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## Communicating Change Made Easy

Tips and Tactics - Agile 2023

# THE NUMBERS GAME

“Most companies under-communicate their vision for change by at least a factor of 10.” This statement by change management pioneer and Harvard professor John Kotter should be an eye-opener. It is also likely an underestimation itself.

Let's examine his math:

1. The total amount of communication going to an employee in three months: 2.3 million words or numbers.
2. Typical communication about the change over a period of three months (the equivalent of one 30-minute speech, an hour-long meeting, one 600-word article in the company's internal newsletter, and one 2,000-word memo) = 13,400 words or numbers.
3.  $13,400 / 2,300,000 = .0058$ , which means the change vision has captured only 0.58 percent of the communication market share.

Why is this a likely underestimation? Because this only focuses on the vision. This does not incorporate wins, testimonials, lessons learned, and other communications needed in times of change.

Change all but ensures a significant amount of communication will take place.

The question is how significant will your role be in that communication?



**Nature abhors  
a vacuum.**

- Aristotle

Under communicating means you allow others to define everything about the change and new ways of working. That is a significant risk since detractors tend to be the loudest voices at the outset.

Active participation requires content volume, speed, diversity of distribution, trust, and quality.

# UNDERSTANDING AGILE COMMUNICATIONS

Agile communications is a fast, flexible, customer-centric approach to creating and releasing content. These characteristics allow Agile communication teams to play a critical role during a transformation or other times of change.

## The Essence of Agile Communication:

### Customer-Centric:

- Focused on outcomes for the end user
- Amplifies feedback loops

### Value Flows Consistently and Continuously:

- Releases multiple times per Sprint
- Prioritizes *minimum viable product*

### Delivers Value in Small Increments:

- Campaigns, not masterpieces
- Additive in nature

### Accessible:

- Easy to find and use
- Multiple distribution channels

### Digestible:

- Short and delivers what it promises
- Empathetic

### Increases Engagement:

- This communication is 2-way
- Peer-to-peer communication is gold

### Lean:

- Multiple pieces from the same source
- Has a positive impact/effort ratio

### Culture of Continuous Improvement:

- Data-driven
- Adaptable based on earned knowledge & metrics

### Emergent:

- Your voice, visuals, plans, and creators evolves over time

### Takes Risks:

- Willing to try experiments
- Test hypothesis

## What Agile Communication is not:

1

### Built on Long Term Planning:

We know less now than we will in the short term

2

### The Traditional Corporate PR Approach:

Times of change require a more dynamic and faster system

3

### An Excuse for Poor Quality:

Speed and quality are not mutually exclusive

4

### Slow:

If you're not there to fill the void, someone else will

# LOGICAL DRIVERS OF RESISTANCE

Sometimes change takes place slowly and incrementally - more of an evolution. Then there are the moments when the speed and scope of change make it nothing short of a revolution.

Either way, the intensity of resistance often grows in direct proportion to the scope and speed of the change (or changes) taking place. The bigger the change, the fiercer and more entrenched the resistance.

When employees are not given clear, constant communication, they can perceive the change as a threat. This is certain to lead to overt resistance (Caruth & Caruth, 2018) as they are being put into a situation where they have nothing to lose by their opposition.

There is near universal agreement among all change models and theories of key actions to help mitigate resistance to change. These include:

- 1 People are more concerned about their interests than those of the organization
- 2 When there is a belief that organizational change does not make sense, employees resist change
- 3 When there is a misunderstanding of how the change will impact the organization or the individual, there can be resistance
- 4 When there is low tolerance to change, there is resistance

**Detractors need to be heard and understood if they are to become advocates.**

# EXECUTIVE & SENIOR LEADERSHIP RESISTANCE

More often than not, senior and executive leadership is deeply vested in traditional methodologies and power structures. However, this does not mean they aren't willing to champion - or better yet adopt - changes that empower Agile transformations once convinced of the benefits.

## Common Reasons for Executive and Senior Leadership Resistance

### 1 A Lack of Understanding:

Executive and senior leadership may not yet have a deep understanding of Agile principles and practices. They may not see the value or benefits of the transformation and/or may believe that their current methods are sufficient. All this leads to skepticism or resistance toward an implementation.

### 2 Threat to the Power Structure:

Agile frameworks emphasize collaboration, cross-functional teams, autonomy, and flat organizational structures, which can challenge traditional hierarchical power structures. These can lead to pushback from executive and senior leaders who may feel that their authority is being challenged or diminished.

### 3 Resistance to Change:

Agile transformations often require significant changes to existing processes, systems, and culture. These changes can be uncomfortable for executive and senior leaders who are used to the status quo and may fear the unknown. These leaders may also be concerned about the risks involved in making such changes, including the potential for failure and impact on their reputation. Additionally, the effort required to change longstanding practices can be daunting and may not seem worth the investment.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF AUDIENCE EMPATHY

A significant amount of cognitive science research shows that effective communicators understand the emotions and values that inhibit or activate behaviors in their audience. Overcoming Confirmation Bias is an example of this science in action.

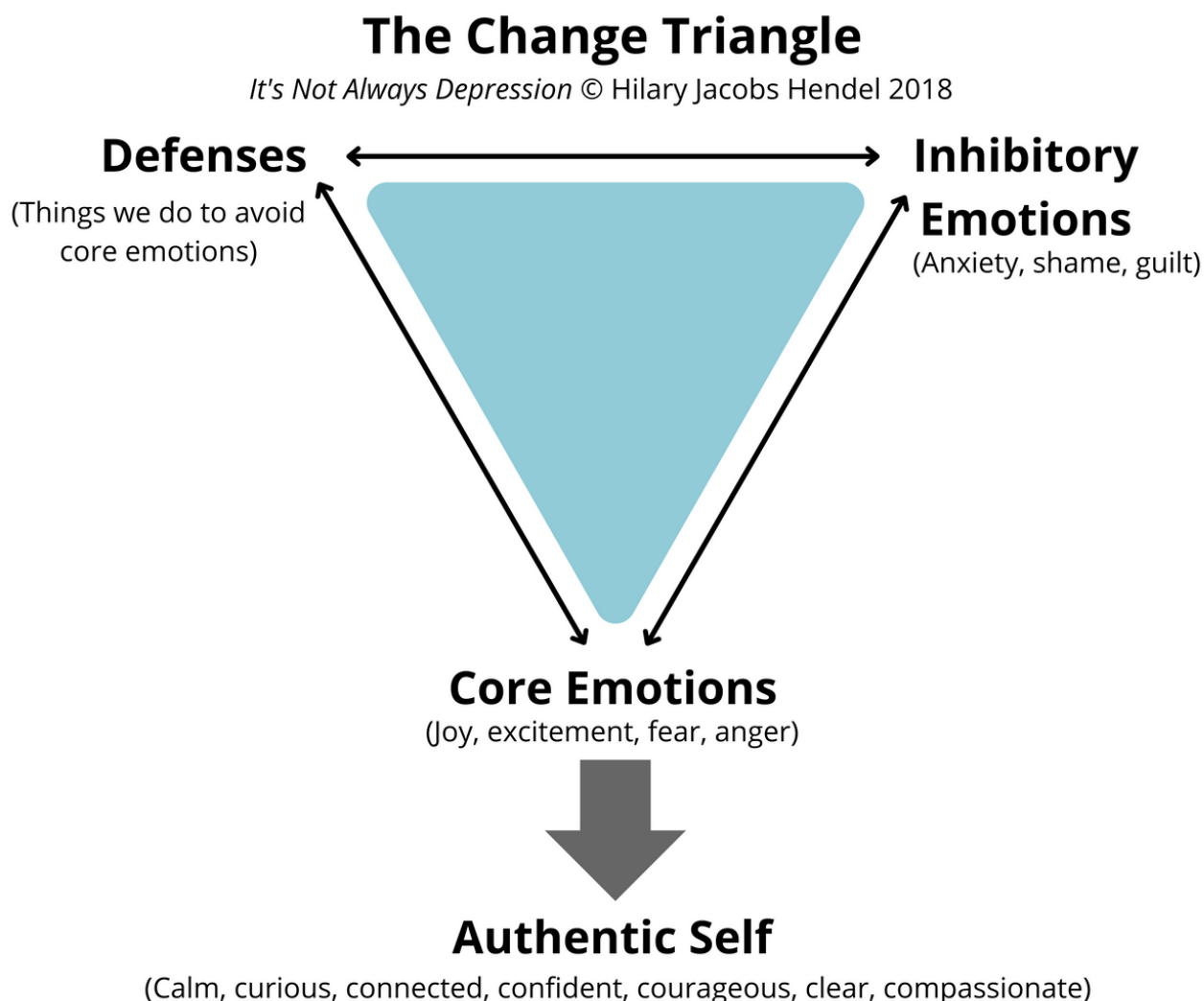
You can learn these skills.

Empathy is not an endorsement. It is the recognition of others' views on a particular subject. More importantly, empathy gives you the ability to persuade that audience to consider a new point of view.

## Confirmation Bias:

The tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories.

- Oxford English Dictionary



# AUDIENCE EMPATHY: TEAM MEMBERS TEMPLATE

**Understand Your Audience:** Write each answer on an individual sticky note. Place the sticky note in the corresponding section.

**Example:** Job insecurity, see this as another management fad, want to be empowered, love the idea of removing their roadblocks.

What are their hopes?

What are their concerns or fears?

What might they like about the change?

# THE POWER AND PURPOSE OF A WHY/WHAT CAMPAIGN

Organizations rarely undergo meaningful change without the overwhelming need to do so. Your audience understands this. However, it does not mean they always believe this to be the case.

At best, change is difficult and disruptive. It also requires a lot of people engaged and committed to it to be successful.

Yet, the perceived nature of change can lead to resistance to the 'new' even when the change represents a clear and needed improvement to the status quo.

That resistance can slow - or even derail - any new initiative or transformation.

These issues are common unless countered with an effective Why/What Campaign is so important.



*Any foreign innovation in a corporation will stimulate the corporate immune system to create antibodies that destroy it.*

- Peter Drucker

## The Purpose of a Why/What Campaign

- 1 Why Now?** Establish the need for change now in frank terms. New competition, slow time to market, decreasing market share, or unhappy customers. Show the status quo is more dangerous than launching into something new.
- 2 Why This?** Build a willingness to actively take part in the change by clearly stating the vision, purpose, and results. Remember, the point of Scrum and Scrum@Scale is not to follow the frameworks - the frameworks are a means to achieving business agility.
- 3 What Should I Expect?** Always remember your audience! They will likely resist the change unless they see their place in the 'new' and understand how it benefits them.

## The Power of a Why/What Campaign

- 1 Breaks the Inertia Powering The Status Quo** - Whether you think of it as 'muscle memory' or Newton's first law of motion, people will tend to do what they have always done until they're shown a better way exists. This is often how detractors become champions.
- 2 Builds Momentum for Change** - An effective campaign boosts the demand for change, accelerates the transformation, and allows Agile to spread organically.

# WHY/WHAT EXERCISE TEMPLATE

**GOAL:** Use your understanding and experience to identify specific Why Now?, Why This?, and What Should I Expect? themes. Capture each on an individual digital sticky note and place each note in the appropriate section.

**Be prepared to share back you board with the other participants.**

**Why Now?**

**Why This?**

**What Should  
I Expect?**

# LEAN COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

Lean is a methodology that focuses on maximizing productivity while reducing waste. It is also a foundational element of both the Scrum and Scrum@Scale frameworks.

It is the key to unlocking volume, speed, diversity of distribution, trust, and quality.

## Basic Principles of Agile Communication:

- **Create Multiple Communications Increments (Or Sets) From The Original Source Material:**

Think ahead to maximize distribution options from the start.

**EXAMPLE:** A single, recorded video conference interview can be repurposed into:

- Micro video content
- Written content
- Podcast content
- Powerpoint presentation
- Infographic
- Pull-quote
- Social content
- Poster/physical assets

- **Deliver Value Early And Often Throughout the Production Cycle:**

Release increments as they are completed.

**EXAMPLE:** A blog that is part of a larger case study.

- **Speed And Volume Are Far More Valuable Than The “Perfect Finished Product”:**

In many ways, this is a numbers game. That fact does not diminish the importance of good quality communications. However, you do not know what perfect is at the moment.

The greatest risk is under-communicating, not over-communicating.

And remember, you are not trying for an Oscar, Emmy, or Pulitzer.

# INTERESTED IN MORE?

We love to partner with Agile teams no matter where they are on their journey.

Our experts can help shape your messaging, use diverse media effectively, and drive your campaigns to done. Curious how we can help accelerate your priorities?



## Contact Us Through



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**We look forward to working  
with you.**