

BEYOND 'RAISING AWARENESS'

Using Decision Science to Inform Organizational Change and Communications

by Ted Bravakis, APR

We've seen and heard it for decades when it comes to organizational change and communications within large organizations:

"If everyone understands the change, it will happen, we just need to build awareness and 'launch the change' with meetings and presentations to employees."

But if improved organizational performance and a more engaged workforce are the goals for organizational change – and let's face it, when aren't they – then consciousness-raising and approaching employees as 'target audiences' will invariably fall short of expectations.

Read on to find out about some practical considerations for today's leaders tasked with cost-effectively converting organizational strategies, policies, practices and goals into measurable behavioural change.

Employees as Stakeholders Not 'Target Audiences'

Organizational change and communications have traditionally identified employees as 'target audiences', when in fact, they are 'stakeholders' in the process.

There is a fundamental difference.

Stakeholders by definition are affected by the decisions and actions of others, including their leaders. By virtue of having a 'stake' in situations, they often insist on a right to have a **say** in decision-making that affects them.

Audiences, on the other hand, see themselves as having no sacrifice to make and as a result, care less about the outcome.

In short, engaging employee stakeholders as part of the strategy and program development process for organizational transformation and communications is not only advisable, but **essential** to achieving behavioural and cultural changes.

Consider Applying Mental Models Research

With this in mind, decisions involving employee stakeholders' resolution to support and commit to change – including behavioural change – must take into account the full range of peoples' thinking on a topic.

This is where mental modeling can come into play. Mental Modeling Technology™ (MMT™) – the application of mental models research – is quickly becoming the gold standard for conceptualizing and designing organizational change and communications.

What is Mental Modeling Technology?

Mental Modeling Technology™ (MMT™) is a unique social science-based platform, for developing validated, behavior-specific programs, and seamlessly integrating policy, strategy, communications and measurement. Where traditional research focuses on information gathering and messaging, the application of mental models research, a key component of MMT™, ensures no assumptions are made about the nature of the problems or issues being investigated. Working from insight, mental models research produces actionable, clearly defined strategies based on a solid understanding of the key influences on stakeholder judgment and decision making.

Together with a world-renowned cognitive scientist, Decision Partners developed MMT™ as a management process for strategic risk communication in 1990. Since that time, the application of MMT™ has extended beyond risk communication to a wide range of challenges where successful outcomes rely on change in the judgment, decision making and behavior of key stakeholders. Hundreds of applications of MMT™ have been conducted internationally resulting in a large and rapidly growing volume of Intellectual Property supporting the process.

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Peoples' mental models are often thought of as complex webs of deeply – and often subconsciously – held beliefs that shape how they define problems, react to information, form judgments and make decisions.

Decades of research has shown that to effectively engage stakeholders and enable changes in their decision making and behaviour, organizations must actively change their mental models.

In fact, mental models can identify why and how different groups think about and respond to a variety of topics, including what they believe is essential for them to opt in to proposed organizational and cultural changes.

Dialogue, as a first-line approach, is proving to be highly effective in addressing an often-identified barrier among employees to adopting change: **how people are treated throughout the process of change.**

To that end, management decisions involving organizational transformation and communication should consider sophisticated, evidence-based approaches to define strategies that can be used in dialogue with stakeholders.

By applying a science-based, measurable and targeted approach to strategy development for change and communications – including the application of mental models research and using dialogue as a leadership tool – organizations can expect to influence judgment and decision making and to drive behavioural change.

The result is greater alignment between understanding and action among employees at all levels, higher rates of return on significant investments in processes and operations, and accelerated payback on key initiatives requiring universal employee engagement.



Ted Bravakis is a founding partner of BravaComm, a communications management consultancy with deep subject matter experience in several regulated industries. BravaComm specializes in helping clients define communications strategies that intersect with business or policy needs and which support improved stakeholder confidence, increased market access and enhanced reputation. Ted is also a Certified Applications Professional, licensed by [Decision Partners](#), in Mental Modeling Technology™ – and leads BravaComm's work in this area. Over the past 20 years, Ted has provided organizational and change management communications to organizations across a range of sectors.

More information can be found on www.bravacomm.com

Creating a New Culture



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Towards Commitment Through Dialogue

The progression towards stakeholder commitment and behavioural change includes a range of stages and decision making (see the chart above).

Change can be significantly accelerated through the application of mental models research.

And just as research is an essential element in the process, at the heart of true stakeholder engagement – particularly with employees – is **dialogue**.

Dialogue builds credibility and is the conversational means of helping all stakeholders – employees and leaders – understand each other's thinking. While 'internal communications' is largely information based, dialogue is focused on behaviour change.

¹ As seen in: Johnson-Laird, P. N. (1983). **Mental Models**. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Atman, C.J., et al. (1994) **Designing risk communications**. Risk Analysis 14(5): 779-788. Bostrom, A. et al. (1992) **Characterizing Mental Models of hazardous processes**. Journal of Social Issues 48(4): 85-100; Fischhoff, B. et al. (1997) **Risk perception and communication**. In Detels, R. et al. (eds.) Oxford textbook of public health. London: Oxford University Press, 1997. pp. 987-1002.

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