
THE

PROSCI ADKAR MODEL

A GOAL-ORIENTED CHANGE MANAGEMENT MODEL
TO GUIDE INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Prosci[®]

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WHY THE ADKAR MODEL?

Because change is often a complex and difficult process - and what's more - it's inevitable. Managing change on the personal and organizational level requires new thinking, new models for change and new frameworks and tools to enable the smooth implementation of the desired change. The Prosci **ADKAR** Model is a valuable framework for organizational leaders, change managers and project managers to effectively lead a wide variety of changes. More than just theories, we share with you the concepts that drive successful change management efforts and practical advice on how to implement these concepts.

UNDERSTANDING CHANGE AT AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Having excellent project management - the best vision - or even the best solution to a problem will not result in successful change. The secret to successful change is rooted in something much simpler: how to facilitate change with one person.

Change happens at the individual level; in order for a group or organization to change, all the individuals within that group or organization must change. This means that in order to affect change in our organizations, businesses and communities, we must first understand how to affect individual change. Oftentimes, though, helping an individual change can be ambiguous. The **ADKAR** Model is a framework for understanding and managing individual change, providing structure and tangibility to enable success.

ADKAR is an acronym that represents the five milestones an individual must achieve for change to be successful: **awareness, desire, knowledge, ability** and **reinforcement**[®]. When applied to organizational change, this model allows leaders and change management teams to focus their activities on what will drive individual change and therefore allow for organizational results. The **ADKAR** Model provides clear goals and outcomes for change management activities.

The **ADKAR** Model was first identified through Prosci research and developed it during a movement to align traditional change management activities with project goals and results. The **ADKAR** Model was used to determine the effectiveness of certain change management activities (communication and training) in achieving desired organizational change results.

USING THE ADKAR MODEL WITH TRADITIONAL CHANGE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

The **ADKAR** Model outlines the individual's successful journey through change. Each step of the model also naturally fits into the typical activities associated with change management.

For example:

1. **Awareness** of the business reasons for change. Awareness is a goal/outcome of early communications related to an organizational change
2. **Desire** to engage and participate in the change. Desire is the goal/outcome of sponsorship and resistance management
3. **Knowledge** about how to change. Knowledge is the goal/outcome of training and coaching
4. **Ability** to realize or implement the change at the required performance level. Ability is the goal/outcome of additional coaching, practice and time
5. **Reinforcement** to ensure change sticks. Reinforcement is the goal/outcome of adoption measurement, corrective actions and recognition of successful change



In identifying the required goals or outcomes of change management, the **ADKAR** Model provides a useful framework for change management teams in both the planning and the execution of their work.

The goals or outcomes defined by the **ADKAR** Model are sequential and cumulative (they must be achieved in order). For a change to be implemented and sustained, an individual must progress through each of the milestones, starting with awareness.

THE FRAMEWORK OF A CHANGE INITIATIVE

The **ADKAR** Model can be used to identify gaps within your change management process. By breaking down a change into the parts of the **ADKAR** Model, you will be able to see where and why a change is not working well. With this understanding, you can address the barrier point, provide effective coaching for your employees and take the necessary steps to improve change success.

The ADKAR Model is useful in:

- Diagnosing employee resistance to change
- Helping employees transition through the change process
- Creating a successful action plan for personal and professional advancement during a change initiative
- Developing a change management plan for your employees

To use the **ADKAR** Model effectively, it is important to understand all of the factors at play during a change initiative, and their effect on change success. Change happens on two dimensions: there is the business side of change and the people side of change.

Successful change is a result of both dimensions of change maturing simultaneously (see below).



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THE BUSINESS DIMENSION OF CHANGE

Listed below are the standard business elements of a typical change project. Most managers will feel comfortable managing these phases:

- Identify a business need or opportunity
- Define the project (scope and objectives)
- Design the business solution (new processes, systems and organizational structure)
- Develop the new processes and systems
- Implement the solution into the organization

THE PEOPLE DIMENSION OF CHANGE

The most commonly cited reason for project failure is problems with the people side of change.

In a study involving 3,400 companies, “effective change management with employees” was listed as one of the top five project success factors, with the most critical success factor overall identified as “helping managers be effective sponsors of change.”

To effectively manage the people side of change, the five key goals are:

- **Awareness** of the need for change
- **Desire** to participate and support the change
- **Knowledge** of how to change (and what the change looks like)
- **Ability** to implement the change on a day-to-day basis
- **Reinforcement** to keep the change in place



HOW TO USE THE ADKAR MODEL

Below are two examples of the **ADKAR** Model at work, the first in a personal change, and the second in an organizational change. We provide an exercise below (see table and instructions) to help build a clearer understanding of the model and how to apply it to different situations.

THE ADKAR MODEL IN A PERSONAL CHANGE

It is helpful to first think about the **ADKAR** Model in your own personal life. Consider a change you want to make in your own life. A good example is adding a regular exercise regimen; a change many people attempt but struggle to sustain over time. Let's look at each element of the **ADKAR** Model in this context:

- **Awareness:** are you aware of the need to exercise? Why should you start an exercise regimen? Some things that may build your awareness are reading articles or seeing TV reports that describe the health benefits of regular exercise, from weight control to preventing disease and reducing stress.
- **Desire:** do you have the personal motivation to start exercising? A lot of people are aware of the need to exercise but might not have found the personal desire to start. Desire is a very individual concept; your motivation may be that you want to lose weight to better keep up with your kids, or you have a need for



more physical strength at work, or maybe you're looking for a way to reduce anxiety. Regardless of what your motivation is, you must make a personal decision to make this change, based on your own unique motivations.

- **Knowledge:** do you know how to effectively and safely exercise? This is where you need to gain some knowledge. Perhaps you hire a personal trainer to teach you the basics, attend an exercise class with an instructor or order a workout video or book. In order to effectively change, you need to know how.
- **Ability:** can you put your knowledge into practice? Just because you know how to do something, does not mean you can actually do it. We often need coaching when implementing new behaviors, so you may need additional coaching from your personal trainer to be able to exercise. Or perhaps time constraints are preventing you from being able to exercise and you need to rearrange other commitments to make the time.



- **Reinforcement:** do you have reinforcements in place to prevent you from reverting to your old habits? In this example, you may have a reward system for yourself when you hit certain exercise milestones. Or you might have a workout buddy who holds you accountable for showing up to the gym.

The above example highlights all five elements of the **ADKAR** Model. Note that each element represents a particular result that you are trying to achieve. Also note that all elements are cumulative

and must be performed in order. If, for example, we skip past the desire to change, all attempts to build knowledge and develop ability will be futile as there would be no desire to change.

Using exercise as our example, it is easy to see how change occurs on a personal level. Now let's consider how this framework applies to employees throughout the change process and how to help them progress towards the desired outcome.

THE ADKAR MODEL IN AN ORGANIZATION

Just as with a personal change, the **ADKAR** Model helps us understand an individual's needs during a change at work and directs what kind of support is needed for employees to successfully change.

For example, let's take the implementation of a new software tool. If the change is implemented and the employee is not aware that any changes are needed, their reaction might be:

"This is a waste of time."

"It was working just fine before."

"They never tell us what's going on!"

A person's reaction to change, even in the best circumstances, is to resist. Awareness of the business or organizational need to change is a critical component and must come first.

If, on the other hand, someone takes the time to explain to our employee that the old software will no longer be supported by the vendor, and that new software is necessary to meet customer needs and improve efficiency, the reaction (based on this awareness) will likely be very different:

“How soon will this happen?”

“How will this impact me?”

“Will I receive new training?”

Now let's imagine that our employee is made aware that a change is required but has no desire to participate in or support the change:

“I'm not interested in changing.”

“What's in it for me?”

“I doubt they are really serious about this.”

This takes us to the next goal or outcome defined in the **ADKAR** Model - desire. If an employee has no desire to change, they may be labeled as difficult, inflexible, pessimistic or unsupportive. The best person to help a resistant employee is their direct manager or supervisor, who is usually closest to the employee and able to translate the change into the employee's personal context.

It is important here to uncover the employee's personal motivators or reasons for resisting. They may have a unique reason for resisting; sometimes things that are not even related to the change. Managers need to engage in coaching conversations to help identify these barriers to buying-in and help to remove these barriers with their employees.

Only after awareness and desire are built should we move on to providing knowledge-

building to employees. Unfortunately, it is often the case that an organization sees a change coming and responds by sending employees to training before building any awareness or desire. The result of this approach is that employees are not engaged in the training because they do not know why they are there in the first place. To



make the most of a training investment, it must come after awareness and desire building. Training should also be thoughtfully deployed at the right time in a change; not too early or too late, and it should be specific to the employee's role in the change.

After helping employees gain the knowledge of how to perform in the future changed state, it is important to recognize that there is a difference between knowledge and ability. Knowledge is knowing what to do; ability is being able to actually put that knowledge into practice. Ability is where the change actually takes place and we can see the new demonstrated behaviors. If an employee has knowledge but not ability, you might hear:

"I'm not getting these new steps right."

"I eventually get there but it takes me twice as long."

"I understand the manual, but when I have to do it, I freeze."

To bridge the "knowledge to ability gap", employees often benefit from hands-on coaching and practice in an environment where they can make mistakes and ask questions. Often,

employees simply need time to realize changes; they do not happen overnight, and the best thing we can do for employees is to give them time to practice and adjust.

The final element of the **ADKAR** Model is reinforcement. The human brain is wired for habit; we are physiologically programmed to revert to our old habits - unless we have reinforcements in place to sustain the change. When reinforcement is not in place, we see employees using work-arounds or relying on their old spreadsheets instead of the new system. We may hear things like:

“The new way just takes too long; I’m going to keep doing it my way.”

“I keep forgetting to include the new department.”

To reinforce change, we need to monitor whether the change is being sustained or not. The first step is to celebrate and recognize where the change has taken hold; positive recognition is a great way to reward employees for working hard to make changes and demonstrate to the organization that participating in the change is important. If some employees are reverting to old processes or habits, follow-up is needed to ensure they do not need more training or coaching and to reinforce that they are expected to continue working in the new way.

THE POWER OF ADKAR FOR MANAGING CHANGE

Approaching change using the **ADKAR** Model will help you to plan effectively for a new change. Equally, if a current change is failing, the **ADKAR** Model can immediately diagnose where the process is breaking down so that you can take corrective action. While generic

conversations rarely produce actionable steps, this results-oriented approach helps focus energy on the area(s) that will produce the highest probability for success, providing structure and direction. The **ADKAR** Model helps you identify any elements that have been overlooked, starting with awareness (often the root cause of a change's failure).



ADKAR EXERCISE - IMPLEMENTING THE ADKAR MODEL

Now, let's put the **ADKAR** Model into action. This exercise will help to separate and clarify the key elements of the **ADKAR** Model and help you start putting the model into action in your life or work.

To begin, identify a friend, family member, work associate or employee, who, despite your best efforts to support them through a change, is not having success.

Answer the questions below with this person in mind. Use the table for your answers/notes and score.

ADKAR ASSESSMENT

Brief description of the change	
Notes:	
Awareness of the need for change	Score
Notes:	
Desire to make the change happen	Score
Notes:	
Knowledge about how to change	Score
Notes:	
Ability to change	Score
Notes:	
Reinforcement to retain change	Score
Notes:	

Awareness

List the reasons you believe the change is necessary. Review these reasons and rate the degree to which this person is aware of them, or the need to change. (1 is no awareness, 5 is total awareness)

Desire

List the factors or consequences (good and bad) that create a desire for this change. Rate the person's desire to change, taking into consideration the motivating factors, but also their convictions and any associated consequences. (1 is no desire to change, 5 is strong desire)

Knowledge

List the skills and knowledge needed to support the change, including if the person has a clear picture of what the change looks like. Rate this person's knowledge or level of training in these areas. (1 is no knowledge, 5 is highly knowledgeable)

Ability

Considering the skills and knowledge identified in the previous question, evaluate the person's ability to perform these skills or act on this knowledge. Rate this person's ability to implement the new skills, knowledge and behaviors to support the change. (1 is no ability, 5 is very able)

Reinforcement

List the reinforcements that will help to retain the change. Are incentives in place to reinforce the change and make it stick? Rate the reinforcements and how they help support the change. (1 is not helpful, 5 is very helpful)

Once you have completed the table, take a moment to review the scores. Highlight all areas that scored a 3 or below. Start with your first highlighted area.

APPLYING THE ADKAR ASSESSMENT RESULTS

As mentioned before, it is essential to follow the **ADKAR** Model in sequence. The first area that scored 3 or below has room for improvement and must be addressed first (doing this will also positively impact all goals that follow).

If awareness was identified as a low-scoring area, this is where you must begin - at the earliest stage. Working on desire, knowledge or skill development, if awareness is not in place, will not help the change happen.

ACTIONABLE STEPS

If awareness is needed: discuss and explore the reasons and benefits for this change.

If more desire is needed: to move this person forward, you must address their inherent desire to change (which may stem from negative or positive consequences). These motivating factors have to be great enough to overcome the individual's personal threshold to resisting the change.

If more knowledge is needed: avoid dwelling on reasons for change and motivating factors, as this could be discouraging to somebody already at this phase. What is needed now is education and training for the skills and behaviors necessary to move forward.

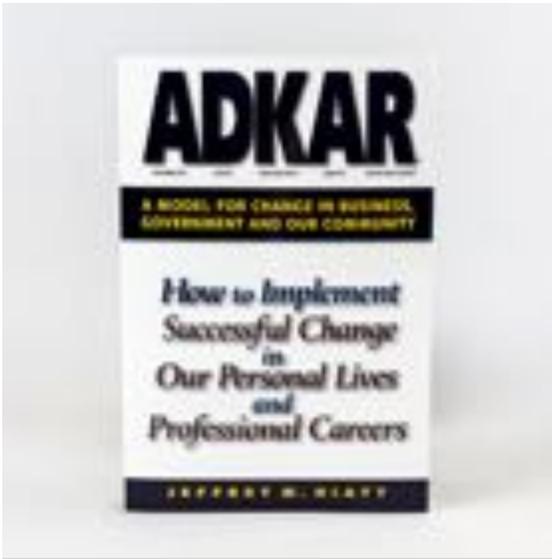
If more ability is needed: at least two steps are required. First, time is needed to develop new abilities and behaviors. Second, ongoing coaching and support is required - a one-time training event or an educational program will not be adequate. Consider outside intervention, continued support and mentoring.

If more reinforcement is needed: investigate if the necessary elements are present to keep the person from reverting to old behaviors. Address the incentives or consequences for not continuing to act in the new way and re-visit the knowledge and ability milestones. It may be that more training and education is needed as processes develop and evolve.

TO CONCLUDE

The **ADKAR** Model is an essential tool for all change professionals and anyone who needs to lead people in times of change. It is effective, easy to grasp and can be applied in a wide variety of organizational settings. If a change is failing, you can use the **ADKAR** Model to identify any gaps within your change management process. The **ADKAR** Model will highlight the areas where focused corrective action can be taken to improve change success.

Equally, if you are planning a change, using the **ADKAR** Model will provide structure and a direction and help you to plan effectively. Each step of the model will outline the individual's successful journey through change and also align naturally with the typical activities associated with change management. If you're ready to change, either personally or professionally, this results-oriented approach will increase your change success.



ADKAR: A Model for Change

The most in-depth explanation of the Prosci **ADKAR** Model with tactics for achieving each critical milestone. Use this practical book to understand, guide and influence change success.

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