

The ADKAR model for change management

Change Management Tutorial Series

Overview

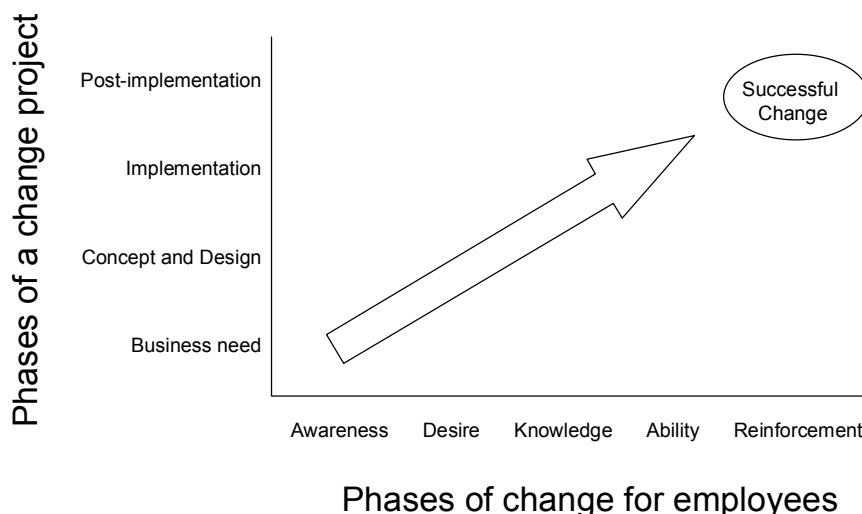
This tutorial presents an overview of the ADKAR model for change management. This diagnostic tool helps organizations and employees understand where they are in the change process. As a manager, you can use this tool to identify gaps in your change management process and to provide effective coaching for your employees. The ADKAR model can be used to:

- manage employee resistance
- help employees transition through the change process
- create a successful action plan for personal and professional advancement during change
- develop a change management strategy

What is fascinating about ADKAR is that once you understand the model and have applied it at least once to a situation you are close to, you will never look at change the same again (especially changes that are failing). In its simplicity the ADKAR model has the ability to identify why changes are not working and help you take the necessary steps to make the change successful. You will be able to break down the change into parts, understand where the change is failing and address that impact point.

The ADKAR model was developed by Prosci in 2001 after research with more than 700 companies undergoing major change projects. ADKAR has become very popular with managers and project teams because this change management model is easily applied and simple to teach to others, including executive sponsors of change.

To use the ADKAR model effectively, you will need to understand the underlying framework for change initiatives. In the diagram below, change happens on two dimensions: the business dimension (vertical axis) and the people dimension (horizontal axis). Successful change happens when both dimensions of change occur simultaneously.



Business dimension of change

The business dimension of change includes the typical project elements.

- Business need or opportunity is identified.
- Project is defined (scope and objectives).
- Business solution is designed (new processes, systems and organizational structure).
- New processes and systems are developed.
- Solution is implemented into the organization.

These are the standard elements of a business change that managers feel most comfortable managing.

People dimension of change

The people dimension of change is how employees experience the change process. Research shows that problems with this dimension of change is the most commonly cited reason for project failures. In a study with 248 companies, effective change management with employees was listed as one of the top-three overall success factors for the project. Helping managers be effective sponsors of change was considered the most critical success factor overall.

Effective management of the people dimension of change requires managing five key phases that form the basis of the ADKAR model:

- **A**wareness of the need to change
- **D**esire to participate and support the change
- **K**nowledge of how to change (and what the change looks like)
- **A**bility to implement the change on a day-to-day basis
- **R**einforcement to keep the change in place

The ADKAR model

In the following scenarios, we look at the ADKAR model with one work example and two personal examples. After reviewing these examples, you can complete an exercise for a change that is personal to you. This exercise is important for building understanding about the model and how it can be applied in different situations.

A work scenario

If you are an employee in an organization undergoing change, your reaction to the change and how you are viewed by the organization will be directly affected by each of the five elements in the ADKAR model.

Take for example the implementation of a new software tool. If the change is implemented and you believe it was not needed (i.e., you were not aware that any changes were required), then your reaction might be:

“This is a waste of time.”

“Why change if it was working just fine before?”

“If it ain't broke, don't fix it.”

“They never tell us what's going on!”

Our natural reaction to change, even in the best circumstances, is to resist. **Awareness** of the business need to change is a critical ingredient of any change and must come first.

If someone had taken the time to explain that the old software would no longer be supported by the vendor, and that new software was necessary to meet the needs of your customers, then your reaction (based on this **awareness**) would likely be very different:

“How soon will this happen?”

“How will this impact me?”

“Will I receive new training?”

Take this same example one step further. Assume you were made **aware** that a change was required, but you had no **desire** to participate or support the change.

“What's in it for me.”

“I doubt they are really serious about this.”

Now the tables are turned, and you may become the target of an emotional response from individuals within the organization. You may be labeled as difficult, inflexible or unsupportive. Some may say you lack initiative or vision. You may be called a cynic or pessimist.

Awareness and desire are two critical components of the change model. In the personal examples that follow, you will see how the other elements of the model play a role in a successful change.

Examples from personal experience

Changing a child's behavior

Changing unwanted behavior in children follows the ADKAR model well. Children first need to know what they are doing is wrong. This **awareness** often comes when an upset parent tells the child he is doing something wrong. Simply knowing it is wrong, however, will not stop most children. Their natural inclination is to test the boundaries and push the limits.

Consequences, either positive or negative, are usually required. These consequences impact the child's **desire** to change. However, the process cannot stop here. Given proper motivation to change, children need a role model to understand what the proper behavior looks like. They need examples to give them the **knowledge** of what the correct behavior is.

Next, they need practice. Few children can change immediately; it is an ongoing process requiring them to develop new skills and habits. They need time to develop the **ability** to act in a new way.

Finally, children need **reinforcement** to keep the good behavior going. This may be in the form of positive encouragement or other types of rewards.

This example highlighted all five elements of the ADKAR model.

Coaching a sport

In this case study example, a parent was attempting to improve the batting style and skill of his son playing baseball. Dad was concerned that his son's batting was not up to the level of the other boys on the team. He searched the Internet for batting videos and purchased a tape for his son. For weeks he tried to get his son to watch the video on batting mechanics. With some parental persuasion, Dad was able to get his son to watch part of the tape. After that, the video was left untouched.

The father's attempt to educate his son failed and resulted only in a frustrated parent. He finally sat down with his son and asked him why he would not watch the tape and use it to improve his batting. His son replied that he just enjoyed playing baseball with his friends, and it did not matter to him if his batting was as good as some of the other boys.

In this example the father skipped steps in the ADKAR model (from **awareness** to **knowledge**). His son had no **desire** to change and was content just to be out there playing the game. Dad's efforts to build **knowledge** failed because his son lacked the **desire** to change.

The power of the ADKAR model is that it creates focus on the first element that is the root cause of failure. When you approach change using this model, you can immediately identify where the process is breaking down and which elements are being overlooked. This avoids generic conversations about the change that rarely produce actionable steps.

ADKAR can help you plan effectively for a new change or diagnose why a current change is failing. In some cases, corrective action can be taken and the change successfully implemented. Here are the five steps again.

1. **Awareness** of the need for change.
2. **Desire** to make the change happen.
3. **Knowledge** about how to change.
4. **Ability** to implement new skills and behaviors.
5. **Reinforcement** to retain the change once it has been made.

Now it's your turn.

The best way to understand the usefulness of this type of model for business change management is to apply the model to a personal situation. Using a situation you are personally close to will help separate the key elements of the ADKAR model.

Begin by identifying a change you are having difficulty making in another person (a friend, family member or work associate). Complete the worksheets to the best of your ability, rating each area on a scale of 0% to 100%.

Be sure you select a change you have been trying to make happen in a friend, colleague or family member that is not working regardless of your continued efforts. Answer and assign a score for the following questions.

Exercise

The change. Briefly describe the personal change you are trying to implement with a friend, family member or work associate:

1. **Awareness.** List the reasons you believe the change is necessary. Review these reasons and rate the degree to which the person you are trying to change is aware of the reasons or need to change (0% - 100%).
2. **Desire.** List the factors or consequences (good and bad) for this person that create a *desire* to change. Consider these motivating factors, including the person's conviction in these factors and the associated consequences. Rate his/her desire to change (0% - 100%).
3. **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 (0% - 100%).

4. **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. To what percent do you rate this person's ability to implement the new skills, knowledge and behaviors to support the change (0% - 100%)?

5. **Reinforcement.** List the reinforcements that will help to retain the change. Are incentives in place to reinforce the change and make it stick? To what percent do you rate the reinforcements as helping support the change (0% - 100%)?

Now transfer your scores from each worksheet to the table shown in Figure 1. Take a moment to review your scores. Highlight those areas that scored a 50% or below, and identify (using the order listed on the score sheet) which was the first area to score less than 50%.

Brief description of the change: _____	Percent true or complete
1. <i>Awareness</i> of the need to change? Notes: _____	
2. <i>Desire</i> to make the change happen? Notes: _____	
3. <i>Knowledge</i> about how to change? Notes: _____	
4. <i>Ability</i> to change? Notes: _____	
5. <i>Reinforcement</i> to retain the change? Notes: _____	

Now consider the first area in which your score was 50% or below. You must address this area before anything else is done. For example, if you identified **awareness** as the area with a low score, then working on desire, knowledge or skill development will not help you make the change happen.

On the other hand, if you identified **desire**, then continually repeating your reasons for change is not adequate to move this person forward. Once they know these reasons, you must address their inherent desire to change. Desire may stem from negative or positive consequences. The negative consequences have to be great enough to overcome their personal threshold to resist change (same for the positive consequences).

If **knowledge** was the area you identified, then you want to be careful not to dwell on the reasons for change and the motivating factors. This could be discouraging for someone already at this phase. What is needed is education and training for the skills and behaviors that are needed for change.

If **ability** was the area selected with the low score, then several steps are required to move forward.

- The person will need time to develop new skills and behaviors. Just like learning a new sport or any new skill, time is required to develop new abilities.
- The person will need ongoing coaching and support. No one-time training event or educational program will substitute for ongoing coaching and mentoring.
- Outside intervention or support may be required.

Finally, if **reinforcement** was the area identified, then you will need to 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.

Now that you have completed the ADKAR model for a personal change, you can follow the same process for the change happening at work. This process should give you insight as to where you are in the change process, and what steps you can take to not only survive change, but advance professionally in a changing business environment.

You can think of organizational and personal change in the context of the ADKAR model. If you are deploying a major change in your organization, then a critical step in change management is organizational **awareness** of the reasons for change. **Desire** to change at the employee level must be addressed as resistance will be a natural reaction to change. As the change moves into implementation, you will need to develop **knowledge** about the change and the **ability** to implement new skills and behaviors. Once the change is in place, you will need to **reinforce** the change to avoid moving backwards to old behaviors.

Tools are available to help deploy the ADKAR change management model in a work environment. For employees, you can provide them with the [“Employee’s Survival Guide to Change.”](#) This new paperback book uses the ADKAR model to help employees through the change process. For managers, you can use the [Change Management Guide for Manager’s and Supervisors](#). This toolkit is a complete guide for using this approach with a group or department.

For change management leaders and consultants, they should use both the [Survival Guide](#) and the [Change Management Toolkit](#). This toolkit provides additional tools, assessments and guidelines for managing change at the organizational level.