REINFORCEMENT

HOW TO SUSTAIN A CHANGE

Prosci®

PEOPLE. CHANGE. RESULTS.

Contents

Building Reinforcement 4

Factors That Influence Reinforcement 5

- The Degree to Which Reinforcement Is Meaningful 5
- Association of Reinforcement With Demonstrated Progress or Achievement 5
- The Absence of Negative Consequences 6
- Accountability Mechanisms to Reinforce the Change 6

Tactics For Building Reinforcement 7

- Celebrations and Recognition 7
- Rewards 8
- Feedback from Employees 9
- Audits and Performance Management Systems 9
- Accountability Systems 10

Final Thoughts 11

Many organizations invest significant time and energy in building the necessary awareness, desire, knowledge and ability for a change to be successful, yet they overlook the final milestone: reinforcement. Once a change is complete, organizations tend to move on to the next task immediately. As a result, reinforcement efforts often fall short and expected results may never materialize. 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 human nature to revert to what we know. Emerging brain function research suggests that we are physiologically wired to return to the most comfortable and familiar state.

© Prosci Inc. All rights reserved. www.prosci.com

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

Effective reinforcement serves three purposes:

- Sustain the change and prevent individuals from slipping back into old ways of doing work
- Build momentum during the transition from the current state to the future state
- 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, or individual corrective feedback. At the simplest level, reinforcement can be a personal acknowledgement of an individual's progress and achievement, which individuals often cite as the most meaningful way to recognize their contributions.

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 will cement the change into the organization's culture and way of working.

© Prosci Inc. All rights reserved. www.prosci.com

Factors That Influence Reinforcement

Whether a change will be sustained over the long term depends on a variety of dynamics beyond the reinforcement tactics themselves. Below we explore the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of reinforcement activities.

1. **The Degree to Which Reinforcement is Meaningful**

   The most effective reinforcement technique depends on the person and situation. When the recipent finds the recognition and rewards meaningful, they understandably have a more significant impact.

   If the recognized individual finds the reward relevant, it will go a long way to motivate them to continue supporting the change. Conversely, if the recognition or rewards feel irrelevant to the individual, the reinforcement could have no effect or even the opposite effect.

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

2. **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 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 will likely diminish. Without reinforcement and recognition, they may even begin to avoid the change and revert to old behaviors.

   Bear in mind that rewards and recognition should only be used in the presence of actual demonstrated progress and achievements. A reward or recognition offered in the absence of achievement will not feel meaningful to the individual and will reduce the value of the recognition now and in the future. Individuals want to be acknowledged for meaningful contributions.

© Prosci Inc. All rights reserved. www.prosci.com

3. 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 change, others may resist and pressure 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.

4. Accountability Mechanisms to Reinforce the Change

Accountability is one of the strongest forms of reinforcement. When going through a personal change to become healthier, accountability could include a workout buddy counting on you to show up for a 5:30 a.m. training session, a personal trainer to keep you motivated, and regular checkups with a healthcare professional to monitor your progress.

Similar accountability mechanisms should be part of change management planning. In the workplace, tying accountability systems to job performance and measurements makes the ongoing results of a change visible.

© Prosci Inc. All rights reserved. www.prosci.com

Publicly visible performance scoreboards are a great way to positively reinforce change and show compliance with a new process. The change is more likely to stick when individuals can monitor the achievement of goals or objectives.

Without an accountability system to monitor and sustain progress, employees may revert to old behaviors. And without corrective actions, two things may result. First employees may believe the change is no longer important. Second, future proposed changes may not be taken seriously.

Tactics For Building Reinforcement

The most effective tactics for reinforcing and sustaining change depend on the individual and the situation. The best reinforcements are meaningful to the individuals and groups being recognized. For some, personal thanks are most effective. For others, active and visible reinforcement from leadership is most effective. We explore some of the most common reinforcement tactics below.

1. **Celebrations and Recognition**

Celebrating successes and recognizing meaningful contributions to change are commonly cited tactics to reinforcing change. In addition to celebrating the achievement of the desired outcome, change leaders should recognize the short-term successes that build momentum, energy and enthusiasm around the change, especially those near the beginning. Exaggerating recognition of these early successes helps reaffirm the desired behavior.

© Prosci Inc. All rights reserved. www.prosci.com

Meaningful recognition can be private or public:

- Private or informal one-on-one conversations with the individual making the change can be very effective for acknowledging results and efforts. 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 in the early stages of change creates 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 fun activities or events for the group that serve to strengthen commitment to the change. These could include anything from a celebratory lunch or dinner 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 implementing change.

Primary sponsors also sustain change by publicly recognizing progress, key milestones and the hard work of the individuals. This positive change reinforcement message must possess the same vigor as the messages you delivered at the beginning of the change journey.

2. **Rewards**

Using rewards can reinforce change in employees who meet identified performance levels. Rewards affirm and compensate for defined accomplishments. Rewards can be structured for individual or group achievements. They can be monetary, but do not need to be. The important

© Prosci Inc. All rights reserved. www.prosci.com

factor is whether the individual being rewarded finds it meaningful. If you offer a reward or bonus to build motivation early in the change process, it is critical to follow through with that commitment when the individual meets performance objective. The best way to present a reward is to include it when you recognize the individual's hard work and unique contributions.

3. **Feedback From Employees**

Evaluating whether your change management activities are accomplishing their intended goals requires soliciting 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 online 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 it is struggling.

4. **Audits and Performance Management Systems**

Reinforcement also includes using 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. Process check lists, usage data and data from other outputs help you understand how employees are using new systems and tools and their proficiency levels. Well constructed performance audits indicate the percentage of employees engaging with the change, how many employees are struggling to adapt to a new way of working, and the possible root causes for low adoption rates.

© Prosci Inc. All rights reserved. www.prosci.com

Don't view compliance audits and performance measurement assessments as negative activities. They are essential tools for the change manager and project team, and provide valuable information about where to take corrective action and provide more support. These measurement systems also highlight where a change is being adopted and implemented with success, so you can recognize and celebrate progress, creating more energy and enthusiasm around the change.

5. Accountability Systems

Building accountability mechanisms into normal day-to-day business operations provides ongoing reinforcement. If you don't make associated changes to performance evaluation programs or compensation systems, the newly implemented change will lack accountability. Building accountability into the structure of the business also transfers ownership from the project team to operational leaders and managers, who assume responsibility for the change and its ongoing success. Accountability must reside with the day-to-day operations, associated managers and leaders to successfully sustain the change over the long term.

© Prosci Inc. All rights reserved. www.prosci.com

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 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. Other effective reinforcements include 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 overlooking or forgetting this step, when other tasks compete for their attention.

To establish an organization that is change agile and change ready, it is important to 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 must change their behavior.

Work to establish a positive history of change where you give employees feedback, corrective actions when necessary, and you acknowledge and reward 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 your history and success with change initiatives. This final element of the Prosci ADKAR Model in place is essential and will contribute greatly to your future change success.

Prosci and ADKAR are trademarks of Prosci, Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries

© Prosci Inc. All rights reserved. www.prosci.com

AWARENESS
DESIRE
KNOWLEDGE
ABILITY
REINFORCEMENT®

Prosci®

PEOPLE. CHANGE. RESULTS.

Change Management Certification Program

CHANGE PRACTITIONER

CERTIFIED Prosci 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