



# THE FIVE LEVERS OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT

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The discipline of project management has a set of recognized tools that support its execution: project charter, statement of work, work breakdown structure, schedule, etc. Similarly, change management has a set of tools that support the people side of change.

While some people might view change management as just communication or training, Prosci's research has shown that change management is most effective when it is a holistic set of tools aimed at supporting individuals through change. In Prosci's change management methodology, that set of tools is called the five levers:

- Communication plan
- Sponsorship roadmap
- Coaching plan
- Training plan
- Resistance management plan

We use the term "lever" because these plans allow us to put effort in one direction to achieve more success in another direction. When we are working on these plans and activities, our goal is not completing activities but leveraging them to drive towards employee adoption and usage.

These five levers are the core of Phase 2 (managing change) in Prosci's 3-Phase Process. To be effective, each plan is customized for a project based on the assessments and strategy developed in Phase 1 (preparing change). Customization occurs based on the size and type of change, as well as the nature of the groups impacted by the change. Below is a definition of each lever and description of how it supports the successful transition of individuals.

## 1. COMMUNICATION PLAN

People often mistakenly equate change management with communication. While many organizations have communication departments and many project teams build communication plans, there is often a missing component: recognizing how communication fits into the larger change process. Communication is a critical component of implementing change, but it is by no means the only requirement for successful change.

Effective communication does not mean an attractive newsletter, the use of a standard template, or even a high frequency of messages. Effective communication is targeted for each of the different audiences impacted by the change and focuses on what they care about and what they need to know. A structured communication plan presents the right messages at the right time, in the right format or channel, and comes from the right sender. Prosci's methodology includes plans for developing these key messages. Learn more with our [communication checklist](#).

### How communication supports individual change

Communication is a tool used to build awareness of the need for change and desire to participate in and support the change, the first two elements of the **Prosci ADKAR Model**. With this foundation, communication is more effective and provides information in the correct sequence to help employees understand and internalize the change.

## 2. SPONSORSHIP ROADMAP

Effective sponsorship was cited as the number-one contributor to project success in all Prosci's change management benchmarking studies over the last two decades. Best practices show three high-level roles of the sponsor:

1. Actively and visibly participating in the change
2. Building the coalition of support with other senior leaders and managers
3. Communicating directly with employees about the business reasons and nature of the change

Unfortunately, sometimes even the best senior leaders do not demonstrate effective sponsorship. Some may not have experience in this role and do not know what it looks like. Others may find that competing priorities result in less than optimal involvement. It is the role of the change practitioner to provide support and structure for the specific actions needed from these senior leaders.

The sponsorship roadmap provides this structure, removing the mystique around sponsoring a change and making it real and concrete. A comprehensive sponsorship roadmap lays out what the sponsor needs to be doing with:

1. The project team
2. Peers and other senior managers
3. Frontline employees

It also breaks down activities by the phase of the project, such as initiation, design, implementation and closeout. Learn more with this [on-demand webinar](#) on engaging sponsors.

## How the sponsorship roadmap supports individual change

When senior leaders demonstrate their and the organization's commitment to a change, employees take notice. Benchmarking research indicates that the sponsor is the preferred sender of messages related to the business reasons and organizational implications for a particular initiative; therefore, effective sponsorship is crucial in building awareness of the need for change. Sponsorship is also critical in building the desire to participate and support the change with each employee and in reinforcing the change.

## 3. COACHING PLAN

Coaching takes place between an employee and their direct supervisor. The managers and supervisors in an organization play a critical role in successful change:

- They communicate messages about the change and how it directly impacts employees
- Their attitudes toward the change filter directly and immediately to how their employees react to the change
- They identify and manage resistance
- They provide recognition and reinforcement during an implementation

The coaching plan outlines the steps for involving managers in change management activities. First, it lays out how the project team and change management resources will build commitment and train and prepare managers and supervisors related to their role in a change. Once on board, managers and supervisors then conduct both group and individual coaching sessions to engage frontline employees. These coaching sessions are crucial to getting employees and the organization moving forward with change adoption.

Do not try to circumvent or substitute anyone as the role of coach—not members of the project team, not external consultants or human resources representatives. Coaching is built upon the relationship that an employee has with the person they report to. Instead, invest the time, resources and energy to engage and empower your managers and supervisors to be good coaches and to build their own personal competency to lead change. Learn more with this [blog on one-on-one coaching](#).

## How coaching supports individual change

Coaching touches all elements of the **ADKAR Model**. Research shows that employees want to hear the personal awareness of the need for change from the person they report to. A manager's desire to change directly influences an employee's desire to support the change. In on-the-job support and coaching, managers and supervisors help build knowledge and ability. Finally, by showing their own support and commitment to the long-term adoption of a change, managers and supervisors provide reinforcement to keep a change in place.

## 4. TRAINING PLAN

Training is an intervention to build skills and capabilities. In addition to communication, training is probably the most common of the change management plans.

In the absence of a holistic approach to change management, training is sometimes used without other critical activities like sponsorship and coaching. One of the biggest errors a team can make when introducing a change is to simply send employees to training. This is poor change management.

The change manager's role in training is to identify the skills and capabilities that employees need and to recognize any gaps that exist in the training requirements. When change management is applied effectively, a partnership emerges between the change management team (who documents knowledge needs) and the training group (who develops and delivers the needed training).

Don't forget about the training specifically on change management. We've already identified sponsors and coaches as important participants in change management. These two groups likely need training about their roles and responsibilities in change management.

## How training supports individual change

Training is focused on building knowledge. It is not effective for building awareness and desire. Think about experiences where you sat through an entire day of training, rolling your eyes and wondering why you just wasted a day in training you didn't need. The people delivering the training, and those who wanted you to take the training thought it was a valuable and necessary experience. But since you did not have the awareness or desire, you were not enthusiastic about the knowledge transfer (and most of it probably did not sink in). Training is an important part of creating successful change, but it must come after sufficient awareness and desire.

## 5. RESISTANCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Resistance to change has been one of the top obstacles to successful change throughout Prosci's research. While resistance to any change is a natural reaction, there are steps that organizations and managers can take to prevent and mitigate the impact of resistance. Some might be surprised to see resistance management planning on the same level as communication and training. You may view dealing with resistance as primarily reactive, but there are some significant and meaningful steps that you can take early in a project to address resistance. This is what Prosci calls proactive resistance management.

What steps can you take to prevent or mitigate resistance before it emerges and impacts the project and the organization? Begin by identifying what resistance might look like and where it is likely to come from. People involved in a project typically know where resistance is likely to come from based on experience and the nature of the change. Next, develop a set of steps that you can take to answer these objections before they manifest themselves and impact the project. The resistance management plan also identifies who will be involved in managing resistance and how you will prepare them to intervene.

Finally, there is a component of reactive resistance management in a complete change management plan. How will you monitor acceptance and resistance? What triggers will you use to know that there is significant resistance, and how will you respond? The **ADKAR Model** provides a simple but powerful model for understanding the root cause of resistance when it does emerge during a change. Learn more with [this overview on resistance to change](#).

## How resistance management supports individual change

Any missing ADKAR element can result in resistance to a change. A lack of awareness of the need for change can directly result in resistance to change. When an employee does not have a desire to change, they oftentimes resist the initiative. Fear of not having the knowledge or ability to be successful in the future state is another main source of resistance. Without reinforcement, employees will not sustain the change and will revert to the old way of doing work.

The important point to remember about resistance is that you need to identify and address the root cause of the resistance, not just the symptom. For this reason, the **ADKAR Model** can be used in both proactive and reactive approaches as a guide for effectively engaging and overcoming resistance to change.

## PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR CHANGE MANAGEMENT PLANS

While any change needs each of the five levers above, the relative balance and effort will depend on the specific change you are implementing. A merger is managed very differently than a technology upgrade, but each requires the five levers of change management.

Once the plans are created, they must be integrated into the project activities outlined in the project plan. And not all of them happen at go-live: communication and sponsorship activities must have taken place long before implementation, and reinforcement work may need to continue after other project activities have wrapped up. Effective change management is holistic (using all of the tools), proactive (starting at the beginning of the change) and integrated (working in unison with project activities).

# BUILD YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE CAPABILITY WITH PROSCI

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Over 80% of Fortune 100 companies have worked with Prosci to build their change capability. Our research-based, results-driven methodology is easy to apply. We can equip your organization with the tools to out-change others, remain agile and thrive during bigger, faster and more complex change.

## SCHEDULE A CONSULTATION WITH A PROSCI SOLUTION ARCHITECT

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### Your no-cost consultation will:

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