



## ROLE OF LEADERS' POSITIVE COMMUNICATION IN FACILITATING CHANGE

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### ABSTRACT

*Coping with unexpected and unprecedented challenges, particularly in managing change, is part of a leader's function. Change often presents problems and tensions between the parties involved, which can derail the achievement of their objectives. For change to be successful, leaders need to build morale, unify individual and departmental aspirations, and positively influence such change. This study explores positive communication models that can facilitate leaders in managing change. By reviewing the literature of positive communication in the areas of a positive organization, particularly involving the integrative approach and constructive interaction, this study found the certain ways of communication that can encourage effective change agents while reducing the resistance of the individual change target. This work reveals that the constructive and integrative dimension of positive communication may facilitate the change agent to be more internally directed and purpose oriented. On the other hand, questioning and discovery emphasize the affection aspects and will lessen the resistance and make change target those who are more open and eager to collaborate.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Communication is the key to the functioning of leadership. In the positive leadership model, where the leader creates a positive work climate and extraordinary performance (Cameron, 2008), positive communication is considered to be an essential dimension. Here, positive communication is defined as an interaction that is dominated by affirmative and supportive communication in the organization. Leaders or managers express more appreciation, support, approval, and compliments. At the same time, negative expressions, critique, disappointment, and dislike are minimal. Organizations with managers or leaders who adopt this approach are found to positively affect organizational performance (Losada & Heaphy, 2004).

In a more detailed model, Browning, Morris, and Fee (2011) offer two main dimensions of positive communication, namely integrative and constructive. Both of these dimensions can improve how employees interpret situations and increase the effectiveness of working in teams. Furthermore, Mirivel (2014) offers six more detailed strategies: greeting, asking, compliment, disclosing, encouraging, and deep listening.

Positive communication can also be related to interactions that emphasize the strengths and positive attributes of the other person. Roberts et al. (2005) found that a positive response will make a person feel more valuable. In time, this approach will strengthen the relationship, create more cohesiveness, and involve parties supporting each other.

The abovementioned approaches are likely to play a role in an organization's change initiatives. Communication from the leader is essential for leading employees to change (Boyatzis et al., 2019). In a relatively new approach, namely positive change, a leader is expected to be willing to inspire others to change according to their own wishes and also create a high level of performance. Positive change is the leader's efforts to inspire themselves and produce significant change and results (R E Quinn & Quinn, 2009). Those positive communication practices also have been found to affect positive relationships, establishing a positive climate (Cameron, 2013).

Furthermore, positive communication may also facilitate managers to create positive images they want to create. Amir and Wijaya (2022) recently offered a model in which positive communication is considered to influence a person's personal branding strategy. According to them, positive communication can help reinforce the personal branding strategy launched and facilitate more opportunities to be accepted by the audience.

Change process needs certain communication strategy. For example, Boyatzis et al. suggest positive communication in a coaching environment where leaders pay attention to phrases that inspire people to change. However, studies that specifically address the role of positive communication in positive change have not been conducted, and leaders often do not know what to do to communicate more positively and make an impact in the long term. This study examines how positive communication can facilitate leaders in carrying out positive changes. It will evaluate how the dimensions offered by the literature related to positive communication can make it easier for leaders to carry out positive changes and establish individual targets for change that are less

prone to resistance. Leaders need a simple, empirical, comprehensive model that they can draw on as a compass for making communicative decisions and creating initiatives that will foster a positive organization.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, the authors review the model of positive communication in an organizational context. Then, the constructive and construction elements in positive communication are detailed, and a demonstration of the orientation and practices ensues. The study and explanation of positive change follow. Thereafter appear the analysis and discussion of the possible relationship between elements and practices of positive communication and the dimension of positive change.

## **POSITIVE COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT**

As a general term in communication, "positive" can be said to be an interaction that has good features, such as pleasant, polite, assertive or empathetic, efficient or empathetic (Browning et al., 2011). Cameron (2008) suggests that positive communication involves the way people communicate using supportive language that dominates negative and critical language. Positive expressions, such as support, approval, and compliments, dominate terms such as disapproval, cynicism, or disparagement. Cameron posits that this communication approach will strengthen positive leadership elements, such as positive relationships, and be more conducive to strengthening a positive climate and facilitating the positive meaning of their work and the organization (Cameron, 2008).

In addition to Cameron's concept of positive communication as a positive element of leadership, the studies of Mirivel (Mirivel, 2014) or Browning and Morris as well as Fee (2011) are often referred to when defining the concept of positive communication. The sections below detail Mirivel's model, which suggests six strategies, and the following section reviews Browning and colleagues' model.

## **SIX STRATEGIES TO INFLUENCE AND INSPIRE**

Drawing from interpersonal communication and language and social interaction studies, Mirivel (2014) proposes that positive communication is any verbal and nonverbal behavior that functions positively in the course of human interaction. Mirivel proposes six strategies that leaders could provide to influence as well as inspire their team.

Leaders need to model appropriate communication in greeting others, initiate contact with various stakeholders within, across, and beyond the organizational hierarchy, and create human connection. The central behavior to master is inviting interaction and dialogue, all of which can begin with the simple act of greeting.

The second principle of positive communication is to use powerful questions to flip the script on human interaction and engage people in the process of discovery. Leaders can do so by using open-ended questions to engage stakeholders, disrupt

dysfunctional and monotonic meetings, and place themselves in a constant state of discovery.

To create a positive climate, managers can use positive communication to affect the people around them in a positive way and help employees thrive and be creative. Emphasizing affection, as the third strategy, can be conducted through complimenting and the act of building people up. Managers can capitalize on strengths and opportunities rather than weaknesses and deficiencies. In this process, leaders will learn to create a growth-mindset culture and aspire an increased sense of purpose.

The fourth strategy involves deepening the relationship between parties. When managers communicate with authenticity, genuineness, and a spirit of transparency, the conversation will be more open. Particularly when the situation is challenging, disclosing critical information and being transparent is critical. Managers can consistently and intentionally deepen connections with stakeholders, respond to challenges effectively, and foster a context of openness and transparency.

Communicating to *encourage* is the fifth strategy to inspire and influence. By doing so, managers can create extraordinary leadership moments that provide memorable, transformative, and meaningful moments for their teams. Because people need direction and a sense of impact, the process of encouraging provides the opportunity for managers to leave their legacy.

The sixth strategy involves the manager's need to create an all-inclusive environment to become effective. By listening more deeply and transcending the perceived differences that exist between people and groups, managers can create dialogic moments that strengthen the quality of the everyday interactions between them and their team.

## **INTEGRATIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE ELEMENTS**

### **Integrative Elements**

Browning, Morris dan Fee (2011) offers a different model, although the implications are similar, namely improving how employees interpret situations and increasing the effectiveness of teamwork. According to these researchers, there are two major elements involved, namely integrative and constructive.

Integrative is concerned with bringing together differences and creating a unified perspective. In this principle, there is inclusiveness, respectfulness and supportiveness. Inclusive suggests that the parties involved respect the aspirations of the parties while maintaining relevance and coherence. The parties also accommodate differences in point of view, culture, and experience. Gibbs (2009) suggest the similar concept where , unity produces strength.

On the other hand, the principle of respectfulness is carried out by the parties with the assumption of trust and honesty. Browning et al. (2011) believe that this method can make people motivated to achieve their goals, as well as effective in making decisions and avoid mismanaging.

While supportiveness means wanting to facilitate others to achieve success. Employees who work under pressure, will feel that a supportive attitude is very important, because it can generate energy and reaffirm one's strengths.

Grolleau et al. (2013), who studies the factors that increase happiness at work, says that being supportive plays a big role. Supportiveness also keeps emotions awake and often makes other people comfortable in communicating. When the situation is comfortable, the parties tend to freely present their problems that are useful for the organization. Inclusiveness, respectfulness, and supportiveness may help the employee collaborate or work in a team that values and appreciates his or her opinion, including giving the employee the sense of receiving help when required.

### **Constructive interaction**

While the integrative suggests unity, the constructive interaction element suggests the parties' desire to make things better. The orientation in communicating is contributing, which involves three mechanisms; solution-focused, future-oriented, and collaborative communication.

*Solution-focused* talks about improvement, and explores existing resources. This way can make the parties become more confident, and can see the available possibilities. Solution-focused can generate a sense of optimism.

*Future orientation* allows parties to link their visions for the future. The term "shadow of the future" is relevant to this so that practicing employees relate their daily activities to the long-term goals of the organization. In the context of this organization, it becomes important because togetherness is needed in carrying out the mission.

*Collaborative interaction* emphasise what is relevant, informative, truthful, and appropriate in communication. Collaboration means parties contributes to understand the conversation's purpose. Stewart (2009) coined the term "nexting", that characterizes the ability to inform about what is essential, and helpful in a conversation in the communication process. As the parties see the opportunity to improve the situation, there is a better direction where people provide a supportive orientation rather than displaying an abandoning orientation. Furthermore, the constructive collaboration tolerates the error as a normal, and parties involved attempting to make sense of it. Noticing mistakes and suggesting improvements will keep the organization on the right track. Therefore, participants may attempt to align their aspirations with the expectations of others by questioning or offering something to gain a better outcome.

### **THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE**

The challenge most often discussed in organizational change is reluctance or resistance to change, particularly when changes are considered only top-down initiatives. Regardless of the cause or reason for the change—changes in market, competition, economy, changes in regulations, low performance, the presence of technology or machines—the process is typically the same. The organization starts with

the manager and plans, and the related field begins to formally announce, and then there is a reaction that is generally what the manager expects.

The main reason employees are reluctant is most frequently because what the change plan involves is typically bad for them; distraction, discomfort, uncertainty, or loss of the value of the skills they have (Lewis, 2016). Such a plan interferes with existing relationships, whether with clients or colleagues. Similarly, the loss of a privilege was initially considered a basic need, such as an office space or a workplace. Because work also means learning, employees typically also calculate the loss of the learning curve.

### **POSITIVE CHANGE PERSPECTIVE**

Positive change refers to the theoretical assumption in the field of POS where all living systems have a tendency toward positive energy and away from negative energy (Cameron 2012). Following this approach, the positive environment created by positive interaction and communication can engender positive energy and life-giving resourcefulness.

When positive practices are institutionalized in organizations, including providing compassionate support for employees, forgiving mistakes and avoiding blame, fostering meaningfulness of work, expressing frequent gratitude, showing kindness, and caring for colleagues, leads organizations to perform at significantly higher levels on desired outcomes (Bright et al., 2006). Positive practices produce a significant organizational change in a positive direction.

Drawing from Quinn and Well's (2012) works, this study suggests five dimensions where change agent have important roles, comparing the conventional approach that has appeared most frequently in the literature.

**Table 1: Positive perspective of agent of change  
(Robert E. Quinn & Cameron, 2019)**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Positive Perspectives</b>
Change target	Change yourself
Focus	Purpose centered
Expectations	Internally directed
Relationship	Other focused
Learning	Externally open

Positive perspective uses the assumption that changes caused by oneself are far more important than those caused by others. Two people can engage in precisely the same behavior and receive highly different reactions. With a positive perspective, there is a shift from telling people what to do to showing people how to be. There is a focus on moral power (Weick & Quinn, 1999). When the change agent becomes more purposive, authentic and empathetic and open, that agent is improving the conditions for being a positive influence (R E Quinn & Quinn, 2009).

Secondly, focus on a purpose-centered approach tends to the ultimate goal that has been set. The eventual goal that is addressed here is something extraordinary because it gives aspirations to oneself and to others. On the other hand, the traditional approach tends to be comfort centered, namely doing what was most frequently done in the past. When faced with things that are different from routine, people are overwhelmed by the gap between expectations and reality—being or doing something that may be thought of as deviant is often considered a threat, and maintaining the status quo becomes the norm.

In the next dimension, positive change agents tolerate challenges and disruptions and continually clarify their higher purpose and help others do the same. In this way, they are transformative, showing purpose and belief, articulating possibilities for a better future, and encouraging employees to think differently. By pursuing a higher moral purpose and transcending traditional norms, these individuals inspire creativity, innovation, and positive deviance.

Positive change agents do not assume that the environment is a barrier to almost all of their behavior. The assumption is that macro affects micro as well as social norms that affect individuals. In behaving, positive change agents are more internally directed (i.e., self-regulating when moving towards goals), and the behavior is consistent with the established values. These agents are the authors of a self with a match between emotions, values, and actions (Rogers, 1975). Internally directed behavior can produce an upward spiral in which self-concordant motivation increases, which increases the likelihood that individuals will achieve their personally valued goals and, therefore, promotes satisfaction and further internally directed behavior (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001).

Other-focused, instead of self-focused, is another positive change agent's character that differentiates them from the conventional. The positive change literature highlights individuals who are exceptional where the change agents transcend self-interest. They prioritize the collective good ahead of their own personal interests and are willing to sacrifice themselves to help the group accomplish its goals. Such agents also tend to adopt a more altruistic and integrated perspective. Furthermore, research on compassion that emphasizes capacity for caring and helping is often driven more than just self-interest.

Positive change agents are particularly open to input and views on change initiatives from others. People in conventional assumptions tend to align their current preferences and approaches and are resistant to stating that they are on the wrong path because there is an assumption that they are highly dependent on factors beyond one's control (Dweck, 2008)

These five perspectives can be influenced by the dimensions and practices of positive communication, as shown in the next sub-section.

## **POSITIVE COMMUNICATION IN FACILITATING POSITIVE CHANGE**

Two models offered by the literature—those of Mirivel and Browning et al.—related to positive communication are quite relevant in explaining the success of positive change. In this case, the positive communication carried out by the change agent can function for them as well as on the target of change.

The integrative dimension in Browning and co-workers' model is particularly helpful in producing purpose-centered and other focused dimensions because the unifying element of the integrative perspective will help make it easier for change agents to convince the change targets that they are part of a wider effort. The practice of inclusiveness communication is among the most necessary because the change targets need to be convinced that they are part of an overall effort. This approach emphasizes that they are significant in the change efforts being carried out. On the other hand, they are also reminded that togetherness is important in change initiatives and that the success of change is not only a matter of personal interest or maintaining one's safe zone. Meanwhile, respectfulness will make the target of change feel that their feelings and worries are recognized. However, changing the situation is not always easy. The supportive aspect has a more pronounced role in facilitating change targets to be ready to anticipate the impact of change and to be skilled at running new things. This way of communication also reduces the change target's concerns about the competencies he or she has.

Meanwhile, the constructive dimension, particularly the solution-focused and future orientation aspects, will also facilitate the change targets to accept change initiatives. Change has side effects that are often a problem. Being solution focused, change agents build a sense of trust and confidence that the possibilities are available and become optimistic. What is prepared to welcome change is the capital to achieve something better in the future.

Mirivel's model also explains that the questioning or discovery process helps facilitate the target of change to find reasons to change that do not involve orders. In addition, the strategy of compliments and providing a sense of affection makes them feel that their actions are appropriate. This strategy also helps reduce feelings of isolation, worry, and or anxiety. Similarly, encouragement is necessary to ensure that the target of change is focused upon according to the values they have, which are internally directed.

## **CONCLUSION**

Managing organizational change demands a conducive interaction between leaders, agents of change, and employees who are the target of change. On the other hand, change always brings challenges and difficulties for the parties involved, where a positive change approach can be an option to overcome them. The application of positive communication by leaders and change agents can facilitate the management of positive change. Integrative and constructive aspects can play a role in helping the target of change understand the importance of change from oneself, internally directed, and also find the ultimate goal as a common goal. The questioning and discovery model and the emphasis

on the affective element in communication also facilitates the target of change, reduces the psychological implications that frequently create resistance, and make it more focused on organizational goals while being more open to change ideas.

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