

Asking Effective Change Management Questions

About the Authors



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Fabia is an executive transformational leader with over 20 years of progressive senior management experience working with and influencing Fortune 500 C-level executives in the areas of human capital strategy, talent planning transformation, and change management. She has been integral in the development and implementation of programs to re-imagine and innovate organizations and disrupt leadership in a global economy. With both industry and consulting experience, she brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to share with her clients. She has attained her MBA in Strategic Leadership & International Management as well as two Bachelor degrees and a Master degree with professional certifications for human resources (SPHR and SHRM-SCP) and project management (PMP). She is a lead facilitator for Anchored Development Institute to support her passion for "Preparing the next generation of leaders."

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Introduction

Organizations are constantly impacted by business environments that require them to adapt to and implement change. Some of these factors, including digitization and globalization, have an increased rate and scale of change. And, even with the discipline of change management, many organizations are unsure of how to practice it. The key reasons can include:

- Lack of awareness or knowledge
- Failure to appreciate its importance or value
- Fear of its perceived complexity

Regardless of the reasons, there are simple ways organizations can apply some key basic practices by asking the right questions and leveraging those answers to find value.

Change Management Overview

Change management is a discipline that yields tremendous business value because of its focus on making sure people think and behave differently on a consistent basis. It facilitates this by ensuring that people impacted by the change get the **IDEA**:

- **I**ncented to sustain new ways of thinking and acting
- **D**esire to make required changes
- **E**quipped to think and act differently
- **A**ware of the business reasons for the change

According to Prosci, effective Change Management raises the possibility of a project meeting its objectives from 16% to 95%, raises the chances of bringing a project in on-time from 16% to 71% and increases the chances of on-budget performance from 51% to 82%. So, organizations recognize the value of change management, but many organizations remain wary. This reservation is demonstrated in statements such as:

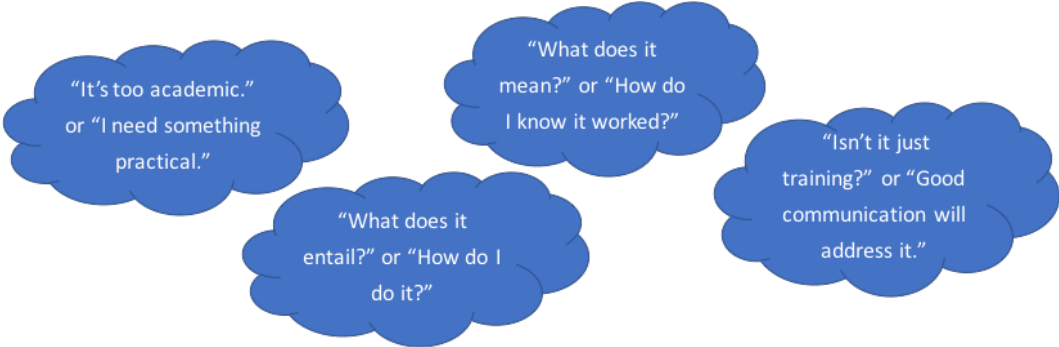


Figure 1: Change Resistance Statements

All valid questions. However, the good news is that there are simple yet effective ways to turn wariness into readiness. It starts with, “asking the right questions” and using the information to identify the necessary activities.

Asking the Right Questions

They are two types of questions: open-ended and closed-ended. Open-ended questions are exploratory. They allow the respondent to provide answers without forcing them to select from concrete options which translate into a rich response that can provide enormous insight. Closed-ended questions, on the other hand, are conclusive. They are designed to force the respondent to select from a predetermined set of answers. This makes them better suited for confirmation rather than exploration.

Here are examples of both types of questions.

Table 1: Types of Questions

Types	Question	Answer
Open Ended	What are the reasons for the change?	The change was triggered by a need to provide more capabilities to the end user.
Closed Ended	Who will be impacted?	End users

The right questions are open ended because they start or enhance the conversation. Ideally, the question is one that forces the respondent to contemplate a variety of related perspectives in one shot. This is both efficient and effective as questions are asked and answered. It requires the respondent to think broadly about their answer which yields a great deal of useful information that is needed to drive change.

Asking Effective Change Management Questions

Take for example the following question, the answers to which are deconstructed in Table 2: The Right Questions.

“What is changing for whom, why and when”?

Table 2: The Right Questions

Element	Characteristics	Sample Answers
What?	What kinds of things are changing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processes • Technologies • Organizations 	We are making it faster to place orders in the sales processing system .
Whom?	Which audiences will be impacted? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locations where businesses are based • Organizations of which people are a part • Functions in which people are employed • Roles to which people are assigned • Activities which people perform • Preferences 	The global sales organization will be impacted. They prefer frequent communications and face to face interactions.
Why?	Why are the changes necessary? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial (grow revenue, reduce cost, increase efficiency, reduce waste) • Technological • Operational • Market • Customer 	We are doing this because we need to increase sales by 10% and improve delivery by 5% .
When?	When will the change happen? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeframes (target month, quarter, year) • Sequencing (at once or in waves) • Packaging (a la carte or part of something bigger) 	The changes will go live at year end .

As you can see, the questions reveal a critical piece of information for each element that needs to be addressed from a change management perspective, as highlighted in red in Table 2. In addition, the answers to each element, when taken holistically, produce the overall narrative of the story.

“We are making it faster to place orders in the sales processing system. The global Sales organization will be impacted. They prefer frequent communications and face to face interactions. We are doing this because we need to increase sales by 10% and improve delivery by 5%. The changes will go live at year end.”

Using the Answers

The answers to the questions help determine the specific actions necessary to help people embrace change. These actions form the basis for supporting tactics and detailed plans. The activities typically fall into three categories: communications, training, and measurement.

Table 3: Using the Answers

Categories	Questions	Sample Answers
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When do we communicate? • How do we communicate? • For how long? • Using which channels? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will communicate to all targeted audiences via weekly emails starting 1/1 ending 12/31.
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the best way to train pre-change? • What is the best way to support post change? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will train trainers who will train staff, face to face, using printed materials. • We will measure satisfaction and assess retention.
Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the expected change? • What will be measured to demonstrate change took place? • How will the above be measured to demonstrate change is sustained? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will monitor key metrics pre and post change. • We will flag performance that does not consistently remain within the newly established ranges, and conduct retraining.

Best Practices

There are several best practices organizations can apply to get the most out of this exercise.



Ask the questions of every stakeholder *individually*.

This provides a comprehensive accounting of all stakeholders. It also ensures the needs of all impacted audiences are captured.



Review the inventory of answers with all stakeholders *collectively*.

This creates consensus among stakeholders regarding the scope and magnitude of the change, the extent to which other parties are impacted, and the support required to be successful.



Engage as early as possible in the project lifecycle.

This provides an opportunity to ensure that appropriate governance, funding, and resources are budgeted for and acquired up front.



Revalidate the information throughout the project lifecycle.

This provides an opportunity to re-evaluate changes that invariably occur, and adjust activities accordingly.

Summary

Organizations can practice change management basics by asking a few simple questions. The best questions are open-ended in nature because they generate rich responses from which a great deal of critical information can be gleaned. Capturing and parsing this information as early as possible ensures that organizations have a clear view up front of what needs to be done to successfully prepare for, deliver and sustain changes, at the individual level.

Validating this information with a representative of every impacted stakeholder further ensures that every corner of an organization is considered and acted upon. This validation also ensures there is agreement as to the plan of action, such that the effort is integrated and holistic by nature and design. This level of rigor helps create the roadmap of the essential tactics which include communications, training and planning activities. These items are fundamental to preparing people for and supporting them through change.

Every organization experiences some degree of change and how this is handled can vary. Some take a relaxed view while others take a more formal approach. In either case, organizations recognize the need for change management and may seek external assistance which only makes them stronger and better prepared for the change.

About Anchored Development Institute

Anchored Development provides quality education and experiences for professionals desiring to advance their knowledge and for organizations to enhance human capital effectiveness. We offer a range of services to optimize organizational efficiencies through strategy, people, processes, and technology. We are dedicated to providing lifelong professional education, developing workforce talent, and promoting education to individuals and organizations. As a part of our ongoing commitment to excellence and service to others, we provide a transformative experience which helps clients strengthen their abilities that result in a higher level of personal performance, a competitive edge, and increased career opportunities and choices.

Change Leaders undergoing a transformational change will benefit from our educational services as they create an organizational vision and learn the methods for building organizational change capability, adopt the guiding principles for change, and lead the human dynamics in change to help adopt and sustain the new state, long after their projects have been completed.



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