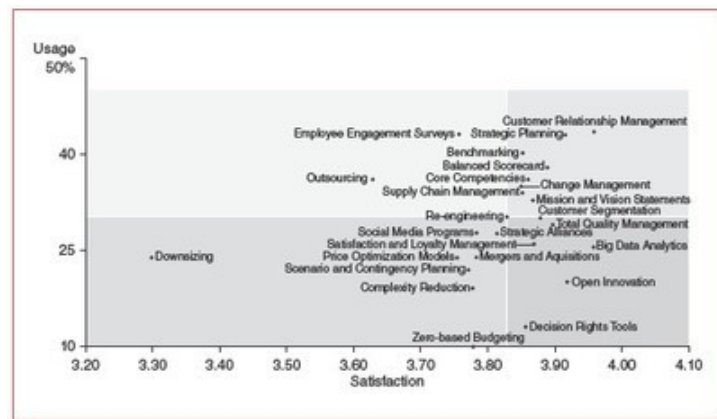**Figure 9.3** Management Tool Usage Rate and Satisfaction Level, 2013

Source: Rigby, D., & Bilodeau, B. (2013, May 8). Management tools and trends, 2013. Used with permission from Bain & Company. www.bain.com

Working the plan recognizes the importance of being able to roll with the punches and learn as you go. Chris Argyris warns, "people who rarely experience (and learn from) failure end up not knowing how to deal with it."[33] De Bono echoes this sentiment, saying, "success is an affirmation but not a learning process."[34] Post hoc memories of what led to success (or failure) tend to be selective; valuable learning will be lost if steps aren't taken to actively and objectively reflect on the process as you go. There will be missteps and failures along the way, and a key attribute of a "do it" orientation to working the plan is the capacity to learn and adapt the paths to change along the way.

When working the plan, generating stakeholder and decision-maker confidence in the viability of the initiative is critical. However, it is also important not to be deluded by your own rhetoric. Russo and Shoemaker provide us with guidelines for managing under- and overconfidence; in particular, they differentiate the need for confidence when one is an implementer as opposed to a decision maker. Decision makers need to be realistic; implementers can afford to be somewhat overconfident if it provides others with the courage to change.[35]

Developing a Communication Plan

When implementing a change program, change leaders often find that misinformation and rumors are rampant in their organization. The reasons for change are not

clear to employees, and the impact on employees is frequently exaggerated, both positively and negatively. In all organizations, the challenge is to persuade employees to move in a common direction. Good communication programs are essential to minimize the effects of rumors, to mobilize support for the change, and to sustain enthusiasm and commitment.[36] In a study on the effectiveness of communications in organizations, Goodman and Truss found that only 27% of employees felt that management was in touch with employees' concerns, regardless of the fact that the company had a carefully crafted communications strategy.[37]

Often, much of the confusion over change can be attributed to the different levels of understanding held by different parties. Change agents and senior management may have been considering the change issues for months and have developed a shared understanding of the need for change and what must happen. However, frontline staff and middle managers may not have been focused on the matter. Even if they have been considering these issues, their vantage points will be quite different from those leading the change.

The **purpose of the communication plan for change** centers on four major goals: (1) to infuse the need for change throughout the organization, (2) to enable individuals to understand the impact that the change will have on them, (3) to communicate any structural and job changes that will influence how things are done, and (4) to keep people informed about progress along the way. As the change unfolds, the focus of the communication plan shifts.

Rumors and Reality in Organizational Change

In an inbound call center of an insurance firm, employees became convinced that the real purpose of an organizational change initiative was to get rid of staff. Management made public announcements and assurances that the reorganization was designed to align processes and improve service levels, not reduce headcount. However, staff turnover escalated to more than 20% before leaders convinced employees that the rumors were false.

Timing and Focus of Communications

A communication plan has four phases: (a) prechange approval, (b) creating the need for change, (c) midstream change and milestone communication, and (d) confirming/celebrating the change success. The messages and methods of communication will vary depending upon which phase your change is in. Table 9.8 outlines the communication needs of each phase.

Prechange phase: Change agents need to convince top management and others that the change is needed. They will target individuals with the influence and/or authority to approve a needed change. Dutton and her colleagues suggest that packaging the change proposal into smaller change steps helps success. She found that timing was crucial in that persistence, opportunism, and involvement of others at the right time were positively related to the successful selling of projects. Finally, linking the change to the organization's goals, plans, and priorities was critical.[38]

Table 9.8 Communication Needs for Different Phases in the Change Process

Prechange Phase	Developing the Need for Change Phase	Midstream Change Phase	Confirming the Change Phase
Communication plans to sell top management	Communication plans to explain the need for change, provide a rationale, reassure employees, and clarify the steps in the change process	Communication plans to inform people of progress and to obtain feedback on attitudes and issues, to challenge any misconceptions, and to clarify new organizational roles, structures, and systems	Communication plans to inform employees of the success, to celebrate the change, and to prepare the organization for the next change

Source: Based on Klein, "A Management Communications Strategy for Change," *Journal of Organizational Change*. Vol. 9, #2, 1996.

Developing the need for the change phase: When creating awareness of the need for change, communication programs need to explain the issues and provide a clear, compelling rationale for the change. If a strong and credible sense of urgency and enthusiasm for the initiative isn't conveyed, the initiative will not move forward. There are simply too many other priorities available to capture people's attention.[39] Increasing awareness of the need for change can also be aided by the communication of comparative data. For example, concrete benchmark data that demonstrate how competitors are moving ahead can shake up complacent perspectives. Spector demonstrates how sharing of competitive information can overcome potential conflicting views between senior management and other employees.[40] The vision for the change needs to be articulated and the specific steps of the plan that will be undertaken need to be clarified. People need to be reassured that they will be treated fairly and with respect.[41]

Midstream change phase: As the change unfolds, people will want to have specific information communicated to them about future plans and how things will operate. If the organization is being reorganized, employees will want to understand how this reorganization will affect their jobs. If new systems are being put into place, training needs to happen in order to help employees understand and use the systems properly. If reporting relationships are altered, employees need to know who will do what in the organization. Thus, intentional strategies are needed to communicate this information.

In the middle phases of change, people need to understand the progress made in the change program. Management needs to obtain feedback regarding the acceptance of the changes and the attitudes of employees and others (e.g., customers, suppliers) affected by the initiative. Change leaders need to understand any misconceptions that are developing and have the means to combat such misconceptions. During this phase, extensive communications on the content of the change will be important as management and employees begin to understand new roles, structures, and systems.[42] As the newness of the initiative wears off, sustaining interest and enthusiasm and remaining sensitive to the personal impact of the change continue to be important. Change leaders need to remain excited about the change and communicate that enthusiasm often. Recognizing and celebrating progress, achievements, and milestones all help in this regard.[43]

Rumors, gossip, and horror stories will compete with the messages from the change leaders, and their frequency rises when the change leader's credibility declines or ambiguity increases. Employees tend to believe friends more than they do supervisors and tend to turn to supervisors before relying on the comments of senior executives and outsiders. Change agents have a choice: They can communicate clear, timely, and candid messages about the nature and impact of the change or they can let the rumors fill the void. An effective communications campaign can reduce the number of rumors by lowering uncertainty, lessening ambivalence and resistance to change, and increasing the involvement and commitment of employees.[44]

Change websites, electronic bulletin boards, online surveys to sample awareness and opinions, change blogs, and other types of social media can all play useful roles in the communications strategy. However, when uncertainty rises on things of importance, don't forget the power of face-to-face communications. Positive reactions tend to increase and negative reactions are lessened when people have an opportunity to hear from those in authority and ask them questions about the change and its impact.[45]

Confirming the change phase: The final phase of a change program needs to communicate and celebrate the success of the program. Celebration is an undervalued activity. Celebrations are needed along the way to mark progress, reinforce commitment, and reduce stress. They are certainly warranted at the conclusion! The final phase also marks the point at which the change experience as a whole needs to be discussed (more will be said about this in the next section on transition management) and unfinished tasks identified. The organization needs to be positioned for the next change. Change is not over—only this particular phase is.

While change agents attend to the different phases in the change process, they need to match the communications challenge with the communications channel selected.[46] Channel richness ranges from standard reports and general information e-mails at one end through to personalized letters and e-mails, telephone conversations, videoconferencing, and face-to-face communications at the other end. When the information is routine, memos and blanket e-mails can work well. However, when things become more complex, ambiguous, and personally relevant to the recipient, the **richness of the communication channel** needs to increase. A change

agent can follow up with a document that provides detailed information, but face-to-face approaches are valuable when matters are emotionally loaded for stakeholders or when you want to get the recipients' attention.

Goodman and Truss suggest using line managers and opinion leaders as lynchpins in the communications strategy, but this requires that they be properly briefed and engaged in the change process. They also stress that change agents need to recognize communication as a two-way strategy.[47] That is, the gathering of information from people down the organizational ladder is as important as delivering the message.

Key Principles in Communicating for Change

Klein[48] suggests six principles that should underlie a communications strategy:

1. Message and media redundancy are key for message retention. That is, multiple messages using multiple media will increase the chance of people obtaining and retaining the message. Too often, management believes that since the message was sent, their work is done. It is the employee's fault for not getting the message! As one author pointed out, it takes time for people to hear, understand, and believe a message, especially when they don't like what they hear.[49] Some change agents believe that it takes 15 to 20 repetitions before a message gets communicated effectively. The value of communicating messages in multiple ways to increase retention and meaningfulness that was discussed in Chapter 7, and the use of social media in change initiatives that was discussed earlier in this chapter, speak to this.[50]
2. Face-to-face communication is most effective. While the impact of face-to-face is highest, the cost is also higher. Face-to-face permits two-way communication, which increases the chance of involvement of both parties and decreases the probability of miscommunication.
3. Line authority is effective in communications. Regardless of the level of participative involvement, most employees look to their managers for direction and guidance. If the CEO says it, the message packs a punch and gets attention.
4. The immediate supervisor is key. The level of trust and understanding between an employee and his or her supervisor can make the supervisor a valuable part of a communications strategy. People expect to hear important organizational messages from their bosses.
5. Opinion leaders need to be identified and used. These individuals can be critical in persuading employees to a particular view.
6. Employees pick up and retain personally relevant information more easily than general information. Thus, communication plans should take care to relate general information in terms that resonate with particular employees.

The importance of communications in helping recipients deal with change was discussed in Chapter 7. Creating a sense of fairness, trust, and confidence in the leadership, and interest and enthusiasm for the initiative is important to the success of change initiatives. Well-executed communications strategies play an important role here.[51] However, change leaders seldom give enough attention to this topic. They intuitively understand the importance of the timely communication of candid, credible change-related information through multiple channels, but they get busy with other matters. As communication shortcomings escalate, so too do downstream implementation difficulties.[52]

Influence Strategies

Influencing others is a key concern for change leaders when working the plan. It involves consideration of how they can bring various stakeholders onside with the change. The sooner this is addressed, the better. When implementing change, there is a tendency to give insufficient attention to the constructive steps needed to foster employee support and alleviate dysfunctional resistance. When considering your communication plan and use of influence strategies, think about who you are communicating with and never underestimate the importance of the reputation (including their competence and trustworthiness) of those who are the face and voice of the change initiative.

Below are seven change strategies for influencing individuals and groups in the organization.[53] These are:

1. **Education and communication:** This strategy involves using education and communication to help others develop an understanding of the change initiative, what is required of them, and why it is important. Often people need to see the need for and the logic of the change. Change leaders may fail to adequately communicate their message through the organization because they are under significant time pressure and the rationale "is so obvious" to them they don't understand why others don't get it.
2. **Participation and involvement:** Getting others involved can bring new energy and ideas, and cause people to believe they can be part of the change. This strategy works best when the change agent has time and needs voluntary compliance and active support to bring about the change. Participation fits with many of the norms of today's flattened organizations, but some managers often feel that it just slows everything down, compromising what needs to be done quickly.
3. **Facilitation and support:** Here change agents provide access to guidance and other forms of support to aid in adaptation to change. This strategy works best when the issues are related to anxiety and fear of change, or where there are concerns over insufficient access to needed resources.
4. **Negotiation and agreement:** At times, change leaders can make explicit deals with individuals and groups affected by the change. This strategy can help deal with contexts where the resistance is organized, "what's in it for me"