

Communicate Your Change: a 4-Factor Model for Change Management Communication

Alyssa Davidson
University of Minnesota

Table of Contents

Background 3

Essential Communication Factors..... 11

 Factor 1: Using an Effective Vehicle and Credible Source12

 Factor 2: Amount and Frequency of Communication16

 Factor 3: Message Transparency Level.....16

 Factor 4: Feedback.....17

Research18

 Research Method and Data Collection18

Results 20

 Survey 20

 Direct Observations 28

 Organization A: 28

 Organization B: 29

 Expert Interviews..... 30

Discussion31

 Factor 1: Using a Credible Source through an Effective Vehicle 32

 Factor 2: Amount and Frequency of Communication 34

 Factor 3: Message Transparency Level..... 35

 Factor 4: Feedback..... 36

Limitations and Future Research 37

Citations 39

About the Author 40

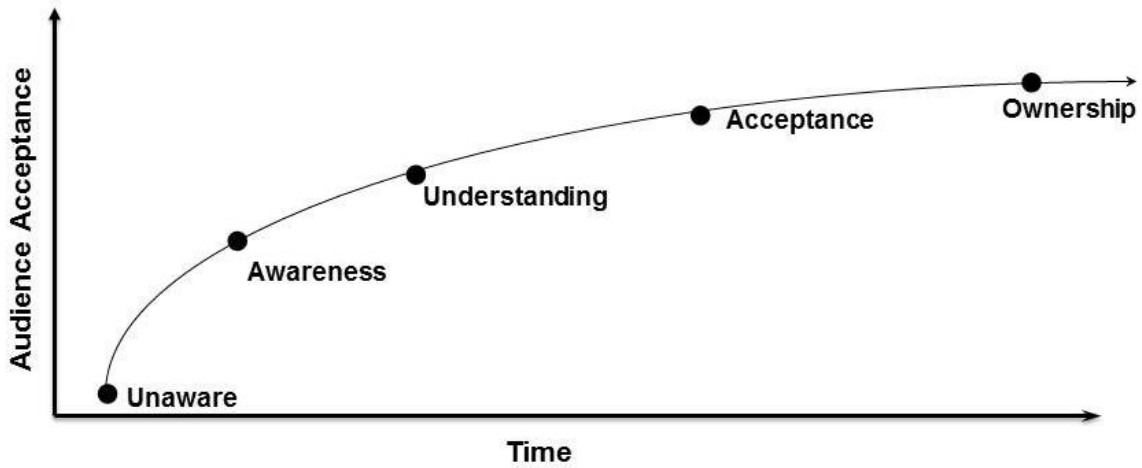
Background

Change management is a management consulting practice that has become increasingly important within organizations of late. New technology innovations, economic and fiscal shifts, and an increase of a demographically diverse workforce are just a few factors that have forced organizations into rapid and constant change. Organizations are finding large-scale organizational changes such as technology, HR structure, organizational structure or reporting structure, role and/or responsibility, management/leadership, and mergers and/or acquisitions are becoming necessary to remain competitive in their respective markets. This environment is creating a deep and unyielding need for proper organizational change management practices. That being said, change management is not a discipline that is rigid and clearly defined. It is a theory and a practice that combines a number of social science disciplines and methodologies that culminate to form guidelines and frameworks for leading individuals and organizations through change (Burnes, 1992). The theory and practice of change management can be leveraged and adapted to fit an organization's needs. A major component of any change management program is internal communication, which drives awareness, understanding and acceptance of the change. However, many organizations are struggling to find a balance in their organizational communication, especially as it relates to communicating through change. Change management leaders across many industries hold that one of the main struggles facing organizations is leveraging their internal communications properly for organizational change management efforts. The growing demand for transparency into the change from employees coupled with leadership's reluctance to grant a high degree of visibility into leadership decisions causes a constant struggle in identifying the proper level of communication during organizational change within organizations. Additionally, organizational change management leaders argue that the approach and implementation of internal communication for change management programs differs from an organization's typical approach to internal communication. Leaders suggest that during change management programs, organizations should consider the difference between internal communication

(communication related to day-to-day activities of the organization) and change management communication (communication related to the change only). Both are important and should be used in parallel, but there are factors to be considered for change management communication that are not as necessary for internal communication. Therefore, a strong grasp of the success factors for internal communication during change programs can help organizations find the correct level of transparency and enable effective communication resulting in increased employee awareness, understanding, acceptance, and ownership of the change. This study aims to better understand the factors that determine successful communication during change management programs with premise that successful communication will enable a more successful change management program.

To understand the factors for successful change management communication, one must first understand organizational change management and its importance to successful organizational change. Organizational change management is the practice of moving individuals in organizations through the phases of change. There are two models to consider when moving organizations through the phases of change. The first is the change commitment curve, which depicts how organizations move through the phases of change overtime. As shown in Figure 1, overtime, commitment to the change is built and organizations move from unawareness of the change to ownership of the change as time and commitment increases.

Figure 1. Commitment Curve (PwC Change Management Fundamentals, 2013)



The second model is the true change curve, which depicts not only how organizations move through the phases of change, but also how they *react* emotionally to each phase of change (Figure 2). The change curve is based on the Kübler-Ross model (Figure 3), which illustrates how people move through the stages of grief. As shown in Figure 2, emotional responses to change fluctuate as individuals in organizations move through the phases of change.

Figure 2. Change Curve (PwC Change Management Fundamentals, 2013)

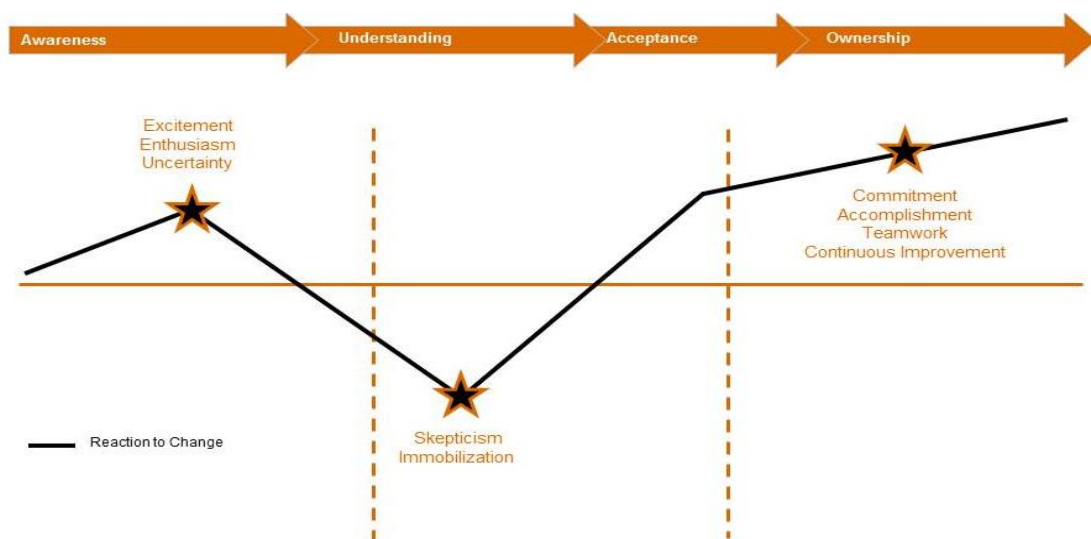
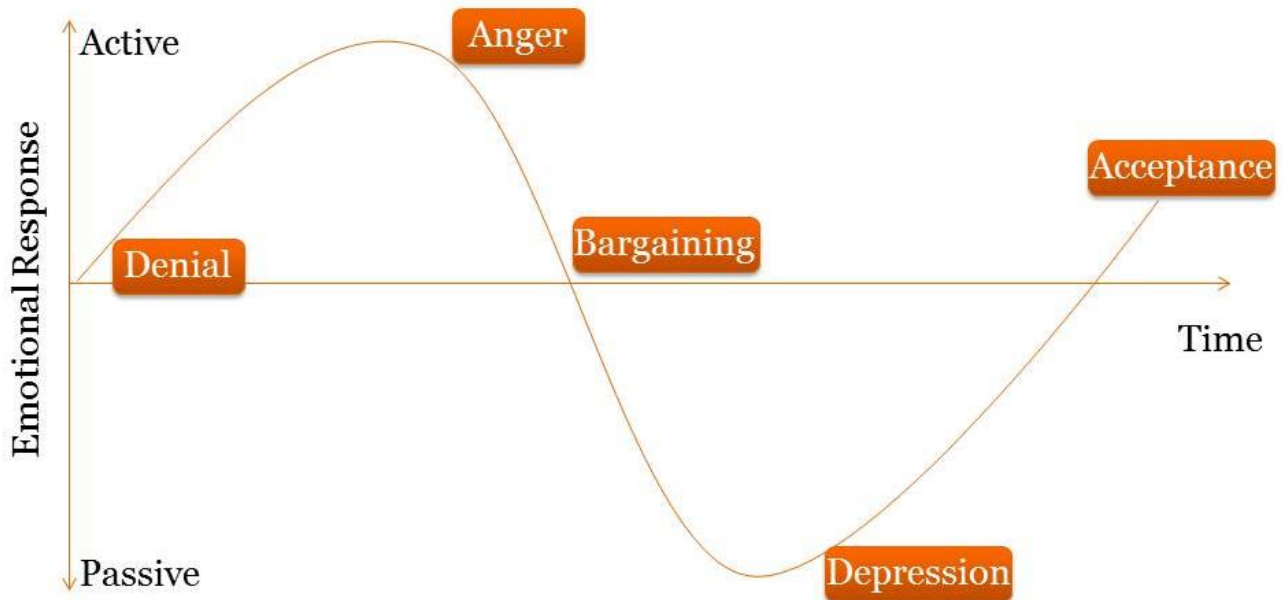


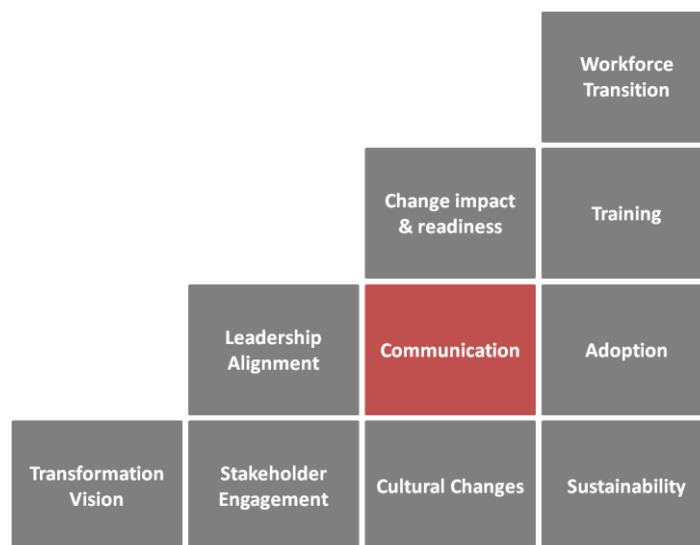
Figure 3. Kübler-Ross model (Kübler-Ross, 2005)



The purpose of organizational change management is to mitigate the amount of time organizations spend in the “valley of despair” through the effective use of communication, as well as other organizational change management activities. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors of successful communication that can be leveraged to move the organization through the phases of change. Essentially, it looks to identify the factors that mitigate the “valley” associated with despair to allow the organization to successfully move through the 4-step commitment curve model, where subjects move through *awareness*, *understanding*, *acceptance*, and *ownership* of the change. It is important to note that while communication is an essential component in organizational change management programs, there are other change management activities that surround, support, and are supported by communication. These activities are defined in a variety of change management methodologies and frameworks. One such methodology approaches change management as a discipline consisting of building blocks that drive a successful change program: transformation vision,

stakeholder engagement, leadership alignment, cultural changes, communication, change readiness, sustainability, adoption, training, and workforce transition. Each of these components is a step that, when integrated, create a foundation for successful change management (Figure 4). As shown, a central component in this framework is consistent and integrated internal communication practices.

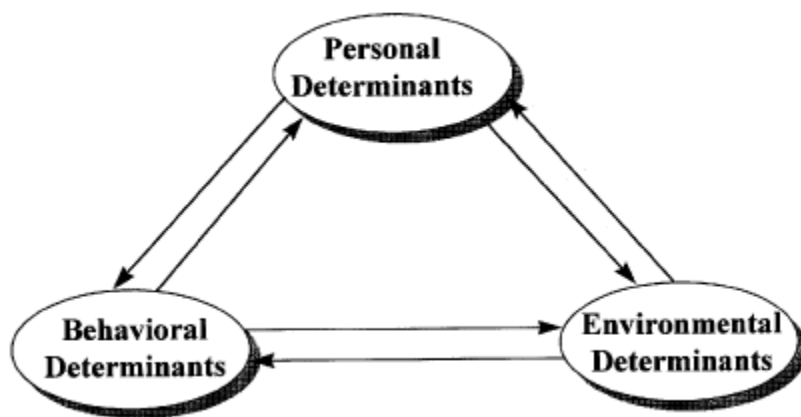
Figure 4. PwC Change Management Framework (PwC Change Management Fundamentals, 2013)



Throughout the literature, effective internal communication has been cited as one of the necessities for organizational success and achieving organizational excellence (Kitchen and Daly, 2002). According to Gilsdorf (1998), “organisations, relying on human beings to create and deliver products and services, lose serious money and see productivity eroded when errors are made” (p. 173). Furthermore, Gilsdorf argues that mistakes in change management programs are often directly linked to communication breakdowns. These mistakes are often issues in the organization such as: desire to maintain the status quo, lack organizational success or organizational failure, and lack of organizational survival and growth (Kitchen and Daly, 2002). The Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication further explains why communication is a necessary and central factor in the success of change programs.

The Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication provides an “agentic conceptual framework” that serves to analyze the factors and physiological mechanisms through which human thought, affect, and action are influenced by symbolic communication (Bandura, 2001, p. 265). According to Bandura (2001), human behaviour has been explained in terms of unidirectional causation. He states that behaviour is shaped by either environmental influences or by internal dispositions. As such, he argues for a transactional view of self and society in which personal factors (cognitive, affective, and biological events), behavioural patterns, and environmental events all operate as factors that influence each other bidirectionally (Figure 5).

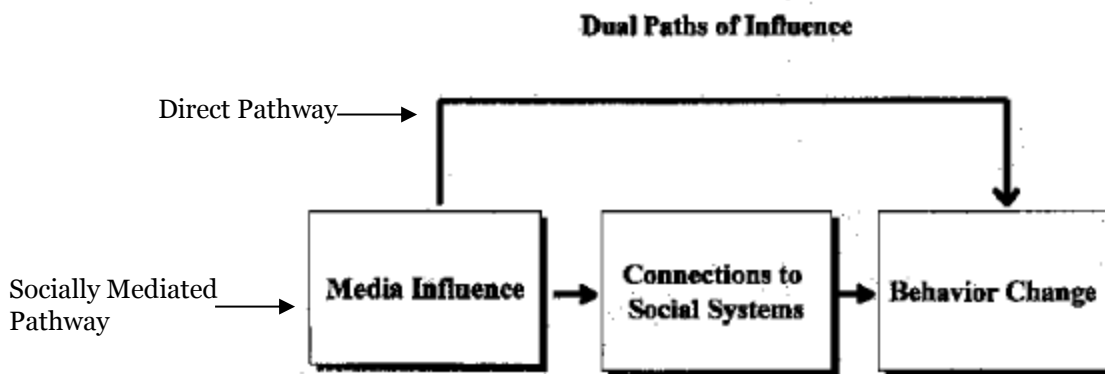
Figure 5. (Bandura, 2001)



Essentially, the social cognitive theory of mass communication states that humans are influenced by environmental, personal, and behavioural factors that are each simultaneously influencing each other and determine how a human reacts or responds to a given situation. This relationship and multi-directional influence is what allows humans to be proactive, self-organizing, self-reflective, and self-regulating rather than static, reactive creatures who are wholly shaped by their environments or various inner forces. Rather, human development, adaptation, and change are rooted in social systems in which each of these factors (behavioural, environmental, and personal) are at play and dependent on each other (Bandura, 2001).

It is through an understanding of the social cognitive theory of mass communication that one can begin to understand the necessity of effective communication in change programs. The goal of change programs is to change a *behaviour*. Therefore, per the social cognitive theory of mass communication, factors in change programs should seek to influence behaviour through influencing the environmental and personal dimensions, as well as the behavioural dimension. Communications can be leveraged to influence these dimensions through an understanding of the dual paths of influence model (Figure 6).

Figure 6. (Bandura, 2001)



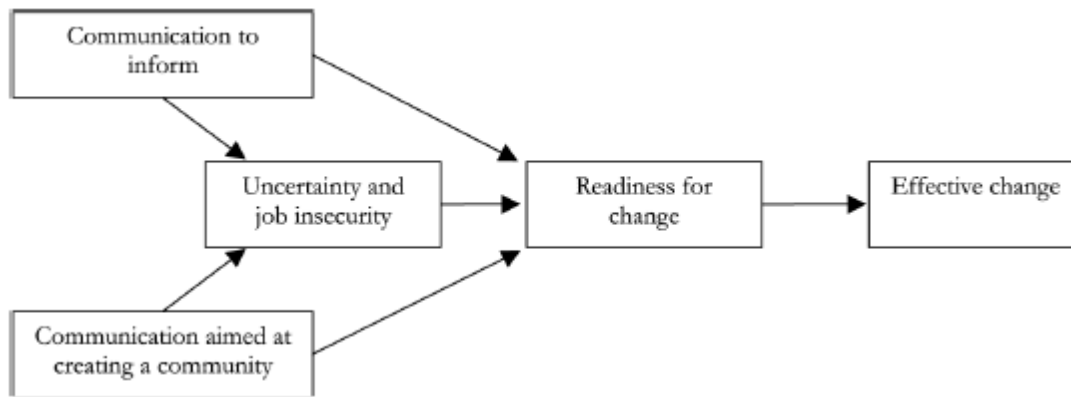
Essentially, communications can effect large-scale changes through two pathways: the direct pathway and the socially mediated pathway. In the direct pathway, communications media inform, enable, motivate and guide participants to promote the desired changes through an individual's *personal and behavioural* dimensions. In the socially mediated pathway, communications media are used to influence and link participants through social networks and community settings. These networks and communities provide on-going support and guidance for the desired changes from an individual's *environment* (Bandura, 2001). Furthermore, the advances in interactive technology for communications media enable an expansion of the reach and influence of communications media. Through these new media, communications can be personally tailored to influence the factors related to the desired behaviour change as tailored communications are viewed as more relevant, credible, and

effective in influencing behaviour. These technologies benefit both channels of the dual pathways model through individualizing messages to inform, enable, motivate, and guide people through the change as well as leveraging social networks and links through new technologies to connect people to interactive programs that allow for the development of communities and support systems for the change (Bandura, 2001).

As stated before, the ultimate purpose of organizational change programs is to influence or change behaviour. So what, then, is the ultimate purpose of communication during organizational change? The literature finds that there are many. On the theoretical level, as stated in the Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication, communication can be leveraged to influence the environmental, personal, and behavioural dimensions of humans, thereby creating a change in behaviour. On the practical level, communication during organizational change can be used to prevent or reduce resistance to change, thereby enabling a more effective change-effort (Elving, 2005). This purpose can be achieved through two main goals, which map to the dual pathway model of communications. The first goal of organizational communication is to inform employees of the change and their expected role in it (Elving, 2005). This is directly related to the direct pathway of communication in Bandura's model. During an organizational change, communication should be used to inform employees, through various media vehicles and platforms, about the change, how they will be affected, and what the expected behavioural outcomes of the change are. It should also address any potential worries that employees may have about the change effort. The second goal of organizational communication is to create a community within the organization, which maps to Bandura's socially mediated pathway. In fact, the creation of a community is essential antecedent of the self-categorization process, which helps to sculpt the identity of a group as well as create a common community spirit, which is a requirement of an organization (Elving, 2005). According to Elving (2005), these two goals of communication essentially mitigate the dual risks of distrust and lack of

commitment in the organization, thereby creating readiness for change which ultimately enables effective change (Figure 7).

Figure 7. (Elving, 2005)



Overall, the literature has established that communication is an essential and integral part of any organizational change program. Without effective communication, organizational change programs are highly susceptible to failure. Communication is necessary to influence behaviours and attitudes of employees and affect the successful movement of employees through the change curve (awareness, understanding, adoption, and ownership of the change). However, communication can only be used to positively influence the movement of employees through the change curve if implemented successfully. Lack of proper or effective communication can leave organizations open to failure just as much as a complete lack of communication can. This begs the question, how do organizations effectively leverage communication to influence employees and move them through the change curve? The literature revealed key factors that determine the success or failure of communication during organizational change.

Essential Communication Factors

It has been established that communication is essential in the success of change programs. However, organizations are struggling with how to best use communication effectively. Literature on

this topic has revealed that there are a number of communication vehicles and approaches that have proved successful in change programs. In addition, literature has revealed that there are other vehicles and approaches that, while widely used, have been shown to be ineffective communication vehicles and/or approaches for influencing the environmental, personal, and behavioural factors leading to effective change in an organization. Moreover, the literature has also shown that there are greater influences in the success of internal communication during change programs than simply the vehicle through which the communication is distributed. The literature finds, rather, that is a combination between the use of four factors that are used for internal communication that establish the difference between effective communication that drives and supports change, and ineffective communication which leads to resistance to the change within the organization: 1) an effective vehicle and credible source; 2) the amount and frequency of communication 3) the level, or amount of transparency into the change that the communication provides and 4) collecting feedback on communication and change management efforts.

Factor 1: Using an Effective Vehicle and Credible Source

With the constant innovations and changes in technology, both new and traditional media forms have become popular within organizations as vehicles for internal communication. As with all communication, organizational or otherwise, the power is often in the vehicle more than the message. However, there are vehicles that rise to the top as the most widely used among organizations, such as email, intranet, posters, town halls, and interpersonal communication. Specifically, the literature review revealed the pros and cons of the utilization of email, intranets, and interpersonal communication as communication vehicles. Moreover, in addition to the specific vehicle, the research has suggested that the utilization of a trusted and credible source is paramount in the effectiveness of disseminating a message.

Research into the effects of source on persuasion messages gives a high degree of credence to the notion that the source of a message or piece of information strongly impacts the degree to which the message is believed and the degree to which it affects behavioural patterns. In fact, it has been shown that in instances where subjects had credible source information related to a given message, resulting attitudes were considerably more stable and more strongly tied to behaviour than in instances where source information was not given (Pierro, Mannetti, Kruglanski, Klein, and Orehek, 2012). This gives credence to the idea that the source of a piece of information or a message during organizational change programs is an essential factor to consider. The use of supervisors and managers as sources and vehicles through which to communicate important aspects of the change has been cited as one of the most effective ways of communicating with employees (Center, Jackson, Smith, and Stansberry, 2013). Organizations seem to understand that supervisors and managers are typically the most trusted source within the organization, making managers and supervisors as communication sources widely used, however, they are not universally effective. As established previously, communication is essential in driving organizational commitment. Managers and supervisors have been cited as the most widely desired source through which to receive information regarding a change. As such, manager and supervisor communication has been strongly linked to driving organizational commitment of a change. Managers and supervisors are cited as the most widely requested source because they represent their respective organizations, and therefore can influence employees' beliefs and perceptions of the organization, ultimately achieving effective organizational commitment (Vuuren, de Jong, Seydel, 2007, p. 124). Manager and supervisor communication serves to bridge the gap between daily interactions and intangible attitudes of employees through a two-way communication process of receiving information and providing feedback. This two-way process is central in enhancing commitment among employees in organizations (Vuuren, de Jong, Seydel, 2007, p. 124). However, the effectiveness of managers and supervisors as credible sources is entirely dependent on their ability to effectively establish and

manage the two-way communication effort. When managers and supervisors do not have the tools, time, or ability to effectively communicate and manage the two-way communication process, Robson and Tourish (2005) have shown that the effectiveness of managers and supervisors as communication sources can plummet due to a lack of communication skill, lack of time in manager's schedules, and an overall lack of willingness to participate (p. 216, 218). Proctor and Doukakis (2003) also found that in many cases, middle management was poorly prepared for cascading information through organizations (p. 272). In addition to Robson and Tourish, Daly, Trague, and Kitchen (2003) also found challenges with managers and supervisors as communication sources, especially as it relates to the two-way communication model. In their study, Daly, Trague, and Kitchen (2003) found that managers saw their roles as communicators as disseminators of information rather than owners of a two-way, interactive communication process (p. 161). However, Robson and Tourish (2005), found that employees desired more face-to-face as opposed to electronically mediated communication, especially from their managers (p. 217). Essentially, researchers have found that managers and supervisors, when effectively trained and prepared for the role, can serve as an effective communication sources and vehicles via interpersonal (face-to-face) communication for organizational change, especially as it relates to influencing employee *commitment*, which translates to acceptance and ownership of the change. Employees, it seems, desperately desire communication in this fashion and respond positively when it is executed properly.

After initial awareness has been achieved within the organization, preferably through interpersonal (face-to-face) communication, technologically mediated communication vehicles are useful to reinforce messages and build understanding of the change (Center et al., 2013). Email is a communication vehicle that has become one of the main forms of communication within organizations. It enhances communication abilities both from organization to employee but also from employee to employee. However, when it comes to effectively communicating messages during organizational change, researchers have suggested that it may not hold the effectiveness desired.

Hewitt (2006) found that, as it relates to organizational communication from organization to employee, email does not have a positive impact on the construct of internal communication. In some areas, in fact, it can have a negative impact. Hewitt states that the effective use of email as a communication vehicle is dependent on the strategic nature of the communication being delivered. Essentially, email communication, when used in an ad-hoc fashion, has little positive influence on organizational performance. However, when used strategically, as part of a larger communication strategy, it can be used to positively affect organizational performance (88). Moreover, Hewitt (2006) goes on to state that email communication is best used to affect *awareness* of a topic, such as a change, in an organization.

Intranets have also become increasingly popular as a form of internal communication. The ability to use them as repositories for all employee communication enables employees to have access to a vast array of information on-demand. Intranets provide shared access to documents as well as controlled access to specific resources. Intranets' provide an array of services and functionalities and allow for applications such as calendars of events, forums for employees to post questions and opinions, a repository for FAQ's on any given topic, searchable directories, and news feeds (Bottazzo, 2005). Bottazzo (2005) states that as a method for supporting "business processes" (i.e. organizational efforts such as change programs), intranet is an irreplaceable tool that can provide immense value to a modern organization (84). The functionality of intranets allows for organizations to utilize it as a two-way communication tool. Employees can retrieve information regarding a change as they need it, including FAQ's about a change, change timelines, training availability, change benefits, etc. Employees can also provide feedback and ask questions through forums, which can be answered by leaders and change advocates.

Factor 2: Amount and Frequency of Communication

The amount and frequency of information has also been cited as a main factor in the success of organizational communication for change programs. In today's workforce, building trust within the organization is essential (Center et al, 2013). Past research has revealed that there is often times a need for *more* communication during organizational change to ensure that employees have trust and confidence in the change (Robson and Tourish, 2005; Proctor and Doukakis, 2003). In case studies of organizations going through change programs, there is an overwhelming desire for more communication, from a variety of vehicles. For example, Robson and Tourish (2005) found that employees desired more information in general, but also desired that more information come from their managers and change agents as opposed to broadcast messages via electronically mediated vehicles (p. 217).

Factor 3: Message Transparency Level

The degree of transparency of the message including visibility into the change program and the reasons behind the change has been identified as a major factor in communication during organizational change. Messaging should be considered carefully during organizational change programs. Organizations are finding that fostering trust among their workforce means they must be entirely open with their employees through their messaging. Through a concept called "transparent communication", organizations are realizing that that employees desire more visibility into the change, the decisions that are being made, and why leadership is making those decisions (Center et al, 2013). In fact, Proctor and Doukakis (2003) found that negative feelings toward an organization were driven by a general feeling that employees were not receiving open and honest communication from senior management (p. 270). Furthermore, Kitchen and Daly (2002) cite *secrecy* as one of the factors that impedes successful implementation of change management programs (p. 48). These findings point to a general idea that the level of transparency of information being shared should be considered a factor when crafting messages during organizational change programs. By considering the level of

transparency necessary for messaging to employees, organizations can better craft messages that will resonate with employees and influence commitment to the change.

Factor 4: Feedback

The final success factor that was identified is the presence of an effective way to solicit feedback and incorporate findings into the communication activities during organizational change management programs. Scholars suggest that it is essential that employees' input is not only solicited, but also considered and incorporated into communication activities (Center et al, 2013). In fact, the ability to open a two-way dialogue and solicit feedback immediately is one of the main benefits of fact-to-face communication via managers and supervisors. As discussed previously, manager and supervisor communication serves to bridge the gap between daily interactions and intangible attitudes of employees and enables a two-way communication process of receiving information and providing feedback. This two-way process is central in enhancing commitment among employees in organizations. (Vuuren, de Jong, Seydel, 2007, p. 124). The two-way communication process enables direct and in-the-moment feedback from employees, which can provide insights into not only the effectiveness of the communication itself, but also how employees view the change. Additionally, as part of his four-models of Public Relations, James Grunig has defined the process of two-way symmetrical communication, which can be applied to communication models for change management communication. Grunig states that "the strategic management paradigm emphasizes two-way communication of many kinds to provide publics a voice in management decisions and to facilitate dialogue between management and publics both before and after decisions are made" (Bailey, 2008). Essentially, Grunig stresses the importance in publics (e.g. employees) having a voice in decisions and the ability to participate in dialogue regarding decisions.

Research

The literature review established the importance of communication during organizational change programs. The review also found key themes that ultimately led to the identification of four factors for communication during organizational change: a credible source through an effective communication vehicle, amount and frequency of communication, and level of transparency of the message, and the utilization of a feedback mechanism. Given the findings of the literature review, the research for this study focused on validating and elaborating on the four factors for communication during organizational change that were identified. To do so, research questions were developed to understand how organizations are utilizing communication to move employees through the change curve (awareness, understanding, adoption, and ownership) and how employees feel their organizations *should* be using communication during organizational change programs to support employees.

R1: How is internal communication used to positively affect employee awareness, understanding, engagement, and ownership of change programs?

R 2: How do employees wish to be supported through communication during change management programs?

Research Method and Data Collection

To answer the research questions, a study was designed that would identify the ways in which employees are experiencing communication during organizational change programs. The first goal of the research was to gain a sample that covered a broad spectrum of organizations across a variety of industries. The second goal was to gather in-depth practical observations of organizations currently going through organizational change, focusing on the overall approach to communication that the organization used. Finally, the third goal was to discuss the identified factors, validate their

significance, and identify any additional factors that should be considered through structured interviews with organizational change management professionals.

The first goal was achieved through a survey that explored employee perceptions of past organizational change programs in their organizations. A survey was chosen as a research method because it allows for broad-spectrum view of how employees have experienced communication during organizational change programs and how they desire to receive communication during organizational change programs. The survey was designed to elaborate on the four factors of communication during organizational change that were identified in the literature review, use of an effective vehicle, amount and frequency of communication, transparency level of the message, and use of a feedback mechanism, from an employee perspective. Respondents were asked to select an organizational change they had experienced in their professional career and answer questions regarding the change. Respondents were not asked to identify themselves or their organizations. The survey consisted of 26 questions and captured both quantitative data as well as qualitative data through a variety of question types (multiple choice, multiple selection, Likert scales, and open-ended questions). The survey was distributed online through social media (LinkedIn and Facebook) for a duration of three weeks. A convenience sample of 41 respondents participated.

The second goal was achieved through direct observations of two organizations currently undergoing organizational change programs. Direct observation was chosen as a research method because it allows for an in-depth look into how organizations are approaching communication during organizational change programs. Organization A is a small mutual insurance company located in Wisconsin. Organization B is a global insurance brokerage firm. Observations of Organization B took place in its New York office. Both organizations are currently undergoing technological organizational change programs. Observations of these organizations were over a 12 month period, from June 2012-June 2013, with 6 months spent at each of these organizations. Observations of these

organizations focused on the approach and implementation of their respective organizational change management initiatives. The development and implementation observations of these organizations were done at the business level, through engaging and observing the organization's change leaders as they developed and implemented the organizational change management programs. I attended meetings, spoke with change leaders in the organization, and noted how each organization approached change management holistically. Specifically, noted observations focused on what tools the organizations used and what factors they most heavily leveraged throughout their organizational change program as well as the communication practices and vehicles used by the organizations to communicate with their employees about the change.

Finally, the third goal was achieved through a series of interviews with four organizational change management professionals. Interviews were conducted in 30 minute time slots during May 2013. Interview subjects ranged from 6 to 30+ years as organizational change management professionals in both industry and consulting. Interview questions (see Appendix) focused on their experience in implementing organizational change management programs, specifically relating to the role of communication and how it is leveraged to move employees through the phases of change and ultimately achieve commitment to the change.

Results

Survey

The 41 survey respondents were 63% female and 37% male and represented a range of age groups with the largest percentage, 44%, being 25-34 and the second largest at 17% being 35-44. Survey respondents also represented a range of industries, which was preferred for the study. As desired, the survey provided insights into the two research questions, through which, one is able to draw conclusions regarding how organizations are using communication during organizational change.

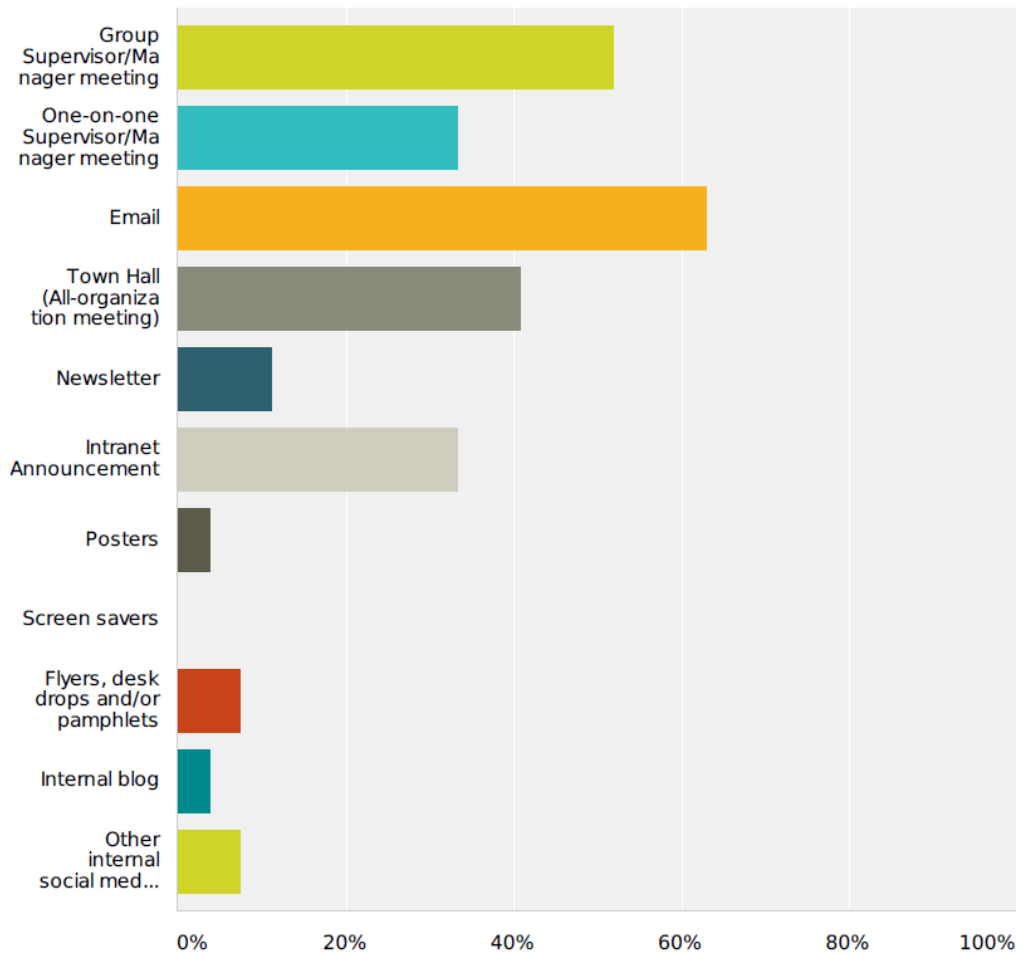
R1: How is internal communication used to positively affect employee awareness, understanding, adoption, and ownership of change programs?

The study found that organizations are using a variety of vehicles to communicate with employees about the change. Respondents noted that the most frequently used vehicles are: Email communication with 66% of respondents citing it as a vehicle, group supervisor/manager meetings with 52% of respondents citing it as a vehicle, town hall (all-organization meeting) with 41% of respondents citing it as a vehicle, one-on-one supervisor/manager meetings with 33% citing it as a vehicle, and intranet announcements with 33% of respondents citing it as a vehicle. Vehicles that were used less frequently are newsletters at 11%, posters at 3%, flyers, desk drops and pamphlets at 7%, internal blogs at 3% and other mediums at 7%.

Figure 8.

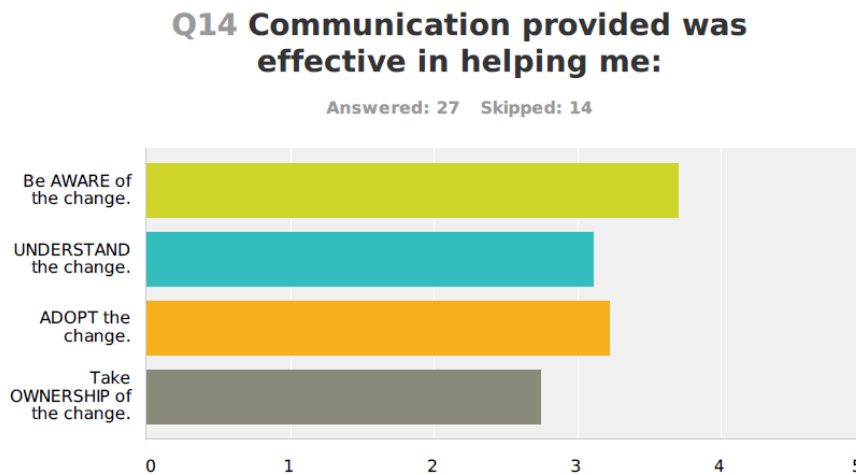
Q13 What was/were the main communication vehicle(s) used by your organization to communicate to employees about the change? (select all the apply)

Answered: 27 Skipped: 14



Overall, employees agreed or strongly agreed that the communication they received through these vehicles was effective in helping them be aware (78%) of the change. Additionally, the data also suggested that, to a lesser degree, employees feel that the communication they received through these vehicles helped them understand (48%), and adopt (48%) the change.

Figure 9.



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Average Rating
Be AWARE of the change.	7.41% 2	11.11% 3	3.70% 1	59.26% 16	18.52% 5	27	3.70
UNDERSTAND the change.	14.81% 4	22.22% 6	14.81% 4	33.33% 9	14.81% 4	27	3.11
ADOPT the change.	3.70% 1	33.33% 9	14.81% 4	33.33% 9	14.81% 4	27	3.22
Take OWNERSHIP of the change.	14.81% 4	37.04% 10	18.52% 5	18.52% 5	11.11% 3	27	2.74

These results suggest that organizations may need to build out their ability to effectively communicate with their employees through understanding and adoption (e.g. acceptance) of the change. However, only 30% of respondents felt that the communication provided was effective in driving ownership of the change. In fact, 52% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the communication provided was effective in promoting ownership of the change.

Employees were also asked to cite which communication vehicles they felt were the most effective in making employees aware, understand, adopt, and take ownership of the change. The most effective communication vehicles that were cited for making employees *aware* of the change were: email (41%), town hall (41%), group supervisor/manager meeting (33%), one-on-one

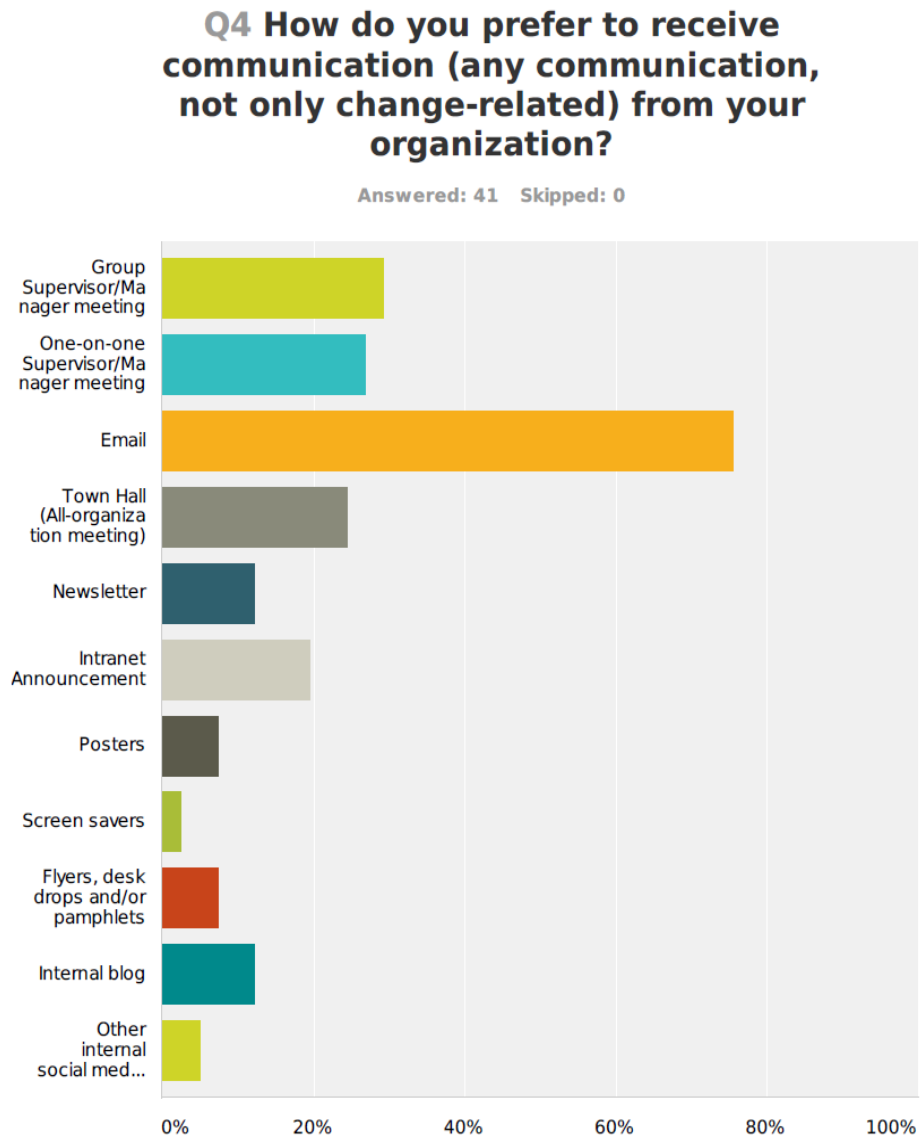
supervisor/manager meeting (26%), and intranet announcement (22%). The most effective communication vehicles that were cited for making employees *understand* the change were: group supervisor/manager meeting (44%), email (41%), and one-on-one supervisor/manager meeting (26%). The most effective communication vehicles that were cited for making employees *adopt* the change were: group supervisor/manager meeting (44%) and one-on-one supervisor manager meeting (33%). Finally, the most effective communication vehicles that were cited for making employees take *ownership* of the change were one-on-one supervisor/manager meetings (41%), group supervisor/manager meetings (33%), and email (33%). It's important to note here that many respondents noted in the comment section that they believe none of the vehicles effectively promoted adoption or ownership of the change within their organizations.

In addition to the vehicles, employees also were asked which roles in the organization they believed were involved in communicating messages about the change. Overall, respondents agreed or strongly agreed that communication messages were delivered by all roles provided in the survey. Fifty-three percent agreed or strongly agreed that the CEO was involved in communicating messages. Seventy-four percent agreed or strongly agreed that other organizational leadership was involved in communicating messages. Fifty-nine percent agreed or strongly agreed that their manager/supervisor was involved in communicating messages. Finally, 50% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their peers were involved in communicating messages.

R 2: How do employees wish to be supported through communication during change management programs?

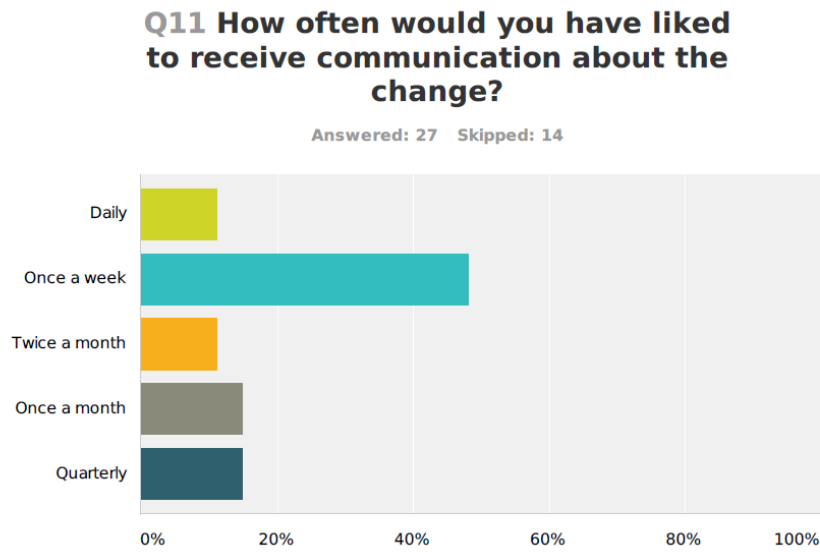
The study found that employees, overall, prefer email as the primary method for all organizational communication with 75% of respondents citing email as their preferred communication method.

Figure 10.



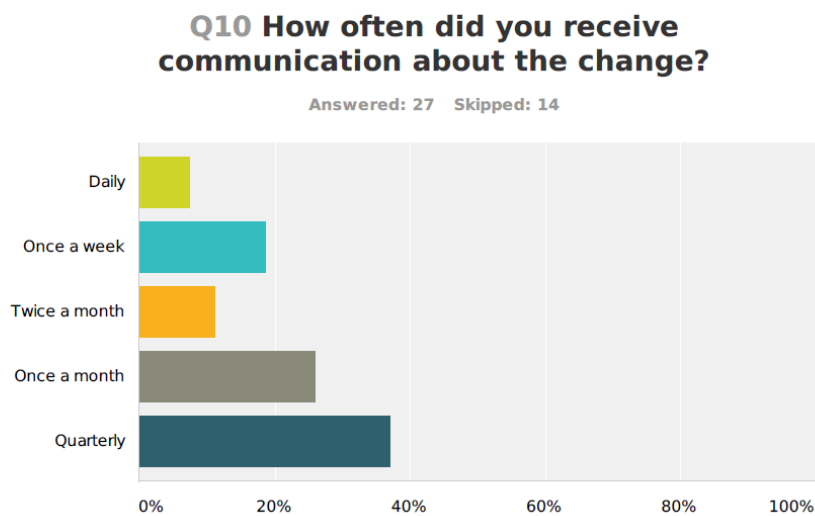
Additionally, the study found that 48% of respondents preferred to receive communication regarding the change once a week (as opposed to daily, bi-weekly, once a month, and quarterly).

Figure 11.



This finding is in contrast with the cadence of communication that respondents cited they received during their organizational change. When asked how often they received communication about the change, 37% of the respondents cited they only received communication quarterly and only 18% cited they received it once a week, as desired, with 52% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that the cadence of communication met their needs.

Figure 12.



Additionally, 41% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the amount of information they received met their needs (compared to the 37% who agreed or strongly agreed that it met their needs) and 52% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the type of information they received met their needs (compared to 33% who responded that they agreed or strongly agreed that it met their needs). Qualitative data from the survey suggests that employees desire more in-depth and specific, role related communications. Essentially, employees are desiring less broad, broadcast-type messages regarding the change and, instead, prefer more specific information that is tailored to their role and outlines exactly how they will be affected by the change.

Respondents were then asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the communication they received. Some key themes arose out of the open-ended question:

Strengths:

- To-the-point and clear communication
- Frequent discussions regarding the change

Weaknesses:

- Closed communication and a lack of transparency and clarity
- Rogue middle-managers (middle managers who do not support the change and sabotage success)
- Lack of effective feedback methods

Respondents were also asked to describe how their needs could have been better met through communication, which also yielded some key themes:

- More open, transparent communication
- More timely and frequent communication
- More communication channels/greater availability of communication
- More middle-management involvement

Overall, the study suggested that employees desire more communication in general, through a number of different mediums including email and manager/supervisor meetings. Employees seem to desire more open and transparent communication delivered more frequently than they have received in the past.

Direct Observations

Observations of Organization A and Organization B were focused on research question 1:

R1: How is internal communication used to positively affect employee awareness, understanding, adoption, and ownership of change programs?

The observations of these two organizations were focused on the four factors of successful communication during organizational change: credible sources through effective vehicles, amount and frequency of communication, transparency level of the message, and feedback. The observations were not used to measure the effectiveness, but rather, to further identify how organizations are approaching the factors.

Organization A:

During the observation period (January – June 2013), Organization A was using a variety of communication channels. The organization had successfully created awareness of the change throughout the organization and has just entered the understanding phase of the commitment curve. Per the change curve, this was expected to cause some uncertainty and scepticism within the organization. This organization had a top-down approach to communication with leadership receiving information regarding the change and then cascading it down to the employees. In this model, managers and supervisors were highly accountable for communicating messages about the change. The organization was also utilizing intranet sites and weekly newsletters to communicate high-level messages about the change effort and the status of the program. In addition, the organization was

utilizing a change-agent network in which employees were working as “change champions” and passing down messages to their peers. As the organization moved into understanding of the change, change champions became a larger part of the communication plan and change champions began to own the responsibility of cascading down more targeted messages to their respective areas. Finally, Organization A used an email in-box specifically created to receive feedback regarding from employees within the organization. The call for feedback was solicited during every communication that was distributed. Additionally, change champions as well as managers and supervisors were encouraged to collect feedback from their peers and direct reports and share any observations with the organizational change management team during monthly meetings. Feedback was catalogued and considered when drafting any succeeding communications.

Organization B:

During the observation period (July 2012-December 2012), Organization B was using less of a variety of communication channels. This organization was primarily communicating with employees about the change through town halls and manager/supervisor meetings. There is very little communication done through newsletters, intranet sites, or email, other than announcing town hall and manager/supervisor meeting schedules. It was, however, also using a change-agent network. The “change champions” in this organization were primarily being used to support training of employees on the new system rather than to disseminate messages regarding the change throughout the organizational change program. Managers and supervisors as well as direct messages from the CEO were the primary forms of communication in this organization. Feedback was primarily solicited through focus groups following town-hall meetings. A random selection of employees was selected to participate in these focus groups. Feedback gathered during these sessions was catalogued and incorporated into future communications regarding the change.

Expert Interviews

A number of key themes were identified upon an analysis of the interview responses. The first is the overall importance of communication during change management programs. Interviewees unanimously agreed that communication was a central component in organizational change management programs. In fact, one interviewee stated that communication is “the enabler for all other activities in organizational change management”. Emphasizing that proper communication during organizational change management is essential in the success of an organizational change management program. Interview responses also unanimously indicated that the function of communication during organizational change management is to move employees through the change curve. However, interviewees also unanimously indicated that communication can only successfully move an organization, and its employees, from unawareness through acceptance of the change. Specifically, the interview responses indicated that awareness and understanding are most heavily influenced by communication activities. Interviewees indicated that ownership of the change is hard to achieve through communication alone and other aspects of change management, such as stakeholder engagement, sustainability, culture change, and organizational alignment, should be used in conjunction with communication to drive ownership of the change. Furthermore, interview responses suggested that communication should also be leveraged to manage the change curve, specifically resistance throughout the organizational change program. This can be achieved through understanding the source of resistance and designing messaging to address the underlying source of resistance. The interview responses also suggested that employees have a very specific, tangible idea of the role of communication during organizational change management programs. Interviewees argued that, while communication should be used across a variety of vehicles for a variety of purposes, employees view their communication needs as very tactical. Particularly, the interview responses suggested that employees desire more role specific communication which outlines exactly how the change will impact their roles and responsibilities. Essentially, interview responses indicate that in the experience

of these professionals, employees view communication as the way they will know what they need to do and when, rather than as a persuasion mechanism for the change. However, it should be noted that employees are not always fully cognizant of all of the communication messages they are receiving daily. While it may be true that employees do not view communication during change management as a persuasion mechanism, it does not negate the need or the ability of communication during change management to be used in such a manner. Finally, interview responses yielded a strong degree of support for the communication success factors that were identified in the literature review.

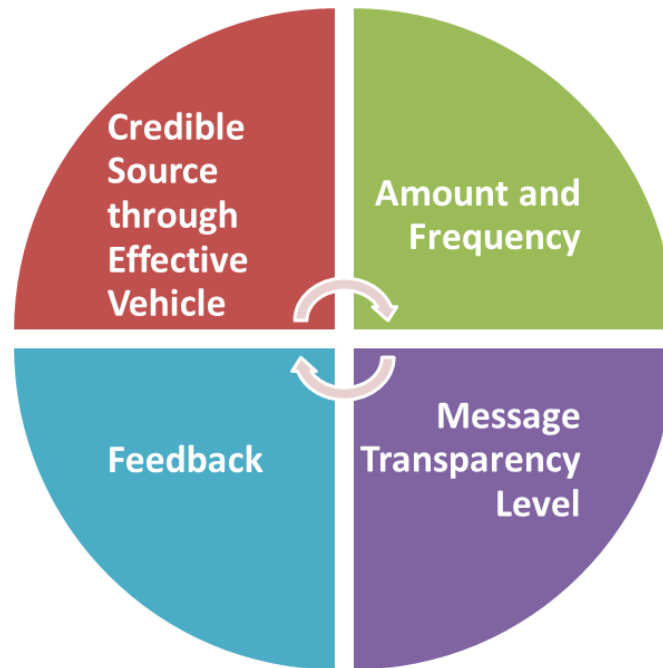
Interviewees were able to expand on and discuss the relevance and importance those factors, especially as it relates to how organizations are missing the mark during organizational change management programs. This will be addressed further in the discussion.

Discussion

Overall, the literature and research provided some interesting insights into how communication can be leveraged to move employees through the change curve during organizational change. The literature established that communication is an essential component in influencing employees with effective internal communication being cited as one of the necessities for organizational success and achieving organizational excellence (Kitchen and Daly, 2002). Gilsdorf (1998) argues that mistakes in change management programs are often directly linked to communication breakdowns. Therefore, successful organizational change can be said to be directly related to the successful implementation of communication. The successful implementation of communication has been found to correlate to four factors: the use a credible source and an effective vehicle, the proper amount and frequency of communication, the level of transparency the message provides into the organizational change, and the use of an effective feedback mechanism. While the identified factors follow the standard “right message, right vehicle, right time” communication approach, it has been suggested through the primary and secondary research that organization change programs continue to struggle with the proper implementation of communication during

organizational change programs. Therefore, leaders and communicators in organizations should leverage the 4-factor model presented as a guide during organizational change programs (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Davidson's 4-Factor Change Management Communication Model



Factor 1: Using a Credible Source through an Effective Vehicle

As it relates to the use of an effective vehicle, the literature review and research found it to be one of the greatest contributing factors to successful communication. The literature points to the use of a trustworthy and credible source as an essential component of communication during organizational change programs. This suggests that, regardless of the vehicle, a message should be seen to come from a trustworthy and credible source within the organization. The research suggests that in most cases this is an employee's manager or supervisor. The literature points to the manager or supervisor as the most credible source because they are the leader with whom employees most often interact. Because other leaders, such as the CEO, are often not in the trenches and don't have personal relationships with employees, they are not often viewed as credible sources of information for direct messaging to employees. Rather, it is suggested that CEOs should be used as sources for high-level

communication of the change, especially related to messaging around the vision of the change and what it means for the organization. However, messages that are more specifically tailored to how the change will impact a department or an individual employee is most effective coming from a manager/supervisor. In addition, the literature found that email communication, face-to-face communication, and internal intranet communication are three of the most highly effective communication vehicles, when implemented properly. While the literature revealed that these communication vehicles, especially face-to-face communication, can be highly ineffective if not used properly, it also noted that proper use of these vehicles yielded higher employee commitment (Vuuren, de Jong, Seydel, 2007, p. 124).

The findings of the research support the idea that communication vehicles can influence employees either positively or negatively during organizational change programs, making it a major factor in the success or failure of communication during organizational change programs. The research (both quantitative and qualitative) suggested that a credible source was essential in stimulating persuasion and behaviour change in an organization. The survey and interviews, in particular, supported the literature in the suggestion that it is not possible to create commitment to a change within an organization if employees do not trust the source of the information they are receiving. Interviewees' pointed to their experiences within organizations to highlight that managers and supervisors are often seen as the most credible sources, which also supports the literature. The research also revealed that employees viewed the type and variety of vehicles as important in influencing awareness, understanding, and acceptance of change, while they generally found that the communication vehicles presented were not effective in influencing ownership of the change. The research findings supported the literature by finding that overall, employees found email, face-to-face communication, and intranets as effective vehicles in communication about organizational change and influencing employees through the change curve. Additionally, the research also revealed that town halls are a vehicle that employees view as effective in influencing employees through the change

curve, especially as it relates to awareness of the change. These findings highlight and validate that the use of a credible source through an effective communication vehicle is a main success factor in the successful implementation of communication during organizational change management programs.

Factor 2: Amount and Frequency of Communication

The amount and frequency of communication was also found to be a major factor in the success or failure of communication during organizational change programs with the literature review indicating that there is often time a need for *more* communication during organizational change (Robson and Tourish, 2005; Proctor and Doukakis, 2003). This idea was supported by the findings of the research. Overall, employees felt that the amount and frequency of communication they received regarding the change to be inadequate. The study found that 48% of respondents preferred to receive communication regarding the change once a week (as opposed to daily, bi-weekly, once a month, and quarterly). This finding is in contrast with the cadence of communication that respondents cited they received during their organizational change. When asked how often they received communication about the change, 37% of the respondents cited they only received communication quarterly and only 18% cited they received it once a week, as desired, with 52% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that the cadence of communication met their needs. Additionally, 41% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the amount of information they received met their needs (compared to the 37% who agreed or strongly agreed that it met their needs) and 52% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the type of information they received met their needs (compared to 33% who responded that they agreed or strongly agreed that it met their needs). Employees also cited that need for more timely and frequent communication when asked how they could have been better supported through communication during the organizational change. These findings indicate that employees regard the amount and frequency of communication as a major factor in their ability to move through the change curve and ultimately take ownership of the change and overall find that they do not receive information frequent enough and do not receive the right amount of information. Additionally, direct

observations and interviews suggested that timely communication containing the correct amount and transparency of information is essential in influencing employees during organizational change.

With respect to the proper amount and frequency of communication, interview responses indicated that there is no standard or correct amount or frequency of communication. Rather, interviewees suggested that an organization should follow a model that is aligned with their organizational culture and desires of their workforce. This means that, with respect to the successful implementation of the correct amount and frequency of information, it is important for organizations to have a pulse on the needs and desires of their employees. The research indicated that too little and infrequent communication is likely to lead to resistance and a lack of commitment to the change. Therefore, organizations should consider this factor with respect to their workforce and determine the correct amount and frequency of communication needed for the change as well as to meet the desires and expectations of their workforce.

Factor 3: Message Transparency Level

The level of transparency into the organizational change provided by communication was also found to be a factor in the successful implementation of communication during organizational change programs. Proctor and Doukakis (2003) found that negative feelings toward an organization were driven by a general feeling that employees were not receiving open and honest communication from senior management (p. 270). This idea was supported by the research with employees citing closed communication and a lack of transparency as a weakness in communication during organizational change. Additionally, employees cited more open, transparent communication as something they felt would have better met their needs during the organizational change. Moreover, 52% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the type of information they received met their needs (compared to 33% who responded that they agreed or strongly agreed that it met their needs), which suggests that employees desire more open and clear communication regarding the organizational change. Overall, it

is clear that employees find a lack of clear, open, and transparent communication to be a problem in their ability to successfully move through the change curve.

While survey results indicated that, in general, employees desire greater transparency into organizational change programs, interviews with change management professionals revealed that organizations should carefully consider the level of transparency provided during organizational change programs. Interviewees validated the necessity of transparency level as a success factor, but hold that when considering transparency level during organizational change, the degree of transparency should be tailored to the culture and expectations of the organization. Essentially, interviewees caution that there is no set degree of transparency, rather, at the outset of the organizational change program, leaders should assess the degree of transparency that aligns with their organizational culture and maintain a steady level of transparency throughout the organizational change program.

Factor 4: Feedback

This success factor is aligned with the findings that the correct implementation of the first three success factors should be closely aligned with the organizational culture and the unique needs and desires of the workforce. Therefore, interviewees suggested that it is important to have a constant and consistent way of gathering employee feedback regarding the change and the communications they are receiving. The feedback loop enables a form of two-way communication that has been identified as an essential component in building commitment of the change among employees in organizations. (Vuuren, de Jong, Seydel, 2007, p. 124). The two-way communication process enables direct and in-the-moment feedback from employees, which can provide insights into not only the effectiveness of the communication itself, but also how employees view the change. It is through the feedback loop that the organizational change management team can identify the most credible sources, successful vehicles, proper amount and frequency of communication, and proper transparency into the

change. Interview responses suggested that a feedback loop can take many forms within an organization. Pulse surveys, focus groups, and face-to-face feedback are some of the most common and effective according to the interviewees.

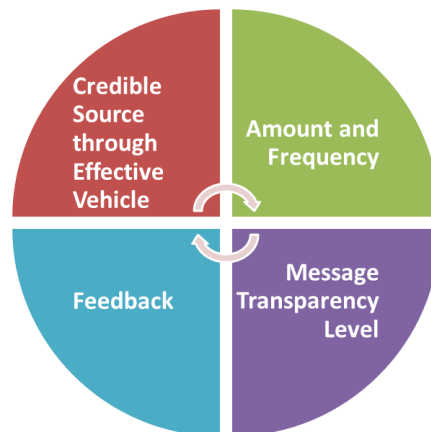
Limitations and Future Research

This study sought to identify the communication factors that should be leveraged to most effectively move employees through the change curve during organizational change. Through the literature and the research, four factors were identified as factors that most often dictate the success or failure of communication during organizational change: a credible source and effective vehicle, amount and frequency of communication, transparency level of the message, and feedback mechanism. However, there were limitations to that research that should be addressed. While open and available to a large audience, the survey only yielded a small number of participants. Therefore, while any data gathered can be referenced and used to draw correlations, it cannot be considered statistically valid data. Additionally, the observations of Organizations A and B, while valuable in identifying what communication channels organizations are using, cannot be used to see how each vehicle influences employees through the change curve. Because the organizational observations were not able to be performed throughout the full lifecycle of the organizational change, and because the organizational observations were not able to be validated with survey data of the employees in the organization, one cannot draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the two organizations' communication; one can simply identify the different vehicles being used.

The research does point to some interesting correlations that could lead to future research, specifically as it relates to testing the communication factors in a true organizational change setting. The factors could be tested in several ways. The first piece of research should be to validate that the four factors are, in fact, the four most prevalent factors in dictating the success or failure of organizational change. The second piece of research would be to test how to ensure that the factors are

implemented successfully. This would involve testing which vehicles are truly the most effective, what the appropriate amount and frequency of communication is, and what the best level of transparency is in communication within an array of organizations. An argument could be made that the details and strategy behind the use of these factors is entirely dependent on other factors such as the organization undergoing the change, the type of change, and the duration of the change; this was a key theme of the interview findings. Research should be conducted to validate if there are true benchmarks for these success factors or if they are, in fact, fluid and dependent on organizational needs. Regardless, the primary and secondary research conducted suggests that the identified factors are required components to ensuring that communication during organizational change programs is implemented properly. Therefore, leaders and organizational communicators should leverage the 4-factor change management communication model during organizational change programs to build the necessary level of commitment for the change.

Figure 13. Davidson's 4-Factor Change Management Communication Mode



Citations

Bailey, Richard. (2008) A 'two-way symmetrical' with James Grunig. PR Studies.

<http://prstudies.typepad.com/weblog/2008/10/a-two-way-symme.html>

Bandura, A. (2001). Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication. *Media Psychology*. 3, 265-299.

Burns, B. (1992). *Managing Change: A Strategic Approach to Organizational Development and Renewal*. Pitman Publishing. London. 1992

Center, A., Jackson, P., Smith, S., and Standberry, F. (2014). *Public Relations Practices: Managerial Case Studies and Problems*. 8th ed. Pearson Education, Inc. New Jersey.

Elving, W. (2005). The Role of Communication in Organizational Change. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. 10(2), 129-138.

Giltsdorf, J. (1998). Organizational Rules on Communicating: How Employees Are – and Are Not – Learning the Ropes. *Journal of Business Communication*. 35, 173-200.

Kitchen, P., and Daly, F. (2002). Internal Communication During Change management. *Corporate Communications: an international journal*. 7(1), 46-53.

Kübler-Ross, E. (2005) *On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss*. Scribner.

Pierro, A., Mannetti, L., Kruglanski, A., Klein, K., and Orehek, E. (2012). Persistence of Attitude

Change and Attitude-Behavior Correspondence Based on Extensive Processing of Source Information. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. 42,103-111.

Proctor, T., and Doukakis, I. (2003). Change Management: the role of internal communication and employee development. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. 8(4), 268-277.

Robson, P., and Tourish, D. (2005). Managing Internal Communication: an organizational case study. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. 10(3), 213-222.

Van Vuuren, M., de Jong, M., and Sydel, E. (2007). Direct and indirect effects of supervisor communication on organizational commitment. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. 12(2), 116-128.

About the Author

Alyssa Davidson is a Human Capital consultant in the Financial Services Industry. Her work primarily focuses on the strategy, design, and implementation of Organizational Change Management programs for organizations in the Financial Services Industry. Prior to her current position, Ms. Davidson worked in marketing and event planning at the University of Minnesota. Her interest in the success factors for communication during organization change programs was sparked during her work with her clients in her current position. Ms. Davidson observed the need for a fundamental framework for change management communications that goes beyond typical internal communication models to address the specific needs of change management communications.

Ms. Davidson lives in Chicago, IL and is looking forward to enjoying Summer in Chicago after the successful completion of this body of work.

Appendix

See documents attached to email.