REINFORCEMENT

HOW TO SUSTAIN A CHANGE

Prosci®

CONTENTS

AWARENESS	**D**ESIRE	**K**NOWLEDGE	**A**BILITY	**R**EINFORCEMENT®

Many organizations invest significant time and energy in building the necessary awareness, desire, knowledge and ability for a change to be successful, yet overlook the final milestone - reinforcement. Once a change is finished, the tendency is to immediately move on to the next task. As a result reinforcement efforts can often fall short and there is a risk of not fully realizing the expected results. For a change to deliver the expected results over time, it must be actively sustained.

 The five parts of the **Prosci ADKAR® Model** show the milestones an individual must achieve for a change to be successful - awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement.

Reinforcement is the final milestone and it is critical. While making a change is hard, sustaining a change over the long term is even more difficult. It is a natural human tendency to revert back to what we know. Emerging brain function research suggests that we are physiologically wired to return to the most comfortable and familiar state.

Reinforcement in the **Prosci ADKAR Model** represents the internal and external factors that serve to sustain a change. It includes intentional actions such as recognitions, rewards, and celebrations that are tied to the realization of the change, as well as a person's internal satisfaction with his or her achievement.

Effective reinforcement serves three purposes:

- To sustain the change and prevent individuals from slipping back into old ways of doing work

- To build momentum during the transition from the current state to the future state

- To create a history of successful and sustained change that increases agility for future changes.

BUILDING REINFORCEMENT

Reinforcement includes any action or event that strengthens and reinforces the change with an individual or organization. It can be public group celebrations of success, visible performance measurement, and individual corrective feedback. At the simplest level reinforcement can be a personal acknowledgement of an individual's progress and achievement, which is often cited as the most meaningful way to recognize an individual for their contribution.

Although reinforcement is the final element of the ADKAR Model, it can and must be present throughout the change process. Using reinforcement to build momentum during a change increases the probability that objectives will be met. At the beginning of an initiative, when change is new and the challenges are greatest, seeking out

opportunities to celebrate the small successes can be tremendously impactful. Once the desired outcome has been achieved, continued reinforcement of the change will cement the change into the organization's culture and way of working.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE REINFORCEMENT

Whether a change will be sustained over the long term or not is impacted by a variety of dynamics beyond the reinforcement tactics themselves. Below we explore the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of reinforcement activities.

THE DEGREE TO WHICH REINFORCEMENT IS MEANINGFUL

The most effective reinforcement technique is dependent on the person and the situation. When recognition and rewards are meaningful to the recipient, they understandably have a more significant impact.

If the individual being recognized feels that the reward is relevant, it will go a great way towards motivating them to continue supporting the change. Conversely, if the recognition or rewards take a form that is irrelevant to the individual, the reinforcement could have no effect or the opposite effect.

To be meaningful, recognition is best delivered by someone the individual respects. An individual's direct manager is often the best sender of this message.

ASSOCIATION OF REINFORCEMENT WITH DEMONSTRATED PROGRESS OR ACHIEVEMENT

When an individual has successfully made progress toward change, recognition strengthens their desire to continue. It reinforces that the change is important and that their efforts are appreciated. If on the other hand, an employee has struggled to make a change and nobody has noticed, the individual's desire to participate in the change is likely to diminish. Without reinforcement and recognition for their efforts and accomplishments they may even seek out ways to avoid the change and revert to old behaviors.

Rewards and recognition should only be used in the presence of actual demonstrated progress and achievements, however. If a reward or recognition is offered in the absence of achievement, it will not feel meaningful to the individual and will reduce the value of the recognition, both now and in the future. Individuals want to be acknowledged for meaningful contributions.

THE ABSENCE OF NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

Negative pressures within the work environment can be powerful reinforcements in the wrong direction. Long-term sustainment of change is put at risk when an individual demonstrates the desired behavior and experiences negative consequences for doing so. Peer pressure and group dynamics play an impactful role in change. While some employees take steps to support and implement the change, others may resist and apply peer pressure to

their co-workers to do the same. If the group environment emphasizes continuing to work in the old way, the negative social consequence of supporting the change can become a barrier to change.

ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS TO REINFORCE THE CHANGE

One of the strongest forms of reinforcement is accountability. In a personal change like, accountability could include a workout buddy counting on you to show up for a 5:30am training session, a personal trainer to keep you motivated, and regular check-ups with a healthcare professional to monitor your progress.

Similar accountability mechanisms should be part of change management planning. In the workplace, accountability systems can be tied to job performance and measurements, where the results of a change become visible and on-going. Publically visible performance scoreboards are a great way to positively reinforce change and show compliance to a new process. The change is more likely to stick when individuals can monitor the achievement of goals or objectives.

When no accountability system is in place to monitor and sustain progress, employees may revert to old behaviors. If this happens and no corrective action is taken, two things may happen. First the employees may consider that the change is no longer important, and second, any proposed changes in the future may not be taken seriously.

TACTICS FOR BUILDING REINFORCEMENT

The most effective tactics for reinforcing and sustaining change are dependent on the individual and the situation. The best reinforcements are those that are meaningful to the individuals and groups being recognized. For some it will be a personal expression of appreciation, for others active and visible reinforcement from leadership will be most effective. Below we explore some of the most common reinforcement tactics:

CELEBRATIONS AND RECOGNITION

One of the most commonly cited tactics for reinforcing change is celebrating successes and recognizing meaningful contributions to change. In addition to celebrating the achievement of the desired outcome, change leaders should also be looking to recognize the short-term successes that build momentum, energy and enthusiasm around the change, especially those near the beginning. Exaggerated recognition of these early successes can actually be helpful in reaffirming the desired behavior.

Meaningful recognition can be private or public:

- Private or informal one-on-one conversations can be very effective at acknowledging both achievement of results and the effort expended by the individual making the change. Directly thanking the employee for their support and hard work throughout the change process is often the most meaningful way to express appreciation.

- Formal public recognitions can be very useful in the early stages of change for creating clear role models for change while acknowledging outstanding performance. This method must be considered carefully as it could offend employees who are not selected for recognition, but feel they have contributed as much or more than the individuals being recognized.

Project-sponsored celebrations with employees are also a great way to mark key milestones associated with the change. Change leaders should seek out activities or events that are fun for the group and serve to strengthen commitment to the change, which could include anything from a celebratory lunch to a sporting activity or group outing.

Managers and supervisors play a key role in recognizing and rewarding the hard work and contributions of employees. Managers are ideally positioned to recognize the efforts and achievements of their direct reports, both during the change process and after change has been implemented.

Primary sponsors are also key to sustaining change by publically recognizing the progress and accomplishment of key phases of the change and the hard work of the individuals. This positive message of change reinforcement must be delivered with as much vigor as when the change was first introduced.

REWARDS

Rewards can be used to reinforce change when they are triggered as the result of employees meeting identified performance measurements. Rewards serve the purpose to affirm and compensate for attaining defined accomplishment. Rewards can be structured for individual or group

achievements. They can be monetary, but do not need to be in all cases. The important factor to consider is what will be meaningful to the individual(s) being rewarded. If a reward or bonus is offered to build motivation early in the change process, it is critical to follow through with that commitment when the performance objective is met. The best way to present a reward is to accompany it with recognition of the individual's hard-work and unique contributions.

FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYEES

To evaluate whether your change management activities are accomplishing their intended goals it is necessary to solicit feedback from impacted employees. Simply asking employees how they are doing with the change allows them to articulate their progress and identify their pain points. Seek feedback through interviews, focus groups and surveys. The ADKAR Dashboard is an excellent survey tool for measuring and tracking impacted individuals and groups through the change journey. Whichever tools and channels you use, this feedback helps the project team to better understand where the change is taking hold as planned and where the change is struggling.

AUDITS AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Reinforcement also includes utilizing measurement systems and ongoing evaluations of progress. Conducting formal assessments and analyzing performance data allows a change leader to know if a change is taking hold. Usage ata, process check lists, and data from other outputs of the new way of working provide an understanding how employees are using new systems and tools and their level of proficiency. When constructed well, performance audits will tell you what percentage of employees are engaging with the change, how many employees are struggling to adapt to a new way of working, and what the possible root causes may be if adoption rate is low.
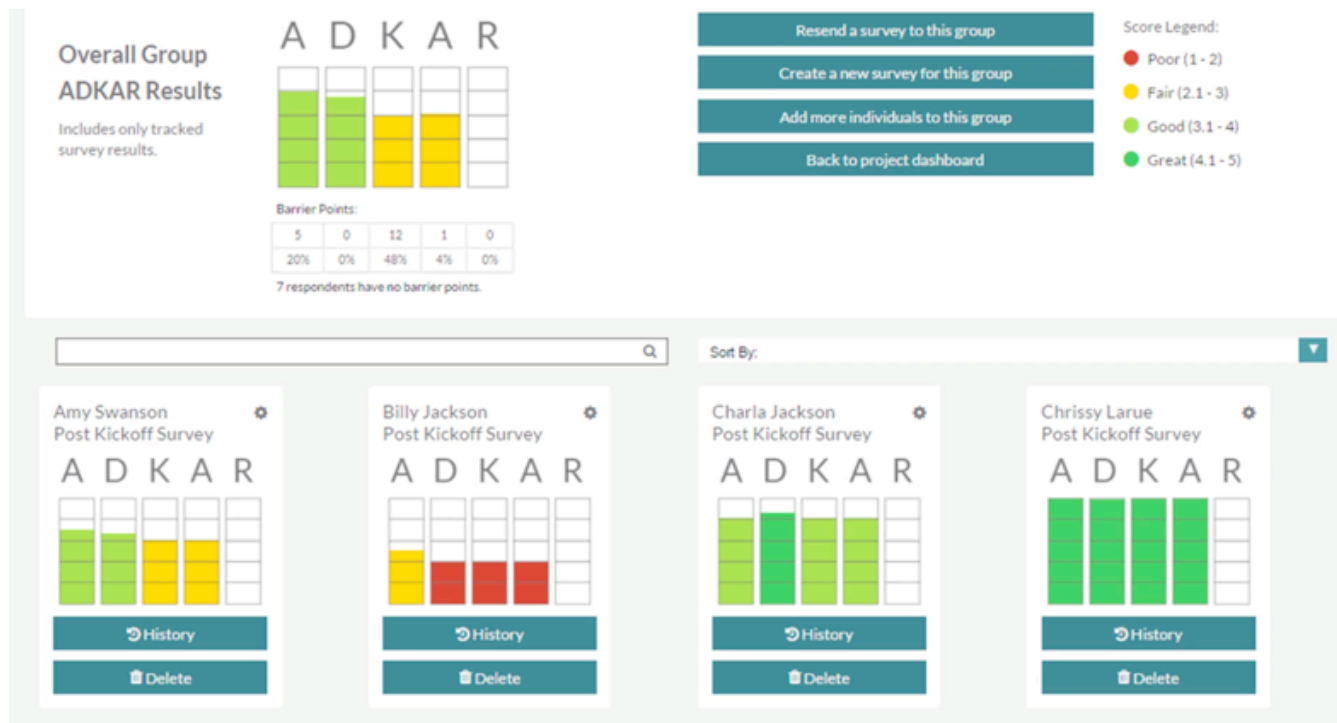
Compliance audits and performance measurements assessments should not be viewed as negative activities. They are essential tools for the change manager and project team and provide valuable information on where to take corrective action and provide more support. These measurement systems will also highlight where a change is being adopted and implemented with success, so that you can recognize and celebrate this progress, creating more energy and enthusiasm around the change.

ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

Building accountability mechanisms into the normal day-to-day operations of the business provides ongoing reinforcement. If a change is implemented and no associated changes are made to performance evaluation programs or compensation systems, the change will lack accountability. Building accountability into the structure of the business also transfers ownership from the project team on to operational leaders and managers, who assume

responsibility for the change and its ongoing success. Accountability must reside with the day-to-day operations and the associated managers and leaders in the business if a change is to be successfully sustained over the long term.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The **Prosci ADKAR Model** defines the milestones an individual must achieve for a change to be successful - awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement. Reinforcing change is as critical to change success as the early communications to build awareness of the need for change.

Reinforcements can be actions, words, or rewards that are meaningful to the person or group being recognized; events, accountability systems, audits, feedback from employees, performance measurement systems, meaningful rewards, and celebrations of both progress and the ultimate realization of the desired outcome.

For a change to deliver the expected results over time it must be sustained. Reinforcement mechanisms must be in place. The biggest mistake change leaders make is simply overlooking or forgetting this step, often due to other tasks taking priority.

To establish an organization that is change agile and change ready, reinforce the change you have already achieved and then build upon this success. Use reinforcement tactics that fit your organization's culture. Find the mechanisms that are meaningful to those who have to change their behavior.

Work to establish a positive history of change where employees receive feedback, are directed towards corrective actions when necessary, and acknowledged and rewarded for their efforts and achievements. If your company has a negative track record of sustaining change, consider which elements of reinforcement you can incorporate into current and future changes to improve this history of change and the success of change initiatives. Having this final element of the **Prosci ADKAR Model** in place is essential and will contribute greatly to your future change success.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

CHANGE PRACTITIONER **Prosci®** CERTIFIED CERTIFIED

Gain the knowledge, skills and tools to drive successful change initiatives. This three-day experiential learning program teaches you to apply a holistic change management methodology and toolset, including the Prosci ADKAR Model, to a real project.

LEARN MORE

+1 970 203 9332

solutions@prosci.com

www.prosci.com