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FIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES THAT MAKE LEADING CHANGE WORK IN TURBULENT TIMES

The pace of change gets faster each year and the challenge to stay ahead of the game becomes more daunting, more challenging, and more necessary.

Change is happening everywhere we look. Markets, technology, competitors, and especially the way we work are radically different today than they were just weeks ago.

Managing change was predicted to be the number one issue leaders would face in 2020.

In a study conducted by Blanchard® in 2019

When change initiatives go well, they improve innovation, creativity, success, productivity, engagement, and employee retention.

When they don't, organizations fail to meet their goals and, as a result, time, energy, resources, and morale can all be lost.

Gartner Research, Gallup, and Harvard Business Review continue to estimate that about

60–70% of change initiatives fail.

A recent study from Gartner showed that

66% of CHROs are dissatisfied with the speed of change implementation

in their organizations.

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A study conducted by Blanchard® in 2018 showed that only

50% of the respondents surveyed felt they could help their teams embrace change and innovate,

only **43%** felt confident managing change initiatives,

and only **39%** felt their teams were a good example of creativity and innovation.

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? | IF THE NEED TO **LEAD CHANGE EFFECTIVELY** IS CRITICAL TO ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS, WHY AREN'T WE GETTING BETTER AT IT?

Ineffective communication, poor leadership, and lack of training and resources are key reasons change efforts fail. But research shows that people go through predictable stages of concern during times of change. And the better that leaders understand how to diagnose and address these concerns and communicate effectively about them, the better they are at keeping the change process on track.

Powerful and sustained change requires constant communication, not only throughout the rollout but after the major elements of the plan are in place. The more kinds of communication employed, the more effective they are.

—DeAnne Aguirre

Research shows that in times of change, people go through predictable stages of concern.

1. **Information Concerns**

2. **Personal Concerns**

3. **Implementation Concerns**

4. **Impact Concerns**

5. **Refinement Concerns**

Addressing these stages can remove roadblocks to the change process.

A key reason that change efforts fail is not simply a lack of communication but a lack of focusing communication on the five stages of concerns people have about the change process.

The First Stage of Concern

Information Concerns

People want specifics about the change process. They want to have the chance to ask questions about the gap between what is and what could be. They want honest and direct answers. And they don't want to be sold on the proposed change. They need to understand what is being proposed before they can know whether the change is bad or good.

The First Stage of Concern

Information Concerns

Key questions at this stage include:

- **What is the change?**

- **What's wrong with the way things are now?**

- **What do we hope to accomplish?**

- **Why now?**

- **What opportunity will I have to raise questions and voice my concerns?**

- **How do people I respect feel about this change?**

The Second Stage of Concern

Personal Concerns

Personal Concerns, are often the most ignored stage and the primary reason so many change initiatives fail. At this stage, people want to know how the change initiative will benefit them or what they will lose.

The Second Stage of Concern

Personal Concerns

Specifically, people want to know:

- **How will the change impact me personally?**

- **Will I win or lose?**

- **Will I be able to learn how to do this?**

- **How do I find the time?**

- **How are my relationships going to be impacted?**

The Third Stage of Concern

Implementation Concerns

Implementation Concerns, include system alignment, best practices, and the daily mechanics of making the change happen. In this stage, people ask themselves,

"What do I do first? Second? Third? How do I manage all the details?"

The Third Stage of Concern

Implementation Concerns

Additional concerns include:

- **How are we going to do this?**

- **How will the people being asked to change be involved in planning for it?**

- **How realistic is the change plan?**

- **How could this change get derailed?**

- **Is there a Plan B?**

- **Who can help me?**

The Fourth Stage of Concern

Impact
Concerns

At this stage, people are interested in learning whether the change is paying off. If leaders have done a good job of addressing the first three stages of concern, this is the point in the process where people will sell themselves on the benefits of the change.

The Fourth Stage of Concern

Impact Concerns

Impact Concerns focuses on issues such as:

- **Is the change working for me, my team, our organization, and our customers?**

- **Is the change effort worth it?**

- **Has anyone figured this out?**

- **What can we learn from their success?**

- **How do we get everyone who is still undecided on board?**

- **How are we dealing with resistance?**

The Fifth Stage of Concern

Refinement Concerns

Refinement Concerns focus on making continual improvements. At this stage, the change is well on its way and employees are focused on innovation. Employees may be wondering whether alternative approaches might work better. They may want to play a role in modifying the approach to the change process to leverage lessons of the past. The leader's role is to encourage this refinement, support further innovation, and invite others to challenge the status quo.

The Fifth Stage of Concern

Refinement Concerns

At this stage, people need to know:

- **How can we do this better or faster?**

- **What have we learned that we can leverage?**

- **Do you trust us to lead this change going forward?**

Mastering the art of leading change doesn't need to be mysterious or complicated. Acknowledging that people go through predictable and sequential stages of concern—which can be anticipated and addressed—can help your organization accelerate change.

By training leaders on how to address the stages of concern and respond with strategies to increase involvement and influence at each stage of the change process—and build the capacity for future change—organizations can dramatically increase the probability of successfully initiating, implementing, and sustaining change.

Visit us here to learn more.

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Blanchard® is a global leader in leadership development, consulting, and coaching. For more than 40 years, Blanchard has partnered with organizations to maximize individual achievement and organizational performance – bringing measurable progress and true transformation. Blanchard's SLII® is the global leadership model of choice, powering inspired leaders for more than 10,000 organizations worldwide. Blanchard also offers a suite of award-winning solutions through flexible delivery modalities to meet the specific needs of clients and learners.

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