

Preface

This preface attempts to answer the questions, “Why should I read this book?” and “What’s in it for me?” For business and government leaders managing change, the challenges and demands are non-stop. The stakes are high and so is the stress. We at the Change Management Learning Center deal with benchmarking data from hundreds of organizations and talk with project leaders every week. Many new techniques for managing change result from these interactions. The ADKAR model provides a primary framework to bring together new and traditional methods for managing change and is instrumental in diagnosing failing changes.

For nearly 20 years, both as an engineer with Bell Laboratories and as a project leader for other companies, I worked large-scale process, system and organizational change. My experiences were a mixture of successes and failures. A common theme around project failures was resistance to change; as one of my colleagues joked, “All of our change initiatives would have gone great if it weren’t for all the people involved.”

The more I immersed myself in the field of change management to address this resistance issue, the more complex the problem became. One would think that engineers are fairly good problem solvers. This solution, however, was proving elusive. After nearly eight years in undergraduate and graduate engineering, I was surprised to find the most challenging prob-

lems dealt with people and not with things.

The catalyst for the ADKAR model was a reaction to the myriad of change management approaches that were proposed by management consultants and authors. These approaches focused on many activities to manage change, including assessments, communications, training, coaching and so on. I struggled with the idea that these change management activities were surely not an endpoint by themselves. From a business perspective, I was constantly bothered by the absence of an end result that these activities should produce.

This focus on results turned out to be the genesis for the ADKAR model. I began to ask the question “Why?” every time I heard about another change management tactic or approach. In other words, “Why would you do that?” and “What is your desired outcome?” For example, communications is commonly cited as an essential element for managing change. Why? One objective of communications is to build awareness of the need for change and to share with employees why the change is happening. Employees want to understand the nature of the change and the risks of not changing. This led to the first component of ADKAR: *awareness*.

By examining a large number of change management activities and mapping them into their desired results, I was able to envision a fairly simple model that included five building blocks for change: awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement. During the early drafts of the model, some of the words changed. For example, I struggled with the term *desire* versus *motivation*. I settled on *desire* because my research suggested that motivation was only one component that created the desire to change. On first analysis this model met my “engineering” criteria: It was simple and identified the desired outcomes for different change management strategies and tactics.

The Change Management Learning Center began studying ADKAR as a model for change. The more research we did,

the more convinced we became that this simple model for managing change was essential in both the learning process for new change leaders and in the effective application of change management activities. We were finding support for ADKAR based on research data from hundreds of project teams. As we began sharing our benchmarking data in reports and publications, we found a growing interest in this model.

Recently we added ADKAR to our change management training programs. Even though we spend just a short time during the three-day program on this model, the most commonly cited highlight of the entire program from the feedback forms is ADKAR. I still ask people in our change management training courses why they gravitate to the ADKAR model, and the answer is almost always the same: “It is results-oriented and easy to apply in a number of change settings.”

Over the past several years, ADKAR has become the most sought-after model from the Change Management Learning Center, with adoption by many Fortune 100 companies, the US Department of Defense and other government agencies around the world. Many companies that provide change management training for their managers choose this model as the primary tool for working with employees during change.

I did not then, nor do I now, view this model to be some type of breakthrough, but rather a framework for understanding and applying many approaches for managing change. ADKAR is a perspective on change that enables other change management tactics to have focus and direction. I very much credit those authors and practitioners whose books and real-life experience have influenced my understanding of change management. William Bridges, John Kotter, Daryl Conner, David McClelland, Frank Petrock, Peter Block, Jeanenne LaMarsh, Patrick Dolan, Richard Beckhard and Reuben T. Harris are a few of the writers and practitioners who have shaped my views on this topic.

This book is a formal presentation of the ADKAR model.

In addition to presenting ADKAR, I will also attempt to answer three fundamental questions about change using this model.

- Why do some changes fail when others succeed?
- How can we make sense of the many methods and tactics for managing change?
- How can we lead change successfully, both in our personal lives and professional careers?

The staff of the Change Management Learning Center has contributed many case studies, research findings and perspectives that hopefully will make this book engaging and applicable to both your work and life.

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