The Prosci ADKAR Model

A goal-oriented change management model
to guide individual and organizational change

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Why the ADKAR Model?

Change is often a complex and difficult process. Leading successful change in other people and across whole organizations requires new thinking and new tools. The Prosci ADKAR® Model is a valuable framework for organizational leaders, change managers and project managers to effectively lead a wide variety of changes. The lens of the ADKAR Model reveals both key concepts that influence successful change and actionable insights for implementing these concepts.

Understanding Change at an Individual Level

Having the clearest vision or the most effectively designed solution to a problem will not, alone, produce successful change. The secret to leading successful change is rooted in something much simpler: how to facilitate change with one person.

Change happens at the individual level. For a group or organization to change, all the individuals within that group or organization must change. This means that to effect change in our organizations, businesses and communities, we must first understand how to effect change one person at a time. The Prosci ADKAR Model is a framework for understanding and managing individual change. It provides structure and tangible guidance for leaders who want to motivate change in others.

ADKAR is an acronym for the five outcomes an individual needs to achieve for a 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 collectively drive individual change and produce organizational results.

The outcomes or goals 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, starting with Awareness.

Prosci founder Jeff Hyatt originally conceived the ADKAR Model through his early research to align traditional change management activities with project goals and results. The ADKAR Model was first used to determine the effectiveness of change management activities like communication and training in achieving desired organizational change results.

Using the ADKAR Model With Traditional Change Management Activities

The ADKAR Model outlines an individual's successful journey through change. Each step of the model naturally aligns to typical activities associated with change management and articulates clear goals for these activities.

For example:

1. **Awareness** of the business reasons for change. Awareness is a goal or outcome of early communications related to an organizational change.

2. **Desire** to engage and participate in the change. Desire is a goal or outcome of sponsorship and resistance management.

3. **Knowledge** about how to change. Knowledge is a goal or outcome of training and coaching.

4. **Ability** to realize or implement the change at the required performance level. Ability is a goal or outcome of additional coaching, practice and time.

5. **Reinforcement** to ensure that change sticks. Reinforcement is a goal or outcome of adoption measurement, corrective actions, and recognition of successful change.

In identifying the outcomes of change management activities, the ADKAR Model provides a useful framework for change management teams in both the planning and the execution of their work.
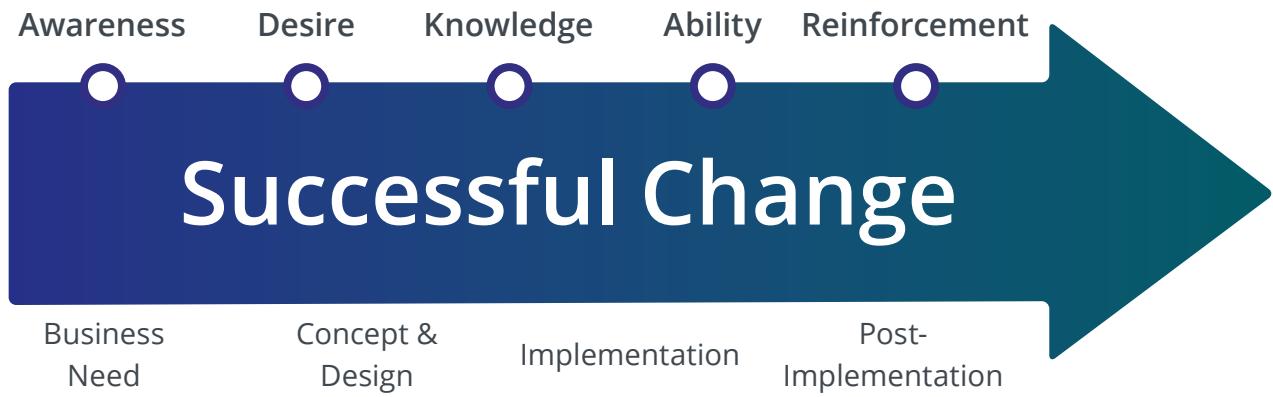
The Framework of a Change Initiative

Use the ADKAR Model 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 barriers that hold people back, 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

Changes come to life on two dimensions: the organizational or project side of change and the people side of change. Successful change is a result of both dimensions of change maturing simultaneously (see below). Project management and change management are complementary disciplines with a common purpose of producing results and outcomes.

Awareness   Desire   Knowledge   Ability   Reinforcement

Successful Change

Business Need   Concept & Design   Implementation   Post-Implementation

The Organizational Dimension of Change

Whether through formal project management or informal approaches, organizational changes progress through typical stages:

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

The People Dimension of Change

Projects commonly fail when there are problems with the people side of change. This is true even with a well-designed project plan.

The five outcomes organizations must achieve for success with the people side of change also comprise the elements of the Prosci ADKAR Model:

- **Awareness** of the need for change
- **Desire** to participate and support the change
- **Knowledge** on how to change
- **Ability** to implement desired skills and behaviors
- **Reinforcement** to sustain the change

How to Use the ADKAR Model

Let's look at two examples of the ADKAR Model in application, the first in a personal change scenario and the second in a professional change scenario. Try the ADKAR activity that follows to enhance your understanding of the model and its application.

The ADKAR Model in a Personal Change

Adding a regular physical exercise regimen is a personal change many people attempt but struggle to sustain over time. Consider each ADKAR element.

- **Awareness**: Are you aware of the need to exercise? Why should you start an exercise regimen? To build awareness, you might read articles or watch news reports that describe the health benefits of regular exercise, such as disease prevention, weight control and reduced stress.

- **Desire**: Do you have the personal motivation to start exercising? Many people are aware of the need to exercise but may 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 need 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 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. To effectively change, you need to know how.

- **Ability**: Can you put your knowledge into practice? Just knowing how to do something doesn't mean you can actually do it. We often need coaching when implementing new behaviors. You may need additional practice time with a personal trainer to build up to doing exercises effectively or with proper form. Or perhaps conflicting time commitments are preventing you from being able to exercise, and you need to rearrange other priorities 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.

Note that each of the five elements of the ADKAR Model 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 start exercising, all attempts to learn how to exercise (to build knowledge and develop ability) will be less effective, if not futile.

Using exercise as our example, it is easy to trace how change occurs on a personal level through the ADKAR Model. Now, let's consider how this framework applies to employees experiencing change in a professional environment and how you can influence their progress toward the desired outcomes.

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 indicates the type of support needed to enable a successful change. The change we will look at is the implementation of a new software tool.

Awareness

If the organization implements the new software, and employees are 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 natural human reaction to change, even in the best circumstances, is to resist. Awareness of the business or organizational need to change is a critical component to overcoming resistance.

If, on the other hand, employees clearly understand that the old software version will no longer be supported by the vendor, or that new software will help them meet customer needs more effectively, the reaction (based on increased awareness) could look very different:

"How soon will this happen?"	"How will this impact me?"	"Will I receive new training?"

Desire

Armed with awareness that a change is required, an employee still may have low desire to log in and use the new software:

"I'm not interested in changing."	"What's in it for me?"	"I doubt they are really serious about this."

The employee's personal motivators or barriers contribute to their level of desire to use the new software. Each person could have their own unique reasons for engaging or resisting—sometimes reasons that are not even related to the change.

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. People managers need to engage in coaching conversations to help connect the change to personal motivators and to identify how barriers can be removed or minimized.

Knowledge

Only after building awareness and desire should we begin providing detailed knowledge of how to use the new software. Unfortunately, organizations commonly see a change coming and the first step they take is to send employees to training. The result of this approach is that the training is not highly effective. Employees are not engaged in the detailed functionality of the software because they are not prepared to learn. They may not even know why they are there in the first place. To make the most of a training investment, it must come after initial awareness and desire building.

Ability

After helping employees gain intellectual understanding of how to navigate in the software interface, there may still be a gap between knowledge and ability. Knowledge is knowing what to do. Ability is being able to put that knowledge into practice. Demonstrated ability to work with the software in a live, real-world situation is where the change actually takes place. 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 will benefit from hands-on coaching and practice using the software before go-live. This practice could take place in a formal training setting or by working through a simulated live environment. What matters is that the employees using the software have the opportunity to try it out, make mistakes, and ask questions in a safe environment. Often, employees simply need time to adopt the changes. The best thing we can do is give them time to practice.

Reinforcement

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. When reinforcement is not in place, we see employees using workarounds or relying on their old spreadsheets instead of the new software. You 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. Who is logging in, following workflows, and using the new software successfully? Where are individuals recognizing new efficiencies in their work? With this information, 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 workarounds or old processes, followup is needed to understand their barriers to changing. Do they need more training or coaching? Are they missing any of the ADKAR elements? Reinforcement confirms that they are expected to continue working in the new way.

The Power of the ADKAR Model for Managing Change

Using the ADKAR Model will help you plan effectively for a new change. If a current change is failing, the model enables you to immediately diagnose where the process has broken down, so you can take the appropriate corrective actions. This results-oriented approach also helps you focus energy on the areas that produce the highest probability for success while providing structure and direction. And the ADKAR Model helps you identify any elements that have been overlooked along the way.

> Working our Adoption and Change Management program through the ADKAR Model gave us a higher degree of engagement... We were treating people differently.
>
> – Jean-Claude Monney, Microsoft

ADKAR Exercise – Implementing the ADKAR Model

Now that you understand the Prosci ADKAR Model, let's put it into action. This exercise will clarify the key elements and help you start applying the model yourself.

Instructions:

1. Identify a friend, family member, work associate or employee whom you would like to see adopt a particular change. Choose an individual who is not having success, despite your best efforts to support them through the change.

2. Answer the questions in the table below with this person in mind. Use the table for your answers, notes and scores.

3. Once you have completed the table, take a moment to review the scores. Highlight all areas that scored a 3 or lower.
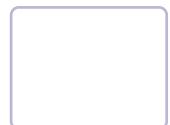
ADKAR Assessment

Briefly describe a personal change in behavior you are trying to influence a friend, family member, neighbor or work associate to make:

List the reasons you believe this change is necessary:

For each element, rank on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the lowest.

AWARENESS RANK

A

Review the reasons for change and ask yourself the degree to which the person is *aware* of these reasons.

List the factors or consequences (good and bad) for this person that create a desire to change:

DESIRE RANK

D

Consider these motivating factors, including the person's conviction in these areas. Assess the *desire* to change.

List the skills and knowledge needed for the change, both during and after the transition:

K

Rate this person's *knowledge* or training in these areas.

Considering the skills and knowledge from above, evaluate the person's ability to perform or act in the new way. Are there any barriers inhibiting their ability?

ABILITY RANK

A

To what extent does the person have the *ability* to implement the new skills, knowledge and behaviors?

List the reinforcements that will help to sustain the change. Are incentives in place to help this person make the change stick? Are there incentives not to change?

REINFORCEMENT RANK

R

To what degree is the person receiving *reinforcement* to support and maintain the change?

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

Applying the ADKAR Assessment Results

As mentioned, the outcomes of the individual change process need to be realized sequentially. When influencing change in someone else, address the elements of the ADKAR Model in order. You should address the first element with a score of 3 or lower first.

If you identified awareness as the first low-scoring area, this is where you should begin. If awareness is not firmly in place, working on desire, knowledge or ability will not make the change happen.

Actionable Steps

If awareness is needed: Discuss and explore the reasons and benefits for this change, both on the organizational level and on the individual level.

If more desire is needed: To move this person forward, address their inherent desire to change (which may stem from negative or positive consequences). The motivating factors must 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. The this could be discouraging to somebody already at this phase. Instead, offer 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 may not be adequate. Consider outside intervention, continued support and mentoring.

If more reinforcement is needed: Investigate whether the necessary elements are in place to keep the person from reverting to old behaviors. Address the incentives or consequences for avoiding the new behaviors.

Improve Outcomes From Change

The Prosci ADKAR Model is based on the understanding that organizational change happens one person at a time. It is effective, easy to grasp, and applicable to virtually any organizational setting. And if a change is failing, you can use the ADKAR Model to diagnose problems and gaps, identify corrective actions, and improve the success of your change projects and initiatives.

The ADKAR Model provides the structure and direction you need to plan effectively for change. From digital transformations and new operating processes to organizational restructuring and culture changes, The ADKAR Model aligns your project changes with the people side of change—which results in more successful outcomes.

AWARENESS
DESIRE
KNOWLEDGE
ABILITY
REINFORCEMENT®

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Change Management Certification Program

Gain the knowledge, skills and tools to drive successful change initiatives.
This three-day experiential learning program teaches you to
apply a holistic change management methodology and toolset,
including the Prosci ADKAR Model, to a real project.

Contact Prosci Europe to learn more.