

IT Communications Planning and Issues Management in Changing Times

Scott Midkiff / Angela Correa

March 2023

Communicating is hard.

IT Communicating is harder, because...

- There's a significant knowledge gap.
- Many messages cannot be reduced in complexity.
- People have short attention spans and are constantly experiencing information overload.
- People also have unrealistic expectations and won't prioritize technology considerations until there is a problem.
- Change is seen as threatening.

But most of all,

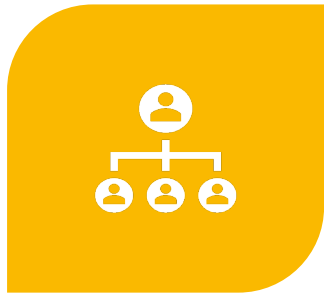
- IT Communication is hard because there's always the possibility that the information you share will alarm people...

*For these reasons,
and many others...it can be
tempting to minimize the internal
communication steps and go
straight to the rollout.*

This does not always go well.

Clarifying questions

- What is the goal of this message?
- Who is your audience?
- What actions do you need people to take afterwards?
- How urgent or directive is this message meant to be?
- What are the risks of this message or project?
 - In what ways could people misinterpret the goals of this effort?
 - What could happen if people don't take the desired action?
 - What is the likelihood of active opposition to this effort?



SAMPLE GOAL 1: GETTING BUY-IN FROM LEADERSHIP FOR A DECISION

- PRESENT A CLEAR RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION
 - USE INFOGRAPHICS AND CONCEPTUAL EXPLANATIONS
 - BE PREPARED WITH ADDITIONAL DETAIL TO BACK UP THE CONCEPTS
 - LAY OUT OPTIONS
- CREATE A SENSE OF URGENCY FOR YOUR PREFERRED COURSE OF ACTION



SAMPLE GOAL 2: TEACHING A GROUP HOW TO COMPLETE A PROCESS

- EXPLAIN WHY IT'S NECESSARY
 - BREAK DOWN THE STEPS
- PROVIDE A TUTORIAL OR DEMO
 - SET A DEADLINE
 - ANSWER QUESTIONS



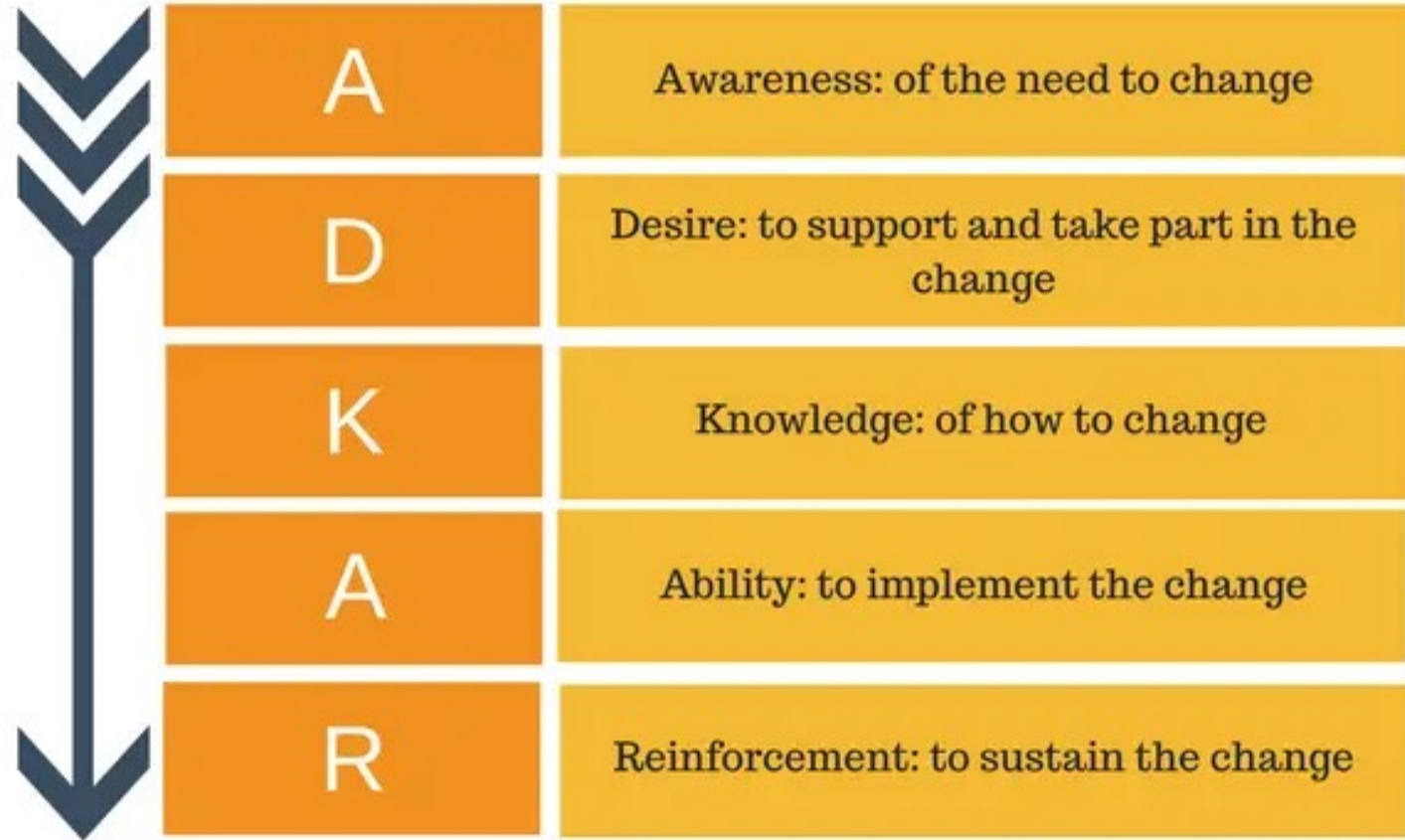
SAMPLE GOAL 3: SHARING FACTS TO STOP THE SPREAD OF MISINFORMATION

- ACKNOWLEDGE CONCERNS
- PRESENT A CLEAR RATIONALE
- ADDRESS MISINFORMATION WITH FACTS
 - OFFER A MEETING
 - DISCUSS SAFEGUARDS
- BE TRANSPARENT, TACTFUL, AND OPEN
 - KEEP FOLLOWING UP

Different approaches to meet different goals

Change management

ADKAR Model of Change



ADKAR 'lite' in Communication

- Awareness – don't assume that people understand your context or what you're talking about. Give them that context.
- Desire – present your idea in a compelling way, and address doubts or concerns with tact and in good faith.
- Knowledge – be as clear as possible on what is going to happen, and deadlines, and the actions that each person will need to take.
- Ability – connect people with all the support and resources they will need, and offer ways for them to reach out if they have questions or feel stuck
- Reinforcement – plan to share a statement as a project goes from the implementation phase to full operation to mark the milestone, thank people for their cooperation and support, and direct them to the starting point for the new tool or process on an ongoing basis.

Under-communicating can have consequences

- Low effort/planning for internal communication or stakeholder awareness results in heightened risk of roadblocks and issues
- Opening up two-way communication with people can be time consuming, but knowing more in advance about the reactions and the concerns of the user community is valuable.
- With that in place, though:
 - You can identify concerns you might not have thought of on your own, and tailor your communications to address any concerns directly
 - You can identify groups within the user community that need additional outreach
 - You might be led to change your approach to the project in some way to yield better results
 - You can find advocates and champions for your project
 - Adapt to changing circumstances

So what's the take-home message here?

- Good communication can't happen in a vacuum, and everyone has a role in making it a reality for their projects and initiatives.
- Ask the questions you think your users will ask, and try to step out of your 'expert' shoes and into the shoes of someone who has no background in any of this.
- Find support within your areas to help refine messages - get to know your comms person, if you have one.
- Resist the impulse to skip or minimize communication
- Explore using ADKAR principles to check in on the experience that your users might be navigating.
- If you find yourself facing a controversy you aren't prepared for, escalate it to trusted folks within your organization



INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
VIRGINIA TECH™

Questions?
Comments?

Scott Midkiff (midkiff@vt.edu), Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer

Angela Correa (acorrea@vt.edu), Division of IT Communications, Office of the CIO