Chapter 7

The ADKAR Model

The ADKAR model has five elements that define the basic building blocks for successful change:

1. Awareness
2. Desire
3. Knowledge
4. Ability
5. Reinforcement

By its nature, ADKAR is an individual change management model. In other words, ADKAR represents the essential elements of change for a single person. When a group of individuals experience change, ADKAR can be used:

- As a coaching tool to support individuals through the change process
- To guide change management activities like communications, sponsorship, coaching and training
- To diagnose a struggling change by performing an ADKAR assessment

In the workplace, missing or weak elements of the ADKAR model can undermine business changes. In the absence of awareness and desire, you can expect more resistance from employees, slower adoption of the change, higher turnover and delays in implementation. If awareness and desire are extremely low, project failure is likely. In the absence of knowledge and ability, you can expect lower utilization throughout the organization, incorrect usage of new processes and tools, a negative impact on customers and a sustained reduction in productivity. In the absence of reinforcement, you can expect individuals to lose interest and revert to old behaviors. Each of these consequences impacts the probability of success for a change and lowers the return on investment (ROI) for the project overall.

When the ADKAR elements are achieved, employees become engaged and energized. The change is adopted faster. Employees contribute ideas and seek out new ways to support the change. Employees have the knowledge and ability to implement the change such that the business goals are realized or exceeded. Employees celebrate success. Flexibility and adaptability become part of the organization's value system; a more change-capable organization results.

Chapters 2 through 6 presented the ADKAR model and identified the factors that influence achievement of each element, as summarized in Figure 7-1. Understanding these factors help change leaders design change management programs that overcome the unique challenges in their organization.

Chapters 8 through 12 present change management tactics and techniques that have the greatest influence on each element of the ADKAR model, including:

- Communications
- Sponsorship
- Coaching
- Resistance management
- Training

ADKAR elements	Factors influencing success
Awareness of the need for change	• a person's view of the current state • how a person perceives problems • credibility of the sender of awareness messages • circulation of misinformation or rumors • contestability of the reasons for change
Desire to support and participate in the change	• the nature of the change (what the change is and how it will impact each person) • the organizational or environmental context for the change (his or her perception of the organization or environment that is subject to change) • each individual's personal situation • what motivates a person (those intrinsic motivators that are unique to an individual)
Knowledge of how to change	• the current knowledge base of an individual • the capability of this person to gain additional knowledge • resources available for education and training • access to or existence of the required knowledge
Ability to implement required skills and behaviors	• psychological blocks • physical abilities • intellectual capability • the time available to develop the needed skills • the availability of resources to support the development of new abilities
Reinforcement to sustain the change	• the degree to which the reinforcement is meaningful and specific to the person impacted by the change • the association of the reinforcement with actual demonstrated progress or accomplishment • the absence of negative consequences • an accountability system that creates an ongoing mechanism to reinforce the change

Figure 7-1 Factors influencing each element of the ADKAR model

Each change management activity plays a different role in the change process. For example, communications are instrumental in building awareness of the need for change. Sponsorship is a primary activity for creating awareness, desire and reinforcement. Training plays a key role in developing knowledge and ability (see Figure 7-2).

Change management activities	A	D	K	A	R
Communications	●				
Sponsorship	●	●			●
Coaching	●	●	●	●	●
Resistance management		●			
Training			●	●	

Figure 7-2 Mapping of change management activities to ADKAR

In a similar way, the primary players in the organization contribute differently as well. For example, the primary sponsor (also commonly referred to as the executive sponsor) plays a key role in building awareness and desire, and then provides reinforcement for the change. HR and training, along with the project team, play a primary role in developing knowledge and ability. Managers and supervisors play a critical role throughout the entire process (see Figure 7-3).

Change management players	A	D	K	A	R
Primary sponsor	●	●			●
Leadership coalition	●	●			
Managers and supervisors	●	●	●	●	●
HR and Training			●	●	
Project team			●	●	

Figure 7-3 Mapping of key players during change to ADKAR

Figure 7-4 presents a broader perspective on how change management activities are connected to business results through the ADKAR model. Managing change is not just about the tasks of communications, sponsorship or training. Managing the people side of change is about realizing change faster, with greater engagement (participation levels) and higher proficiency (performance) by all individuals affected by the change. The ultimate goal is to realize the objectives of the change and maximize the total return on investment. These results occur when change management activities create awareness, desire, knowledge and ability to succeed at the change, and when those activities reinforce the change to retain the benefits.

Specifically, Figure 7-4 lists the potential business objectives for a change, including reduced costs, higher revenues, improved quality and return on investment (ROI). Business objectives would also generally include expectations for the project to be "on time and on budget" (see examples in column 4 of Figure 7-4).

Change management strategy development	Change management activities	Change management elements - ADKAR	Business results
Assess the change	Communications	Awareness	On time
Assess the organization	Sponsorship	Desire	On budget
Assess sponsorship	Training	Knowledge	Achieve business objectives
Assess risks and challenges	Coaching	Ability	- lower costs
Design special tactics	Resistance Management	Reinforcement	- increased revenue
Form team and sponsor model			- improved quality
Assess team readiness			- return on investment (ROI)

Figure 7-4 – Aligning change management with business results

These business objectives are realized when the organization and individuals have achieved each element of the ADKAR model, including ability (see column 3 of Figure 7-4), since by definition this is the point in which employees have the demonstrated capability to implement the change at the required performance level.

In order to achieve each building block of the ADKAR model, change management activities such as effective communications, active and visible sponsorship, engaged and informed coaching, effective training and carefully directed resistance management must be completed (see column 2 in Figure 7-4).

In order for these *activities* to be successful, a well-defined strategy is needed that includes an assessment of the change and the organization, as well as assessments of the readiness of the project team and sponsors (see column 1). This completes the full cycle linking traditional change management activities

to business results through the ADKAR model.

The remainder of this chapter reviews several case studies to examine the application of the ADKAR model to both struggling and successful changes. The case studies selected range from broad and general to narrow and personal to help illustrate the application of the complete ADKAR model.

Hubbert's Peak and Peak Oil Production

On April 20, 2005, Roscoe Bartlett, Representative from Maryland, addressed the US House of Representatives. In this address Mr. Bartlett presented the issues that will face upcoming generations surrounding Hubbert's Peak.[1] Shell Oil scientist M. King Hubbert studied the production and depletion of oil fields in the 1940s and 1950s. He observed that each oil field's production capability followed a bell curve in which the total oil produced from that field increased until it reached its peak, and then gradually declined until the field was exhausted of oil. By taking a view of all oil fields in the United States, he was able to predict in 1956 that US oil production would peak around 1970. This prediction turned out to be accurate, as oil production in the US peaked in the seventies and has declined since then to about one half of peak level. Hubbert made a similar prediction that world oil production would peak in 2000. Since this prediction was made more than 40 years earlier, its accuracy was not as precise as the prediction of the US oil peak. Current geologists predict the peak for world production will occur between 2025 and 2045, with some predicting the peak sooner, depending on total oil consumption rates worldwide.

As world oil production approaches peak capacity, the gap between demand and supply will begin to grow. With the US increasing consumption at a rate of 2% per year and China at 10% per year, the demand for oil continues to rise. When we reach and ultimately "roll over" Hubbert's Peak (visualize a bell curve of which the top is referred to as Hubbert's Peak), the available oil supply flattens and eventually begins to drop

off. The growing gap between demand for oil and the dwindling supply of oil over time produces a change in the price per barrel. As the demand and supply gap grows the price per barrel of oil rises.

Because the industrialized world has built an infrastructure based on oil over the past 150 years, this phenomenon will have economic consequences beyond the rising cost of gasoline. Oil has become a fundamental building block in the developed world's infrastructure. Agricultural production, chemicals and plastics, and transportation are three areas that are deeply tied to the availability and price of oil. As the price per barrel of oil increases, so does the cost of goods and services, food and transportation. Because our perception of success equates to increasing productivity and output, we have created an economic model and stock market that is dependent on growth, yet we have built this model on a natural resource that is non-renewable and limited in supply.

During the past 100 years, when we were on the upside of Hubbert's Peak, this was a non-issue as oil production could meet the growth in consumption. As we approach and roll over Hubbert's Peak, consumption growth will rapidly outpace supply availability, and the economic impacts are predicted by some to be substantial.

Many people believe that oil production is not an issue because we have been told that the world's oil supply would not be depleted for several hundred years. What Bartlett, Hubbert and others are trying to communicate is that it is not the ultimate depletion but rather the arrival at peak production that is of concern.

Mr. Bartlett's address to Congress had a central theme beyond creating *awareness* of this issue. He presented data on how rapidly other sources of energy might augment oil. For example, the US government and private industry have been doing research on wind, passive and active solar, geothermal, bio-fuels, nuclear and other energy sources for some time.

Surely we can fill the energy gap. While this ultimately may be true, Mr. Bartlett's message is that the time required to create a sustainable infrastructure based on renewable and other non-renewable energy sources may be longer than we have available. In other words, the window of time in which we could augment oil with other energy sources, including the time necessary to build new infrastructure components, may be too long to avoid catastrophic impacts on our economy. He argues that we need to take immediate action to change both our current consumption rates and our deployment of alternatives in order to ensure that we have the time necessary to implement these alternatives. Bartlett's message is supported by a number of well-respected economists and members of the banking community. An open letter signed by more than 30 prominent business leaders and politicians was sent to the President of the United States in the spring of 2005 urging greater attention to overall risks faced by the dependence on oil.[2] In a separate message, the Federal Reserve System's chairman stated: "Altering the magnitude and manner of energy consumption will significantly affect the path of the global economy over the long term."[3]

If this is such a critical issue, why is change not occurring right now? If our economic future over the next 20 to 40 years is at risk, why aren't we taking action?

Over a six-month period, while leading conference sessions and seminars, I conducted informal assessments of people's awareness of this issue and their perceived need for change. Among more than 800 people at seminars and conferences, less than 10 out of 800 (1.25%) indicated any awareness of this concern. At most seminars with 20 to 50 participants, not a single hand was raised. An AP Wire story was published May 29, 2005, but this article did little to convey the powerful nature of this problem. If you rate awareness of the need for change on a scale of 1 to 5 with "1" being the lowest level of awareness and "5" being the highest, this change rated a "1."

If we apply the same scale to *desire*, then we must look at those factors that create a desire to change. First, the cost per barrel of oil has increased dramatically in the past five years. However, the price of gasoline at the pump has risen only marginally in the US and many people attribute that rise to normal seasonal adjustments and localized events (like what occurred with Hurricane Katrina in 2005). Moreover, the rise has not been enough to make people stop and ask what is happening. In other words, as individuals we are not feeling the pain. Moreover, the time scales for this problem are long and the American public can be slow to react to problems that are not immediate. It cannot be said that there is no desire to conserve, but when assessed across the broad spectrum of industry and public use, the desire to change is low. Since the real impact of this phenomenon may not be felt for 10 to 20 years, there is also no pressing desire to change behaviors today. On a scale of 1 to 5, desire to change at best rates a "2."

For *knowledge*, the overall outlook is quite different. Research into alternative energy sources and methods for conservation have been in place for years. The National Renewable Energy Lab has been operating since 1977 when it started as the Solar Energy Research Institute with work on solar, wind, bio-mass and geothermal energy sources. Other organizations, including the Department of Energy, have been working on nuclear fission, nuclear fusion and hydro-electric sources. The issue with most of these alternatives is that the price per kilowatt produced is usually higher than the cost of energy produced from oil. With nuclear fission and breeder reactors, the waste products are problematic. Nuclear fusion would address most of this issue and produce little waste product, but we are not yet able to sustain a nuclear fusion reaction similar to what powers the sun.

If oil production peaked today, we do not have the infrastructure or capacity to meet the energy demands with alternative sources. In the case of nuclear fusion, this is a

knowledge issue. However, with other renewable sources our knowledge level is quite high. On a scale of 1 to 5, this change would rate somewhere between a "3" or "4" depending on how fusion is factored into the assessment.

From the perspective of *ability*, the primary challenge for alternative energy sources is the time required for infrastructure development. As we approach Hubbert's Peak for worldwide oil production, the demand and supply gap may grow faster than we can replace oil with renewable and other non-renewable sources. For example, with a 2% growth rate per year (current US growth rate for oil consumption), the amount of oil consumed is doubling every 35 years. At a 10% growth rate (current Chinese growth rate for oil consumption), the amount of oil consumed is doubling every seven years. You can see that once we approach peak oil production worldwide, the demand pressure will far exceed the available supply. This is what will cause oil prices and gas prices to escalate. In terms of *ability* to implement the change toward alternative energy sources, on a scale of 1 to 5, we rate a low score ("2" or "3") because of the time required to create alternative energy channels and the associated infrastructure compared to the relatively short time window that we may have available.

Over the past 30 years we have had very little *reinforcement* toward a change to alternative sources of energy. For example, individuals who have attempted solar or wind for their homes have struggled to achieve a return on their investment, especially when maintenance costs are included. The housing industry overall has not integrated solar into their building materials or roofing systems, and most single-family homes built today are nearly identical to those built 20 years ago. Alternative sources for transportation have produced little economic reward, and even hydrogen vehicles are not addressing the core issue of energy production. Hydrogen fuel cells are not an energy production source, but rather an energy storage device. Traditional energy sources are still needed to separate

hydrogen from water to energize the fuel cell.

If you pull these assessment scores together for Hubbert's Peak and peak oil production, with "1" being the lowest score and "5" being the highest, you have:

- Awareness – 1
- Desire – 2
- Knowledge – 3
- Ability – 2
- Reinforcement – 1

This score can be represented by a simple profile as shown in Figure 7-5.

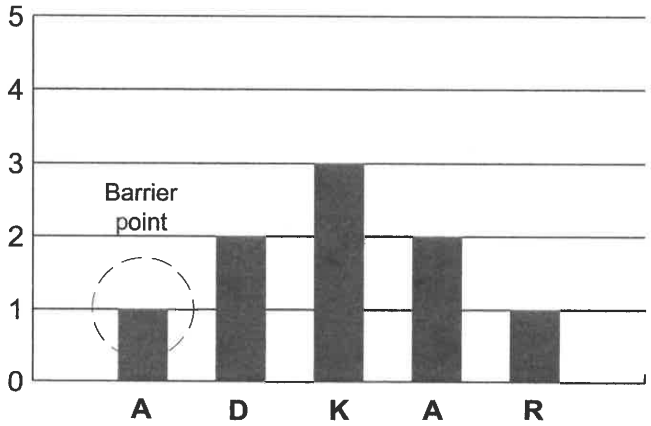

Figure 7-5 ADKAR profile for large-scale alternative energy production

The ADKAR profile for this change is very weak. The barrier point for this change, defined here as the first element that scores a three or lower in the ADKAR assessment, is *awareness*. The complication around this issue is that even if awareness were raised, desire would then become the barrier point. Since

our economic models rely on supply and demand to fix the price and therefore curb consumption, desire will not be substantially changed until the price rises considerably. However, by the time the prices rise enough to impact demand, it may be too late to avoid the downturn that will occur within our oil-based economic infrastructure.

The insight provided by the ADKAR model in this case study is that pouring more money into research of alternative energy sources will not by itself create a change to address the issue surrounding peak oil production. Without *awareness* of the need for change and *desire* to engage and participate in the change, implementation of renewable energy sources will stay low, and the risk we face with this issue will remain.

Social Security and Medicare insolvency

Social Security reform in the US has become a major political issue, with the projection that Social Security would become insolvent between 2042 and 2047. Many solutions have been put forth by the Republican and Democratic parties, including progressive indexing, personal accounts, privatization of the Social Security system and changing the payroll ceiling on Social Security and Medicare taxes. So, why do these solutions not move forward? Is it that these ideas are not solid approaches to the problem? If these ideas are not the best ones, can we find other solutions?

This set of questions is a normal response to the Social Security quandary. However, if you look at the needed change through the lens of ADKAR, you will find that the barrier point to change is not about the "right answer."

For Social Security funding changes, the ADKAR assessment profile would look something like:

- Awareness – 5
- Desire – 2

- Knowledge – 3
- Ability – 4
- Reinforcement – 3

The ADKAR profile is shown in Figure 7-6.

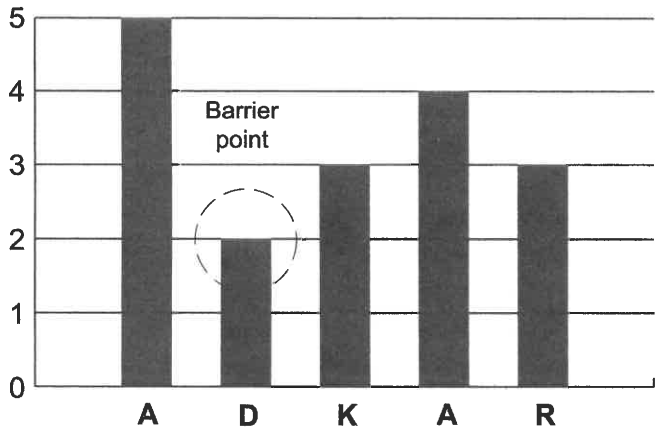

Figure 7-6 ADKAR profile for Social Security reform

A 2005 *USA Today* poll showed that a large majority of Americans are aware of the need for change with Social Security. The widespread media coverage of the issue has raised awareness significantly.

In terms of desire, however, the overall pulse of the nation is quite mixed. By age group, support for Social Security differs dramatically. For example, if you are 50 to 70 years old, you most likely want little or no change to Social Security for fear that your benefits (which you have built over a lifetime) will be reduced. The AARP is also lobbying aggressively for this segment of the population and is appealing directly to the taxpayers through television ads. Essentially the message is "don't do anything dramatic to the US Social Security system."

If you are in the age group 18 to 30, your view may be quite different. Many people in this age group are hearing that it does not matter because Social Security may not be there for them anyway. Taxpayers between the ages 30 to 50 are more prone to support some change, but for many of them the problem is too far out in the future to have an immediate impact.

The net result is that the most impacted group (50-70 years of age), which also is speaking the loudest, has the lowest desire for substantive change to Social Security. Moreover, at this point in history the percentage of taxpayers in this age range is higher than it ever has been in the past. Hence the desire to change is relatively low overall.

Given the political nature of this issue, it will be difficult to move ahead on a solution. In fact, spending more time on how to solve the problem will not be productive until we can increase the overall desire to make a substantial change to Social Security.

Instead, what can happen in these situations is that more time is spent developing a solution that lessens the overall impact on the most outspoken and resistant group. In other words, change is slowed or sub-optimized by a conflict of interests. The final solution is compromised to reduce this resistance. The net result may not be the best overall solution to the insolvency problem, but rather a solution that minimizes the impact on a particular segment of the population.

By using ADKAR as a framework for looking at this change, you can quickly identify the barriers to change and create a more holistic view of what would be required to move this change forward.

Towel reuse program in hotels

The towel reuse program case study that was presented in Chapter 4 is an example of a successful change. The ADKAR profile for this change is:

- Awareness – 5
- Desire – ?
- Knowledge – 5
- Ability – 5
- Reinforcement – 3

The ADKAR profile is shown in Figure 7-7.

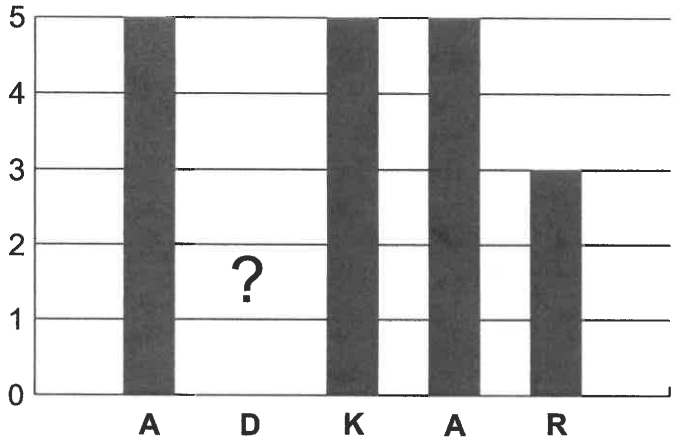

Figure 7-7 ADKAR profile for towel reuse program

Here is an example of a change initiated by a single person that has impacted thousands of hotel guests and has enabled most major hotel chains to adopt a similar program. Why did this change succeed? All of the ADKAR components were high except for desire, and desire is that choice left to the hotel guest. In this case, desire to be environmentally conscious and less wasteful is high for many guests, and hence, the program is successful.

Once you have seen examples of applying ADKAR in different circumstances, you can apply this model to your changes

to increase the probability of success. You can also better understand why past changes were successes or failures. For example, why have quality-improvement programs succeeded for some organizations and failed for others? Why has Six Sigma taken off for some companies but struggled in others? Why do technology changes produce significant ROI for some companies and little return for other companies?

Summary

Successful change is realized when two goals are achieved as shown in Figure 7-8 below. First, the business must realize the full implementation of the change so that the business objectives are met. This is the vertical axis of Figure 7-8. Second, the organization must migrate through each element of the ADKAR model so that individuals are able to implement the change and reinforcements are in place to sustain the change. Failure to achieve either goal can result in partially successful or failed changes.

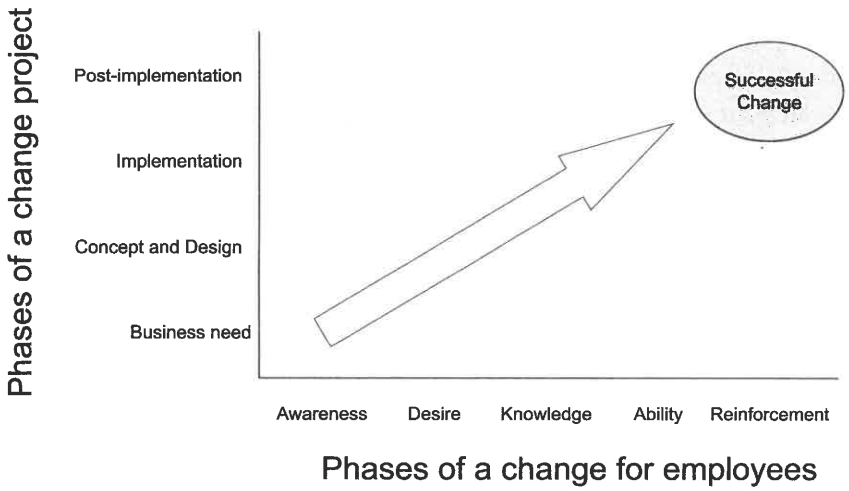

Figure 7-8 Success factors for change using ADKAR

ADKAR is a results-oriented model that provides a framework for how change management tactics and techniques (including communications, sponsorship, readiness assessments, coaching, training and resistance management) come together to produce change. The elements of the ADKAR model must occur in sequence and they are cumulative. In other words, each ADKAR element is a building block. All of the building blocks need to remain present in order for the change to be sustained.

The building block nature of the model is important in terms of application of ADKAR for business, government or community change. The ADKAR elements must be established in order. When an element early in the model is weak, then the change begins to break down. Hence the term "barrier point" is used to refer to the first element of the model that is weak or would be assessed as "low." For example, if both awareness and knowledge were considered low for a specific change, then awareness would be the barrier point for this change and must be addressed before knowledge.

When changes are not succeeding, ADKAR provides a diagnostic framework that is simple and easy to apply. Using this framework you can analyze your change management plan, assess your strengths and weaknesses, and target your energy at the barrier points to change.

For managers and supervisors, ADKAR is an easy-to-learn change management tool that enables them to help employees through the change process.

How can you apply the ADKAR model? Chapters 8 through 13 present how different change management strategies align with and result in movement through each element of the ADKAR model. Chapter 14 presents applications of ADKAR to different situations, including:

- A learning tool for teaching change management, especially when analyzing case studies of successful and failed changes

- A framework for change management teams to evaluate their change management plans
- A coaching tool for managers and supervisors
- An assessment tool for diagnosing changes underway and identifying potential barrier points to change
- A planning tool for behavioral change