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**Enhancing Leaders' Change Communication to  
Increase Individual Change Readiness and Commitment**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Effective change management is paramount in the successful implementation of change in any organization, communication being a fundamental tool for it. Individual attitudes toward change are strong predictors of successful transformations, and the constructs Change Readiness and Affective Commitment to Change have been the most widely studied. In this project, we have designed a program to help the leaders at Organization X develop their communication skills during organizational change. These communication skills are based on the specific factors of communication that, according to the available literature, have the strongest impact on Individual Change Readiness and Affective Commitment to Change. These factors are participation, transparency, meaningful communication, socially constructed meanings, appreciation, and support. This 12-week program is divided into six modules and consists of recommended articles, interactive workshops, and one-on-one sessions and it will be held online. The training will be piloted at Organization X, a fast-growing software company headquartered in Israel with 600 employees distributed in over six countries. The participants, around 20 managers, will be divided into two groups of 10 (experimental and control group). We expect to see increased levels of Individual Change Readiness and Affective Commitment to Change among the employees whose managers were in the experimental group, as well as an improvement in those leaders' communication skills.

*Keywords:* Organizational Change, Change Readiness, Change Communication

## RESUMEN

Una buena gestión del cambio es esencial para implantar un cambio organizacional de manera efectiva, siendo la comunicación una herramienta fundamental. Las actitudes individuales con respecto al cambio son fuertes predictores de transformaciones de éxito, y los constructos Preparación Individual al Cambio y Entrega Afectiva al Cambio son dos de los más estudiados. En este proyecto, se ha diseñado un programa para ayudar a los líderes de Organización X a desarrollar competencias comunicativas durante el cambio organizacional. Estas competencias comunicativas están basadas en los factores de comunicación específicos que, de acuerdo con la literatura disponible, tienen mayor impacto en la Preparación al Cambio y la Entrega Afectiva al Cambio. Estos factores son la participación, la transparencia, la comunicación significativa, los significados socialmente construidos, la apreciación y el apoyo. El programa de 12 semanas está dividido en seis módulos y consiste en artículos recomendados, talleres interactivos y sesiones individuales y tendrá lugar online. Este piloto se implantará en Organización X, una empresa de software en rápido crecimiento con sede en Israel. Cuenta con alrededor de 600 empleados distribuidos en más de seis países y los participantes serán alrededor de 20 directivos (medios y altos). Los participantes se dividirán en dos grupos de 10 (experimental y control). Se esperan mayores niveles de Preparación al Cambio y la Entrega Afectiva al Cambio entre los empleados cuyos directivos estén en el grupo experimental, así como una mejora en las habilidades comunicativas de dichos directivos.

*Palabras clave:* cambio organizacional, preparación al cambio, comunicación del cambio

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## **1. Introduction**

Change is a requirement for continued success in all sorts of organizations. Organizations must adapt to emerging technologies, market changes, new government regulations, and now a global pandemic forcing organizations to move their operations to a remote workplace (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020). One of the most powerful tools to successfully implement change is communication (Gilley et al., 2009; Husain, 2013; Lewis & Seibold, 1998). For many, communications and organizational change are inextricably linked processes and, in fact, increasing researchers argue that without effective change communication, change is impossible (Barrett, 2002; Lewis, 1999).

### **1.1 Description of the organization**

This proposal is a pilot program that we will present to Organization X, an actual software startup with headquarters in Israel, founded in 2012. Although it is a startup with slightly over 600 employees, it is going through exponential growth and it is becoming a market leader in its category. They work with “over 100,000 teams” and have a valuation of almost \$2 billion. Their workforce is distributed in different locations, and they have job openings in Israel, the USA, the UK, Australia, and Japan. Before the pandemic, their employees used to work from their offices, but since the COVID-19 outbreak, they have been forced to switch their workplace to the online world. At the moment, part of its workforce is allowed to work from the office, but most of them keep working from home. The exponential changes (at an exponential rate) within the organization now require a stronger communication strategy that can be leveraged even with distributed teams working from home.

The idea started because, for the past four years, I have been working at a business communications training provider with a portfolio of companies of all sizes spread out across the world (70% of them in the technology sector). We offer training to non-native English speakers, although ever since we started, many native-English speakers have requested training on how to navigate different business situations from a communicative perspective. Since the pandemic started, more and more managers and business owners seem to be struggling to get everyone on board during organizational transformation.

This intervention is a program to address those needs for both native and non-native English leaders who seek to leverage their organizational change efforts. It is designed for

Organization X, but easily transferable to any fast-growing organization where part of their workforces are international and the company language is English. These organizations are in constant change and need to have all the employees on board, ready to contribute to such changes. For that, the leaders need to develop effective communication skills and strategies that will increase individual change readiness, as a precursor of affective commitment to change and effective organizational change implementation (Ouedraogo & Ouakouak, 2018).

## **1.2. Literature review**

This section provides a theoretical analysis of the fields of organizational change, attitudes toward change, and the different aspects of communication linked to them.

### **1.2.1. Change readiness**

How successful can a change management initiative be if the workforce is not ready for the change? Employees' attitudes toward change are a considerable predictor of the successful implementation of organizational transformation (Miller et al., 1994). Change readiness is the most widely studied attitude toward change in the literature of organizational change (Choi, 2011; Rafferty et al., 2013).

Armenakis et al. (1993) conceptualized change readiness as an "individual's beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organization's capacity to successfully undertake those changes" (p. 681). It predicts how willing employees are to actively participate in and contribute to a planned organizational change (Kim et al., 2011).

Communication is a relevant contributor to the success of organizational change, and it helps boost change readiness, reduce uncertainty, and increase commitment (Armenakis et al., 1993). Communication within the context of change is not only a way to inform, but also a tool to motivate and foster collaboration among participants, and poorly managed change communication results in uncertainty and resistance to change (DiFonzo et al., 1994; Smeltzer & Zener, 1992). Elving (2005) explores the relationship between communication and the creation of readiness for change. He maintains that an important goal of communication during a transformation process is to prevent or reduce resistance to change, which is pivotal for a successful implementation. Another goal, Elving asserts, is to reduce individual uncertainty of

their future situation, which prepares employees for the transformation and contributes to increased levels of readiness for change.

### **1.2.2. Affective commitment to change**

Alongside change readiness, affective commitment to change is one of the most researched constructs in employees' attitudes toward organizational change. Employees need to believe that the change will be advantageous for them, and they need to be willing to support the initiative. This construct is known as affective commitment to change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002) and it is a component of organizational commitment. Meyer et al. (1990) suggested three types of organizational commitment: affective (identification, emotional attachment), continuous (associated with the individual's perceived cost of leaving the organization), and normative (pressure to remain in the organization). Among these three types or dimensions, the literature points to affective commitment as the stronger predictor of successful change implementation (Michaelis et al., 2010).

### **1.2.3. Communication in organizational change**

The role of communication during organizational change has been studied with a focus on different functions and aspects of communication. Communication is sometimes referred to as a tool to inform, create understanding, and change people's attitudes and behavior, but it can also be seen as a socially constructed process. In this section, we present a summary of an extensive literature review with the most relevant communication aspects that increase both change readiness and affective commitment to change.

When research on communication in the context of organizational change has tried to dissect the aspects that influence employees' attitudes towards change, transparency, appreciation, participation, and support have been some of the most relevant ones (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Gigliotti et al., 2019; Schulz-Knappe et al., 2019).

***Participation.*** Wide participation in the change process to make organizational members feel more included, committed, and in control of the situation (Bordia et al., 2004). Simoes and Esposito (2014) found that dialogic communication resulted in lower levels of resistance to change among employees. Although communication within the context of change has been largely seen as a way to inform, involve, and motivate collaborators (Caldwell, 1993),

participants are often engaged in monologic participation, where they are not actually treated as objects of change, rather than participants (Simoes & Esposito, 2014). However, a change that is led through dialogue is more likely “to take root because it is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses” (Jabri et al., 2008, p. 679). Simoes and Esposito (2014) summarize the principles of dialogic communication developed by Kent and Taylor (2002), which are *mutuality* (collaboration and equality), *propinquity* (the participants involved are engaged in the present, rather than after the decision has been made), *empathy*, *risk*, and *commitment*. Change efforts should focus on establishing a dialog that allows employees to actively participate in the change process.

**Transparency.** One of the main communication reasons why organizations fail at implementing change is insufficient communication (Salem, 2008). If employees believe that they are not receiving enough information about the transformation, the change initiative cannot succeed. DiFonzo and Bordia (1998) emphasize the relationship between communication and uncertainty. They claim that successful programs of change communication depend on the accurate management of uncertainty associated with change since inadequate information will initiate rumors and gossip. Lack of information bolsters negative feelings and increases resistance (Elving, 2005). Kotter (1995) also argues that one of the major reasons why change efforts do not succeed is under-communication. More and precise information will reduce people’s uncertainty and will help build trust (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998). This highlights the importance of providing employees with detailed and accurate information during change (Allen et al., 2007). Good change communication should involve open, honest information and encourage participation (Elving, 2005; Rogiest et al., 2015). All this indicates that a successful change program should focus on keeping employees properly informed about the change initiative and its implications.

**Meaningful communication.** Research shows that the change message must also be meaningful, informing, educating, and motivating employees to support the initiative (Barrett, 2002). Katzenbach (1995), in his book *Real Change Leaders: How You Can Create Growth and High Performance at Your Company*, includes meaningful communication as one of the main characteristics of high-performing companies. In terms of meaningful communication, effectively conveying the vision and the mission to the employees will contribute to increased levels of change readiness (Lyons et al., 2009). Lewis et al. (2006) also argued that effective



communication about the vision and purpose of the change processes provides justification to employees and adds meaning. A change message should therefore include a clear expression of the vision and motivating language.

***Communication as a socially constructed process.*** Apart from all the change efforts that managers make, there is a difference between what is formally said (often in front of managers) and what is informally conveyed (usually among colleagues). Professor in Implementation and Change Management Thijs Homan, described this difference as on-stage and off-stage behavior at TEDxAmsterdamED, in his talk *The inner side of Organizational Change*. This is partly how people make sense of change, “there is a continuous process of sensemaking going on in informal conversations where people make sense about what is happening in the formal side of the organization”. It is done jointly, not individually, by discussing the situation with colleagues and drawing conclusions based on those interactions. During organizational change, individuals construe their own sense of the significance, importance, and worth of a change initiative (Busser & Shulga, 2018). They tend to do it through social interactions. These processes are described by sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking may influence employee’s receptivity to change (Shulga, 2020), and it is based on the premise that reality is socially constructed (Light et al., 1967).

Several scholars within this approach understand organizational change from a narrative approach, since stories make sense of changes (Weick, 1993). Narrative is a form of communication that is important in sensemaking processes and learning, since stories help people structure their experience. Ford et al. (2002) state that different background conversations create different contexts, and consequently different realities that frame a certain change initiative. Background conversations are products of people’s direct and indirect experience and manage the way they understand what is said and what is unsaid. One solution to dealing with background conversations is to focus on reframing and creating a new context through stories, metaphors, and targeted messages.

***Appreciation and support.*** Support from leaders (and the perception of it) during transformation is important to ensure readiness and commitment to change (Santhidran et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2007). The psychological contract approach (Rousseau, 1989) represents a set of mutual expectations between the employer and the employee and it contributes to building trust and a supportive environment. In the psychological approach, most of those expectations

are implicit and consist of norms like respect and appreciation. Research indicates that when employees felt that their organization fulfilled the psychological contract during the change, their cognitive and behavioral response was positive (Schulz-Knappe et al., 2019). Schulz-Knappe et al. found, feeling appreciated during the change process leads to more positive attitudes toward change, while lack of support leads to more negative attitudes. It is important that leaders develop interpersonal skills and use different communicative tools to show appreciation and support during organizational transformation.

## **2. Objectives**

The importance of communication in organizational change is widely demonstrated and agreed on. And yet, one of the biggest communication challenges that managers encounter is during organizational change (Friedman, 2011). Researchers observe a widening gap between research and practice in the field of change communication (Johansson & Heide, 2008). Knowing the influence that communication has on employees' attitudes toward change, organizations should focus on developing their leaders' communication skills. Models to help employers develop communication strategies during change have been developed. Barrett (2002), for instance, describes the Strategic Employee Communication Model, which includes supportive management, ongoing assessment, well-positioned staff, effective media, and targeted messages. However, these programs are oftentimes too generic and do not enhance specific aspects of communication with specific guidelines.

Thus, the main objective of this innovative project is to design a pilot program that can work as a case study on Organization X based on the literature presented in this paper. The main objective of the program is to help leaders (top and middle managers) of the organization develop specific communication skills relevant to organizational change. The participants will be 10 top and middle managers of Organization X, and the program should be transferable to other organizations in the sector with similar characteristics. The contents of the program are designed to develop those particular aspects of communication that, according to the literature presented, have the strongest influence on those two constructs during organizational change. These specific aspects of communication that influence employees' attitudes toward change are participation, transparency, meaningful communication, socially constructed messages, appreciation, and support.

While the general objective is to train leaders on specific communication skills for organizational change, the ultimate goal is to increase employees' change readiness and commitment to change as a result of the acquired skills by their leaders.

The results of this program will be measured indirectly on the employees, by analyzing whether their individual readiness and affective commitment to change increased thanks to their managers participating in the program.

- **General Objective:** Create a pilot program to help leaders of Organization X develop their communication skills during organizational change
  - **Specific Objective 1:** Improve the change readiness of the employees
  - **Specific Objective 2:** Improve the affective commitment to change of the employees

### 3. Methodology

#### Method

This program consists of a 12-week training involving multiple methods. It is structured into six modules and the participants will learn through recommended articles, workshops, and one-on-one sessions to consolidate the new learnings. The six modules are based on the five main aspects of communication that, according to the literature review, have the strongest impact on individual change readiness and affective commitment to change (including an introductory section), and they are: (1) getting started with communication in organizational change, (2) participation, (3) transparency, (4) meaningful communication, (5) socially constructed messages, and (6) appreciation and support.

The **recommended articles** are developed on our own website (<https://scienceofefficiency.com/>), which serves as an information hub for leaders and supervisors to get a solid initial foundation. Participants will be pointed to the specific articles they will need to read before each module.

The **workshops** will consist of two-hour sessions every two weeks where leaders will learn about the topics aforementioned. These workshops will take place online, on Zoom, and will be fully interactive. All the managers within a group (all from the same company) will take part in these sessions, which will be held in the late afternoon, after their workday. The

workshops will be facilitated through slides (Appendix 1) and will represent important concepts, visuals, and all the supporting materials to be conducted.

The **one-on-one** sessions will last 45 minutes and will be held every other week (in-between workshops). Their goal is to consolidate concepts, fine-tune skills, and provide individualized guidance. In these individual meetings, we will look at specific requirements of the leader's team members and advise them on how to best communicate the change to them. The participants will need to book their individual sessions from Monday to Wednesday of that week through a link provided. These sessions can be done during working hours.

<b>Module 1: Getting started with communication in organizational change</b>	
<b>Weeks 1-2</b>	<p><b>Objective:</b> provide an initial overview of organizational change management and the role of communication.</p> <p>This module includes the basics of organizational change, the classic change curve, and the different attitudes people may adopt during change. It provides an outline of the steps communicators can take to guide them through each phase and at different levels within the organization.</p> <p>We will start the workshop by explaining the program structure and procedure, and then we will go over some initial questions around organizational change. We will discuss the types of organizational change, on-stage and off-stage behavior, and the different attitudes that employees can adopt toward transformation. Participants will discover what makes employees ready for and committed to change and the role of communication in it. Some of the activities will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Defining the need for change and objectives.</b> Identify the problem, formally express the desired change, its purpose, the anticipated results, and the potential obstacles.</li> <li>● <b>Understanding current communication practices.</b> Indicate your preliminary assessment opinion by placing an “X” on the scale provided.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Planning the change initiative.</b> Determine the different people involved, calendar, metrics, and objectives.</li> <li>● <b>Official and unofficial leaders.</b> Understand your organization's leaders and how communications work. What are the main channels? How do people usually receive information? Understand the role of well-positioned staff. What is the role of supervisors?</li> </ul> <p>In the individual sessions, we will have an initial discussion where they will be able to share their initial concerns, problems, goals, and expectations.</p>
<p><b>Module 2: Participations</b></p>	
<p><b>Weeks 3-4</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> learn to establish a dialog that allows employees to actively participate in the change.</p> <p>This module helps leaders include dialogic communication in their change communication strategy. Additionally, this module will offer applicable tools to empower employees and promote co-ideation through a number of strategies, including effective active listening and collaborative problem-solving.</p> <p>In this workshop, the following activities will be included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>The 3 'Whys'.</b> This is a group activity for practicing the Active Listening technique called "The 3 Whys." The group is split into pairs. Each pair is given a thought-provoking conversation starter. One of the participants asks a question and the other must respond providing three reasons for that answer. The participant who asked the question must summarize and paraphrase those three answers to make sure the message was correctly understood.</li> <li>● <b>Dumbest idea first.</b> Participants are divided into pairs and they will need to encourage all of their team members to quickly think of the dumbest ideas they have in their heads in solving a particular problem. Once they have done so, check the list and find out the</li> </ul>

	<p>ideas that are not dumb at all and you can shape that into an effective solution for your problem. In the second part of this activity all the participants have a brainstorming session where they try to make the “dumb ideas” feasible. This problem-solving exercise underlines the importance of out-of-box thinking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>S.C.A.M.P.E.R.</b> This activity follows co-ideation methodology. Given a challenge to tackle, each participant can pick one action out of the S.C.A.M.P.E.R. list as a trigger to utilize toward shaping a variation of an existing idea: Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to another use, Eliminate, Rearrange. While pitching back the ideas to the team, each participant should also clarify which S.C.A.M.P.E.R. action was used to ideate. (Original idea: <a href="http://mural.com">mural.com</a>).</li> </ul> <p>In the individual sessions, we will discuss the level of participation in their team and the issues they encounter in this regard. We will practice some more active listening, and participants will report about their experience with collaborative problem-solving. Based on this information, they will be guided and receive some applicable tools for their specific situation.</p>
<p><b>Module 3: Transparency</b></p>	
<p><b>Week 5-6</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> Keep employees well informed about the change initiative.</p> <p>In this module, participants will understand the importance of transparency during organizational change, what transparency really means, and how a lack of information bolsters negative feelings towards change.</p> <p>Additionally, this module provides a framework to gauge what can be enough information, and how much detail should be provided to the different stakeholders.</p> <p>In the workshop, we will work on the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Justifying change.</b> Participants are presented with different scenarios where they need to explain why this change is necessary.</li> </ul>

	<p>They must provide solid argumentation and think of counterarguments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Conveying an accurate message.</b> Participants think of one real change being implemented in their organization and craft a message to convey it, adding arguments, tackling caveats and concerns, and being specific about what employees need to do.</li> <li>● <b>Answering tough questions.</b> Think of as many questions related to the previous changes that can raise uncertainty or controversy. Then, practice ways to answer them in a polite and straightforward way.</li> </ul> <p>In the one-on-one sessions, we will discuss how their employees are reacting to the current change initiatives and the questions they have asked. We will also practice how to convey accurate messages and the participants will receive individualized feedback on the activities they have done.</p>
<p><b>Module 4: Meaningful communication</b></p>	
<p><b>Weeks 7-8</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> Express the vision clearly and use motivating language.</p> <p>This module provides an overview of how to add meaning to the change message, always keeping the core message consistent. This includes expressing the mission, conveying the vision, and motivating stakeholders through engaging language. In this module, participants will also learn how to frame the message to appeal to different audiences and maximize impact. This module also addresses sensemaking through metaphors and stories.</p> <p>In the workshop, we will work on the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Engaging language.</b> Participants will listen to a recording where corporate speak will be used. They must identify it and replace it with engaging language. Then, they will read the transcript and look for nominalization, which means creating a noun out of</li> </ul>

	<p>something intangible. They will need to replace them with more accurate phrases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Paint a picture of the future.</b> Imagine the future (in 5 years): What does this ideal picture look like? / What makes it so ideal? / What does it look like when we're at our best? / What are people saying and doing? / How does it feel to work there? Tie your imagined statement to your ultimate business outcome and use compelling, engaging language, and avoid jargon or corporate speak.</li> <li>● <b>Conveying the mission and the vision.</b> In groups, create a message to convey the mission and the vision of both the organization and a specific change. Then, start an open discussion and check that everyone has a similar message. If they differ considerably, the group will then create a joint message to express the mission and the vision.</li> </ul> <p>In the one-on-one sessions, each participant will have to bring their own version of the vision and the mission of the organization with regards to a particular organizational change. They will receive individual feedback on it. We will also review how to use engaging language and answer potential questions.</p>
<p><b>Module 5: Socially constructed messages</b></p>	
<p><b>Weeks 9-10</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> reframing and creating a new context through stories to deal with background (<i>off-stage</i>) conversations.</p> <p>This module addresses how employees make sense of change when they lack information. Participants will learn to adopt a narrative approach and understand how background (or off-stage) conversations work. This topic was partially covered in the first module, and participants will be able to get a more in-depth idea of how messages are socially constructed.</p> <p>In the workshop, we will work on the following activities:</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Sensemaking through metaphors and stories.</b> Create a story around the change strategy and the need for it. Include metaphors and create a mind map to guide employees through the process.</li> <li>● <b>Targeted messages.</b> The goal of this activity is to practice message framing by providing information tailored to the audience (i.e. messages in different words for different people when necessary), so that the information is relevant and meaningful, at the same time that it is consistent. Thus, each business unit or division must tailor the important messages to its employees, and if necessary, convert the overall message of the corporate center into digestible and actionable messages the employees can understand and act upon. “From my perspective as a sales agent, the constraints we face are...”</li> <li>● <b>Spot the rebel.</b> Identify the most resistant employees and figure out what is holding them back. Participants will have to identify their concerns and motives and adjust the transition to accommodate their needs. These employees are likely to create ‘alternative facts’ and spread negative attitudes across the organization, which would create a big hurdle for the change efforts.</li> </ul> <p>In the one-on-one sessions, participants will need to bring their own stories and metaphors for a particular change initiative. They will also need to create targeted messages for their own team members. They will receive advice and feedback on those activities.</p>
<p><b>Module 6: Appreciation and Support</b></p>	
<p><b>Weeks 11-12</b></p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> learn to effectively show appreciation and support during organizational transformation.</p> <p>Participants will work on how to show appreciation to employees throughout a change process and support them from beginning to end, not</p>

only with the necessary resources, but also through their change communication activities. For that, it may be necessary to break down the whole process into doable steps, add recognition and appreciation milestones, etc.

In the workshop, we will work on the following activities:

- **Breaking down the change and celebrating small wins.**  
Participants will be presented with different organizational changes of great magnitude. The activity consists of converting that big change into smaller, more doable activities or steps. Creativity and problem solving will be required. The participants will be divided into groups of three to come up with their own strategy and justify it afterward. Breaking down the change into doable steps and setting meaningful milestones will help to keep employees engaged by celebrating easy wins.
- **Reframing criticism.** There is often criticism and negative feedback about different aspects during a transformation, both from the employees and toward the employees. This activity consists of turning something potentially bad into growth opportunities. Participants will be presented with negative feedback and they will have to reformulate it in a way that conveys what could be fixed, how it could be fixed, and what positive outcome this would bring.
- **Supportive management.** This activity is discussion-based where we would provide techniques on how leaders can provide continuous mentorship and support throughout the change process. Some of the advice will include recommendations seen in other modules, such as encouraging teamwork and engaging in employee dialogue.
- **Appreciative inquiry.** Appreciative inquiry is an approach focused on strengths rather than on weaknesses. We will go over the five stages of this approach (definition of the agenda, discovery of the

	<p>strong points, dream what might be, design the imagined reality, destiny/delivery of what will be) and practice with a short case study.</p> <p>In the last one-on-one session, we will answer all potential questions that the participants may have, receive feedback from the program, and provide key takeaways they can keep implementing in their teams. They will be informed about the next meeting, within six months, to follow-up and receive their feedback on the effectiveness and positive outcomes they have observed from this program.</p>
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**Table 1.** Program modules and activities.

### Procedure

This program will be piloted as a case study on Organization X, with the aim of pitching it to other similar companies in the technology sector. As an initial first step, we will contact their Learning and Development (L&D) department and, should they agree, we will invite the board executives and L&D representatives to an informative meeting. The following step is to negotiate the conditions of the project and sign all the due paperwork. To encourage participation, we will provide the company with marketing collateral (Appendix 2) and help with communications and internal emails. This first phase of *negotiations and communications* will last one month. The top and middle managers of Organization X that choose to participate (around 20) will be invited to take part in this project.

In the second phase, the 20 managers will be divided into two groups of up to 10 members by randomization. One of the groups will start the program immediately (experimental group) and the other group will remain on the waiting list (control group). On the one hand, the employees of Organization X whose managers are part of the program (both in experimental and control groups) will undergo a pre-test to measure their initial attitudes toward change. The number of employees taking the pre-test is around 250 individuals. In particular, we will measure their Individual Change Readiness and their Affective Commitment to Change. On the other hand, we will measure the self-report communication skills of the participants (i.e. the managers both in the experimental group and in the control group). This second phase of *grouping and pre-test* will last two months.

Thirdly, the experimental group will start the 12-week training *program*, divided into six modules, consisting of recommended articles, workshops, and one-on-one sessions. The control group will remain on the waiting list.

Once the program is finished, three months later, all the employees of Organization X will take the same test again to measure their new levels of Change Readiness and Affective Commitment to Change. We will do this to examine whether there are significant differences between the employees whose managers participated in the program and those who did not. Analyzing all the employees will allow us to compare, in case changes in attitudes are observed, whether those changes are stronger among the employees of the participants (thanks to the program) or whether the changes are similar across the board (potentially due to the passing of time). We will also measure the communication skills of all 20 managers. After the data collection and analysis, the participants will be invited to an informative meeting to present the results found. This fourth phase of *post-test and results* will last two months.

Six months following the end of the training program, on month 12th, the participants will be invited to follow-up interviews, which will last 20 minutes, and where they will be able to report their own observations over time and examine the lasting effects of this program. Once the process is over, the control group may start the program to reap the benefits of the training.

### **Variables and Instruments**

**Communication skills.** The leaders' communication skills will be measured using the *Social Skills Inventory* (SSI) originally developed by Riggio (1986). SSI is a self-report instrument that uses a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 ("Not at all like me") to 5 ("Exactly like me") in which respondents indicate the extent to which they agree with each item.

in which respondents indicate how closely they feel each statement reflects a description of them. SSI scale anchors range from "not at all like me" to "exactly like me. The scale is divided into two dimensions: Emotional Scores, which measure nonverbal communication skills, and Social Scores, which measure verbal communication skills. For this study, we will only use the Social Scores, which has three subdivisions with 15 statements each (45 items in total): Social Expressivity (SE), Social Sensitivity (SS), and Social Control (SC). Social Expressivity (SE) measures the skill of effectively conveying verbal messages to others and engaging them in

social interaction (e.g. “When in discussions, I find myself doing a large share of the talking”). Social Sensitivity (SS) measures the skill of accurately receiving, understanding and interpreting verbal communication. It also involves being aware of and adapting to social situations (e.g. “Sometimes I think that I take things that other people say to me too personally”). Social Control (SC) measures the ability to interact in a way that influences the attention, thoughts, and perceptions of others (e.g. “I find it very easy to play different roles at different times”).

**Individual Change Readiness.** This construct will be measured using the scale developed by Holt et al. (2007). The scale uses a five-point agreement-disagreement Likert format where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. It includes four dimensions: (1) Appropriateness, comprising 10 items (e.g. “There are a number of rational reasons for this change to be made.”); (2) Change efficacy, comprising 6 items (e.g. “I have the skills that are needed to make this change work”); (3) Leadership support, comprising 6 items (e.g. “Our organization’s top decision makers have put all their support behind this change effort”); and (4) Personal valence, comprising 3 items (e.g. “I am worried I will lose some of my status in the organization when this change is implemented”).

**Affective Commitment to Change.** I will be measured using Herscovitch and Meyer’s (2002) Affective Commitment scale, which uses a six-point agreement-disagreement Likert format where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 6 = Strongly Agree. It consists of six items, which include: “I believe in the value of this change”; “This change is a good strategy for this organization”; “I think the organization made a mistake by introducing this change” (reverse coded); “This change serves an important purpose”; “Things would be better without this change” (reverse coded); and “This change is not necessary” (reverse coded).

**Timeline**

Months	Activities
1	<p><b>Phase 1. Negotiations and communications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Outreach to Company X to pitch this program</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Negotiations and paperwork</li> <li>● Distribution of marketing collateral to encourage participation</li> <li>● Informative meeting with all the representatives</li> </ul>
2-3	<p><b>Phase 2. Grouping and pre-test</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Division of all the participants (20 managers) into two groups of 10 by randomization into experimental and control groups.</li> <li>● Pre-test employees (250 individuals): measuring initial levels of change readiness and affective commitment to change of all employees in Organization X</li> <li>● Pre-test managers (20 managers): measuring initial self-report communication skills</li> </ul>
4-5-6	<p><b>Phase 3. Program</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Start 12-week program with experimental group</li> <li>● Control group will remain on the waiting list</li> </ul>
7-8	<p><b>Phase 4. Post-test and results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Post-test employees: measuring new levels of change readiness and affective commitment to change of all employees in Organization X</li> <li>● Post-test managers (20 managers): measuring new self-report communication skills</li> <li>● Data collection and analysis</li> <li>● Invitation to informative meeting showing the results found</li> </ul>
12	<p><b>Phase 5. Follow-up</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Follow-up interviews with the participants (managers) for them to report their own observations</li> </ul>

**Table 2.** Program timeline.

#### 4. Expected Results

Upon completion of this program, leaders will enhance their communication strategy and skills in organizational change. The main goal of this program is to create a pilot to help the leaders of Organization X develop their communication skills. Hence, we expect to see an increase in the post-test of the participants' self-report communication skills. One note important to mention is the fact that the test used to measure communication skills evaluates general communication skills, while this program is highly specific for increasing employees' attitudes toward change through communication. However, although this program does not focus on general communication, the managers will be able to apply these tools to other aspects and develop their general communicative skills. We will be able to see a difference in the post-test of those in the experimental group, compared to no improvements in the control group regarding their communication skills.

Furthermore, the employees whose managers participated in the program will see their attitudes toward organizational change shifter, thanks to the benefits of the training. In particular, their Individual Change Readiness and Affective Commitment to Change will increase by a rate of at least 35%. This increase is expected to happen as a consequence of their managers participating in this training. Consequently, those employees whose managers have not participated in the program will not experience such an increase. They are expected to increase by less than 5-10%, which could be attributable to the passing of time.

#### 5. Budget

This program lasts three months and consists of six modules with recommended articles on our own website, six interactive workshops (one 2-hour group session per module), and 60 one-on-one sessions (one 45-minute session per module and per participant). It also includes all the pre-tests, post-tests, follow-up interviews, and reports.

Amount	Concept	Price/unit	Total
	Modules of recommended articles	Included	0€
	Marketing collateral	Included	0€

2	Informative meetings	Included	0€
500 tests	<i>Individual Change Readiness</i>	Included	0€
500 tests	<i>Affective Commitment to Change</i>	Included	0€
40 tests	<i>Social Skills Inventory (SSI)</i>	10€/test	400€
20 hours	Data collection and data analysis for tests	40€/h	800€
6 workshops	Workshops (2 hours)	450€/session	2,700€
60 sessions	Individual sessions (45 minutes)	50€/session	3,000€
3 hours	Follow up interviews (20 minutes)	40€/h	120€
1	Final report	100€/report	100€
Total			<b>7,120€</b>

**Table 3.** Budget proposal

- VAT does not apply, for the company belongs to a non-EU country.
- The instrument *Social Skills Inventory (SSI)* will be used with 20 managers during the pre-test and post-test. Hence, we need 40 tests.
- The instruments *Individual Change Readiness* and *Affective Commitment to Change* will be used with 250 employees during the pre-test and post-test. Hence, we need 500 tests.

## 6. Final Conclusions

This project encompasses many of the learnings and skills acquired in this Master's program. Below we will further explain the acquired competencies throughout this program and its professional applications.

### 6.1. Acquired competencies

This Master's has been a great introduction for me to the psychology of work. Coming from a non-psychological background, I have had the opportunity to develop many new skills and apply them to my professional life. Likewise, I have developed a deeper understanding of what writing a research paper entails and the different parts of creating an intervention, and I have been introduced to new theories, trends, and practices.



I decided to enroll in this program to advance in my career and create a base for a potential personal project (consulting in communication and organizational psychology-related matters), as well as open the possibility of starting a PhD program. Among the skills and knowledge I gained, the topics I found the most relevant were leadership, coaching, positive psychology, emotional intelligence, and organizational change.



**Graph 1.** Self-evaluation of acquired competencies during MAPOT 2020-2021

Above is a graph summarizing my self-evaluation of acquired competencies during this M.A. program, and below are the specific reasons that justify the marking.

**CE1 - Interpret the different theories and processes developed in Occupational Health Psychology and Ergonomics.**

- **Marks** → Before: 2 / After: 3
- **Reasoning** → Before this master's, I had not studied or read much about this field. In this academic year, we were presented with different theories around this branch and, although I have gained some knowledge, I do not feel I have made great progress in this specific field. However, I have learned to interpret different theories and processes

developed in Psychology in general, thanks to the different assignments (“trabajos finales”) and to the research done to write this manuscript.

**CE2 - Conduct basic research on OHP, Organizational Psychology, and Human Resource Development.**

- **Marks** → Before: 1 / After: 3
- **Reasoning** → The most outstanding improvement, in my opinion, has been in conducting basic research. Coming from a non-psychological background (or scientific, for that matter), it was a big challenge for me to create this project. I have discovered different websites to find psychology-related articles (e.g. PsycNet) and tools to manage references (e.g. Mendeley). I have understood the process and structure to write a research paper, and I have learned to specific the research question and objectives.

**CE3 - Compare the different theories and processes developed in Human Resource Psychology.**

- **Marks** → Before: 2 / After: 3
- **Reasoning** → Similarly to the competency described above, writing this project and the “TIMI” has helped me learn how to compare different theories and processes. I had some basic knowledge from my previous studies in leadership, management, and communication, but writing these two manuscripts has helped me develop this skill even more, especially in terms of leadership, organizational change, and learning organizations.

**CE4 - Apply the different theories and processes to develop the main individual and organizational strengths in Positive Organizational Psychology.**

- **Marks** → Before: 2 / After: 3
- **Reasoning** → The previous knowledge I had was based on my professional experience, working in the HR department of a small, fast-growing organization, we had to establish programs to develop individual and organizational strengths. Devising this communication program based on different theories and including some aspects of Positive Psychology have helped me expand those competencies.

**CE5 - Assess the factors that determine organizational culture and environment, as well as change and development processes in organizations over time.**

- **Marks** → Before: 3 / After: 4
- **Reasoning** → When I started this Master's program, I already had some knowledge in this regard thanks to my professional background. As mentioned before, being part of the HR department of a small, fast-growing organization allowed me to create, develop, test, and improve assessment. While I consider that this skill is learned mainly through practice, with this project I have developed a more scientific approach to it and I have improved this competency thanks to it.

**CE6 - Implement Human Resource management techniques and interpret their relationship with psychosocial health and personal development in organizations.**

- **Marks** → Before: 2 / After: 3
- **Reasoning** → While I had been implementing HR management techniques to my workplace, several topics covered in this master's program have helped me develop this skill, such as the ones covered in the subject SBE07.

**CE7 - Intervene in organizational environments through the execution of organizational practices that contribute to the prevention and promotion of employee health. AND CE8 - Apply psychosocial health intervention/optimization techniques from occupational health psychology.**

- **Marks** → Before: 2 / After: 3 (CE7) and Before: 2 / After: 4 (CE8)
- **Reasoning** → While this is also a practical skill -and I have not done an internship during this master's-, I have gained ideas around new interventions I can apply to the company I work with. For example, I learned about the different tools to measure different psychosocial factors and risks and potential ways to solve them.

**CE9 - Assess acquired competencies throughout the Master's program on Psychology of Work, Organizations, and Human Resources.**

- **Marks** → Before: 3 / After: 3

- **Reasoning** → I have not seen any improvements in my self-evaluation of acquired competencies throughout this Master's program. Most teachers have been responsive when we actively asked for feedback, but in most cases we did not receive any justification of the final assignments' grades for the individual subjects. It would have been very helpful to read some short feedback or see a grid with what worked and what did not.

## 6.2. Professional applications

This master's program in general is a very solid foundation for my career development. It will allow me to apply different techniques and strategies to my current role, for example: implement new surveys, help managers with their leadership styles, apply new recruiting techniques, and better identify psychosocial factors and risks. I can also apply the learnings from this master's to personal consulting projects. In particular, I gained new skills and tools with subjects such as SBE03, on Positive Organizational Psychology, and SBE08, on Psychology of Coaching. Although my motivation is not tied to the administrative aspect of Human Resources, I can see how other students could greatly benefit from this program and subjects such as SBE01 and SBE05.

My immediate goal is to approach different organizations to present this project and sell it as it is. From the first pilot, I will keep improving it and developing blog articles, activities, and resources, as well as expand the topics and have a wider offering in terms of internal organizational communications for growing organizations in the technology sector.

In the long run, these final theses (TIMI and TFM) have been of particular interest to me because I can use them as a starting point for creating my own personal project. What I envision is to create a consultancy-training company to help organizations leverage their people. My personal interest is a balance between psychology (positive psychology, psychology of coaching, leadership, change processes, psychology of emotions and learning, etc.) and communication (internal communication within an organization, change communication, conflict resolution, persuasion, etc.). I believe great things can be achieved with this combination, and businesses could hugely benefit from it. Thus, I aim to help organizations improve their internal communication processes in different aspects and situations (namely organizational change) and apply my knowledge of organizational psychology to help them strategically navigate different

people-related situations. In this TFM, I was able to deeply review the available literature in organizational change communication, as well as employees' attitudes toward change, which was extremely helpful to understand what organizations can do to leverage their transformation initiatives.

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**Appendix 1.** Sample slides used in the workshops.

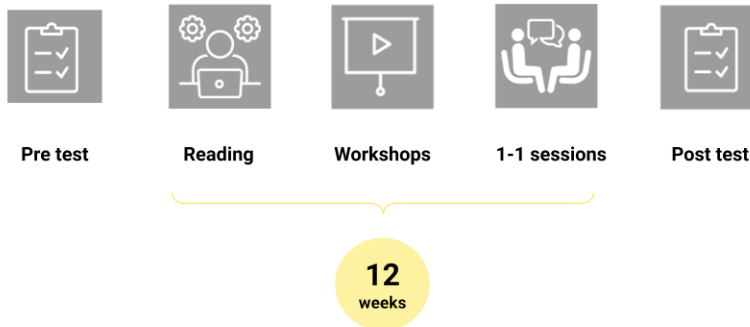


**Program Content**

- 1. Communication in organizational change
- 2. Participation
- 3. Transparency
- 4. Meaningful communication
- 5. Socially constructed meaning
- 6. Appreciation and support

2

**Program Structure**



3

# Module 1

## Communication

### in organizational change

5

## Module 1. Content

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- Initial questions
- Types of organizational change
- The change curve
- Power dynamics in organizational change
- On-stage and off-stage behavior
- Employees' attitudes toward change
- What makes employees be ready for and committed to change?
- Change communication

6

## Initial questions

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Let's start by reflecting on these quotes...

"The world is changing very fast.  
Big will not beat small anymore.  
It will be the fast beating the slow."

– Rupert Murdoch

"Knowledge does not change behavior.  
We have all encountered crazy shrinks  
and obese doctors and divorce marriage  
counselors."

– Chip & Dan Heath, *Switch*

7

## Initial questions

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What is organizational change?

What changes has your organization gone through recently?

How important is organizational change management?

What challenges have you experience during change?

8

## The change curve

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10

## On-stage and off-stage behavior

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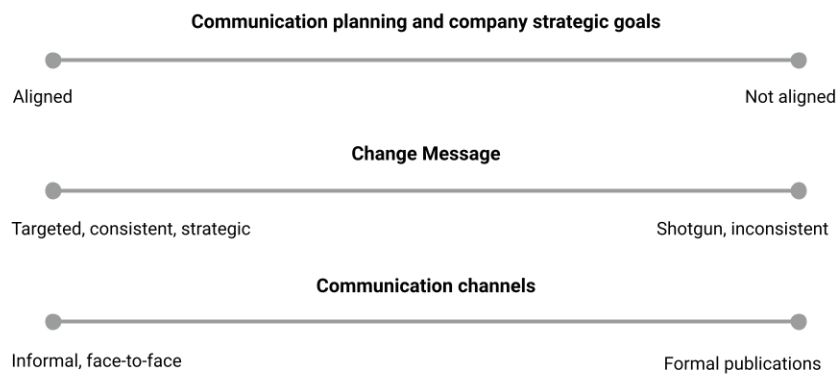
12

## Employees' attitudes toward change



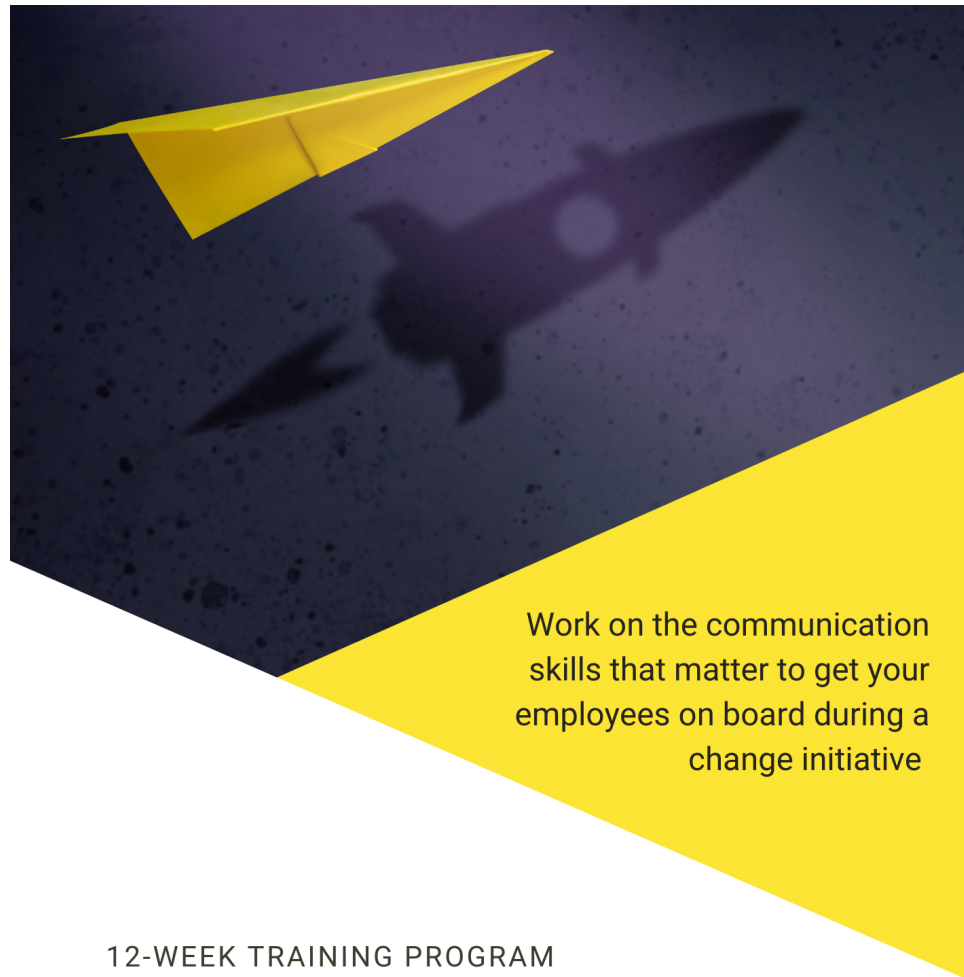
14

## Current communication practices



17

**Appendix 2.** Marketing collateral.



Work on the communication skills that matter to get your employees on board during a change initiative

12-WEEK TRAINING PROGRAM

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## COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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PAOLA PASCUAL

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# Program Contents

## WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

### 1 COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

- An initial overview of organizational change and communication
- Classic change curve
- The basics of guiding employees through change

### 2 PARTICIPATION

- Dialogic communication
- Active listening
- Collaborative problem solving

### 3 TRANSPARENCY

- Justify change
- Convey an accurate message
- Gauge how much and what information needs to be conveyed

### 4 MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION

- Engaging language
- Convey the mission and the vision
- Adapting the message to the audience

### 5 SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED MEANING

- Sensemaking through metaphors
- Storytelling
- Message framing

### 6 APPRECIATION AND SUPPORT

- Show appreciation to employees
- Supportive management and
- Breaking down change into doable steps

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# Program Structure

ALL THE STAGES WILL TAKE PLACE ONLINE



## Pre test (30 min)

Measure employees' *Change Readiness* and *Affective Commitment to Change* and managers' communication skills prior to the start of the program



## Training via Zoom (12 weeks)

Managers learn and practice all 6 modules with recommended articles, one 90-min group workshop, and a one-on-one session



## Post test (30 min)

Measure employees' *Change Readiness* and *Affective Commitment to Change* and managers' communication skills once the program finishes



## Informative meeting (60 min)

Learn about the test results and feedback on this program in your organization in a virtual meeting



## Follow-up interview (20 min)

After 6 months, managers report their own observations over time and provide feedback on their acquired communication skills

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## HOW TO SIGN UP

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