

Understanding the ADKAR Change Management Model

Organizational change can't happen without buy-in from employees at all levels, which is always challenging. It's just human nature for some to resist the change process, ranging from minor setbacks to completely derailing your change initiatives. Enter ADKAR: a model for change in business from Prosci that focuses on the people side of change.

In particular, it places the focus on individual change above all else. After all, an organization is simply a collection of individuals, so for changes to work, everyone must play their part.

The Prosci ADKAR model remains the industry standard for change management projects around the globe. It's effective for change both at an individual and an organizational level.

The philosophy behind the ADKAR model is that change happens one individual at a time. That means getting them to realize the need for a change, embrace that change, and then reinforce it into the future.

The acronym **ADKAR** stands for:

- Awareness
- Desire
- Knowledge
- Ability
- Reinforcement

Each letter represents an outcome for each stage of the model.

Once employees are **aware** that a change needs to happen, it will build the **desire** to make it happen. After that, you need to provide the **knowledge** to take on the change through training — and the **ability** to put the training into practice through exercises. Lastly, the final outcome is reinforcing the change to sustain your future state.

Read on to learn more about the ADKAR model and how to use it to implement change in your organization.

What is the ADKAR Change Management Model?

In 2003, Jeff Hiatt, the founder of Prosci, developed the ADKAR change model after closely examining the change habits of over 700 organizations.

During his research, he discovered the importance of **individual change**, as organizational change management begins and ends at the individual level.

If you can't align everyone on the same goal, there's no way to implement a successful change that sustains well into the future. Instead, you'll get met with resistance, and some individuals will harken back to their old ways.

States of change

This realization led Hiatt to create the five elements of the ADKAR model, awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement. In addition to the elements, there are also **three states of change** that take place during the ADKAR process. They are:

- Current State
- Transition state
- Future state

Your **current state** is where you are now, and it refers to what needs to change at your organization. It could be that legacy software is slowing your operation, or your sales and conversions are nose-diving.

The **awareness and desire** stages of ADKAR take place during your current state. This is where you'll want to let your employees know why change is necessary and build desire by letting them know how the change will improve their life individually.

Next, you'll enter the **transition state** to take you from your current state to your future goal. This is where the **knowledge and ability** stages of ADKAR occur. At this time, you'll need to train your employees and stakeholders on how to implement the new changes.

That usually means rolling out training programs as well as hands-on exercises.

Once everyone knows what to do, you will enter your future state, where you achieve your desired goals. Once you've hit the mark, you're not done yet, though. You'll need to put efforts in place to sustain the changes, also known as the **reinforcement** stage of the ADKAR model.

Following the ADKAR order

It's critical to note that the ADKAR acronym **is in a particular order that you must follow in order to see effective results**. For example, many organizations make the mistake of beginning with the knowledge stage and attempting to win over employees through training programs. What they fail to realize is that they skipped two crucial steps before training, **awareness**, and **desire**.

If your employees aren't sure why a change is necessary, they won't have much desire to make it happen. As a result, any training programs are likely to fall flat and on deaf ears.

Instead, you'll find more success if you first raise awareness of the need for change and then build the desire to put it into practice. Only then can you move on to rolling out training programs and hands-on exercises.

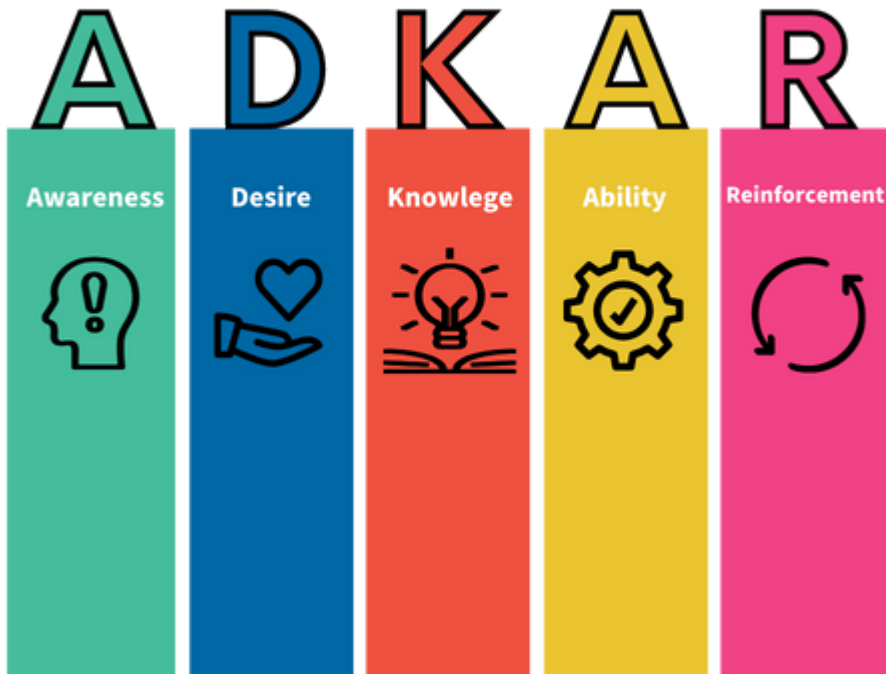
Besides following the acronym in order, it's crucial to realize that each individual will reach ADKAR change management milestones **at different times**. In other words, one employee may already have the desire to embrace change while their coworker is still building awareness of why it's necessary. Knowing this will help you work with each individual to empower them to get past the step they're stuck on at the moment.

Using the ADKAR steps to fight resistance

One of the most influential aspects of the ADKAR model is its ability to pinpoint areas where resistance is forming. An example would be an employee struggling with the desire phase. They understand why the change has to happen, but they aren't thrilled about the extra work they have to do.

In mentoring this employee, try listing a few ways the change will make their day-to-day tasks more manageable. An example would be all the time they could save by using cloud-based services instead of maintaining in-house servers.

As long as you guide each individual through the steps of the model, you'll be able to uncover resistance and eliminate it as it shows up. That's one of the reasons why the ADKAR model is so effective and widely used around the globe.



Applying the ADKAR Model to your change management plan

Now that you've grasped the basics of the ADKAR change management model, it's time to learn how to put it into action at your organization. If you need to change your operations significantly, the ADKAR model can help you develop buy-in from all your employees at all levels.

For the purposes of this example, let's say that you run a medical practice, and storing all your data in-house is affecting your ability to scale. That's when you and your executive team decide to transition to cloud-based services to increase efficiency and productivity — and eliminate costly expenses and free up employee time.

Yet, that means all your people will have to learn new processes and new skills to make the change stick. It will take a lot of mentoring and training to familiarize everyone with the new system.

Now that we've got an example of a change management process that needs to happen let's apply the ADKAR model and see how it works.

Goal 1: Building awareness

First things first, you've got to let your people know about the problem and why the change to a cloud-based SaaS company is a must. If your people never hear a peep out of you about your plans before they start training on the new platform, they'll be confused, upset, and likely won't give 100% of their efforts.

That's why raising awareness of the problem **across the entire organization is crucial.**

Hold company-wide meetings and send email notifications letting your people know that your on-premise servers aren't cutting it anymore. It's affecting your ability to scale, and you're wasting time and money. Tell them that switching to the cloud will make their lives much easier, and they won't have to maintain servers anymore.

Also, give your people plenty of opportunities to ask questions and lots of time to soak in the information. That way, they'll have the chance to express any resistance they feel toward the change.

Goal 2: Foster the desire to make the change

Besides being aware that a change needs to happen, your people must **want to make the change**.

How do you do that?

There are a few practical ways: incentives and designating change leaders. In other words, your employees may understand that switching to the cloud may help you scale your operation — but what will they get out of it?

That's where using incentives comes into play. First, let your employees know all the ways that the change will enhance their lives. Beyond that, you can introduce incentives like discounts, vacation days, and other perks to get them excited about implementing the changes. If your people want to make the change as badly as you do, your organization will go through a buttery smooth transition phase.

A change leader is someone that shows public support for the change and mentors those who will be most closely affected by it. You can think of them as your cheerleaders for change, and they're your #1 most effective weapon against resistance. Your change leaders are there to provide support and guidance to anyone experiencing second thoughts about the new processes.

Goal 3: Build knowledge to make the change possible

By now, your employees know why the change must happen, and they've bought into it fully. That means it's the perfect time to introduce the training programs necessary to get everyone up to speed with the new system.

This is one of the most crucial phases, as the quality of your training materials will significantly affect the success of your change. Rather than creating one-size-fits-all training modules, do your best to be as specific as possible for each department.

For example, you could create training materials for your IT department, nurses, doctors, and admin staff. For each piece of training, focus on the new tasks that each department will have to take on due to implementing the cloud. That will help each staff member build the core competencies that they'll need when using the new program.

It's also wise to use different types of training materials and methods to increase comprehension. These include:

- Educational blog posts
- Classroom-style lectures
- In-depth videos
- Mentoring/shadowing
- Interactive online training programs

Using a breadth of training materials will help you cater to each employee's preferred learning style. Visual learners can focus on videos, while hands-on learners can choose to enter the classroom.

Goal 4: Develop the ability to make the change

Knowing how to do something and actually being able to do it are two different things. That's why Hiatt split up knowledge and ability into two separate steps of the ADKAR model.

For instance, a nurse can read a blog or watch a video on how to enter patient data into the cloud, but they'll also need **hands-on experience**. For this reason, you'll want to give your employees a chance to try out their new processes before making them official.

Have your change leaders break your employees up into teams that they will coach. From there, you can put on 'practice sessions' where everyone tries out their new tasks. That will help them **genuinely craft the ability to make the change a reality**.

Goal 5: Reinforce the change into the future

Not forgetting the final step in the process is crucial, reinforcing your changes. It's great that you were able to transition to the cloud, but you want to keep that momentum going. If you step off the gas too soon, old employee habits can creep back in.

How do you reinforce the change?

By celebrating successes and giving employees a chance to speak their minds. Whenever someone knocks it out of the park, reward them with a shout-out or incentive.

Also, keep an eye out for mistakes, and correct them privately away from everyone else. For praise, do just the opposite - as you'll want to encourage employees to maintain their new responsibilities.

Closing thoughts: ADKAR Change Management

There's a reason why the Prosci ADKAR change management model is considered the industry standard — because it's so effective at implementing change and combatting resistance.

It's the perfect model for encouraging individuals to embrace organizational change instead of fighting back against it.

Remember, for the ADKAR model to work, you **MUST** follow it in order. Also, each employee will reach each of the stages at different times. That's why you need a dedicated group of change leaders to walk them through each phase and work out any resistance. When used properly, the ADKAR model is one of the most powerful change management tools you can use to achieve your goals.