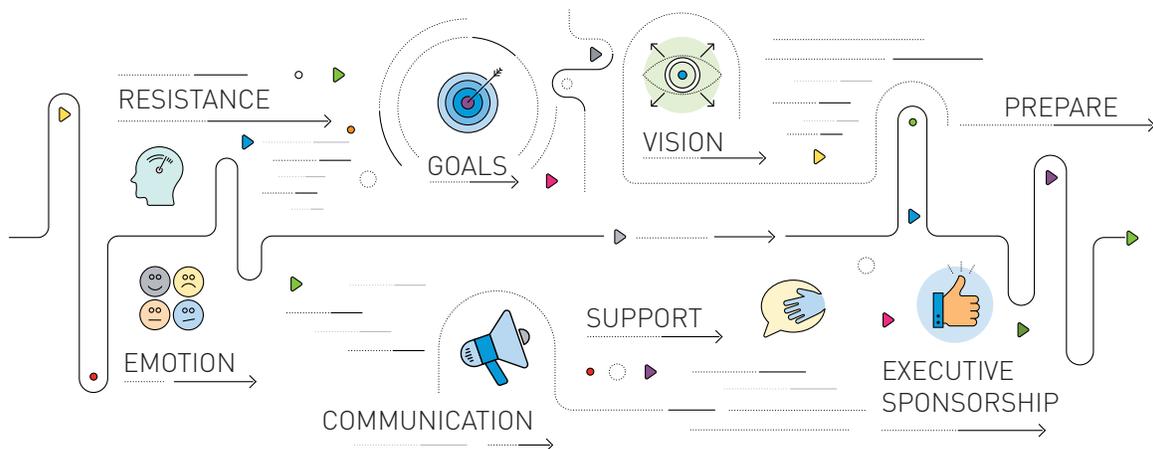


# A leader's role in change management

This resource is part of SAIF's leadership project, which is meant to help employers and leaders of organizations establish strong and sustainable safety cultures using research-based concepts and strategies.



## Change happens

All organizations face change. Sometimes it's an improvement driven internally, and other times external factors force a change. How an organization handles change can make the difference between successful or failed outcomes. But change is not just an event or outcome, it is a process. The transition is a psychological reorientation for those affected by the change. This key concept often gets missed and that's where change management comes in.

Effective change management is critical to organizational success. There are different change management models available, and using a model is important as it will provide a framework to plan for key steps in transitioning through change. Whichever change management model you use, leadership's role will be crucial in any successful change execution.

High quality leadership must be present through the entire process of change. Think of high-quality leadership as "emotional alignment." Typically, most organizational change efforts fail. This is due to the complexity of human emotion, which exerts a powerful resistance to change. Leadership addresses the emotional considerations by considering the hearts and minds of people working towards a common goal.

## What role do leaders play?

Here are a few things leaders should do during organizational change:

- **Communicate a clear and compelling vision** Before you can even start making changes, leadership must develop and communicate a clear and compelling vision of where you're going. This creates awareness and a desire for change.

*(Continued)*

## What is change management?

According to Prosci, a change management consulting firm, it is the discipline that guides how we prepare, equip, and support individuals to successfully adopt change to drive organizational success.

- **Executive sponsorship** An executive sponsor must be visible and engaged through the entire process of change from the beginning to its conclusion. According to Prosci, executive sponsors play a critical role in communicating:

- A vision of where the organization is going
- A roadmap that outlines how the vision will be achieved
- Clear alignment of the current change with the vision
- Specific goals or objectives that define success
- Their personal commitment and passion for the change

- **Prepare your management team**

Supervisors and middle management play a critical role in the successful change and are often overlooked in change management planning. Prepare and equip supervisors and managers with information about the change before messages are rolled out to all employees. Prepare your management team to:

- Communicate a consistent message
- Have effective conversations about the change at group and individual levels
- Manage persistent resistance to the change
- Demonstrate commitment to the change through their behavior  
(Source: Prosci)

## Address resistance

Even if the change is needed and well-planned, there will always be employees who resist the change. This can be expected during any change implementation, and the best strategy is to plan for it.

Leaders can address resistance by taking the time to listen. Employees bring a unique set of experiences, knowledge, and emotions that can only be understood through conversations. By listening and trying to understand different perspectives, you not only learn key information, but you show employees that you respect and appreciate their opinions and unique contributions. Listening respectfully is also a key attribute of a successful leader. It adds time to the process and requires personal effort, but it can make the difference between success or failure. How you lead a change can impact all future efforts because employees will remember your past change leadership.

When it comes to communication, group meetings are a good way to convey the vision and direction of a change and emails can provide the plan's details. However, resistance can only be addressed through two-way communication in one-on-one conversations with employees.

“When it comes to the awareness for the need of change, employees will look to their leaders for the “why,” but when it comes to how it will impact their work and lives, they are going to go to their supervisor.”

– Prosci

### Top 5 reasons managers resist change:

1. Loss of power, responsibility, or resources
2. Overburdened with current responsibilities or workload
3. A lack of awareness of the need for change
4. A lack of skills needed to manage the change
5. Fearful or uncertain about the changes being made

## Activity ideas

- One of the key attributes to a successful leader is self-reflection. Take the time to think about the following:
  - How do I personally respond to change?
  - What are my leadership strengths and weaknesses when it comes to leading change?
  - What actions can I take to strengthen my weaker areas?
- As a group, discuss a failed or a successful change effort your team has experienced. Was there an effective vision for the change? Was it communicated? How were supervisors and managers prepared to address employee concerns?

Source: Prosci – Adkar by Jeffrey M. Hiatt