

Spring 2013

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**ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: MODELS FOR SUCCESSFULLY
IMPLEMENTING CHANGE**

by

Ashley May Calder

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

**HONORS IN UNIVERSITY STUDIES
WITH DEPARTMENTAL HONORS**

in

**Human Resource Management
in the Department of Management**

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Spring 2013

Organizational Change: Models for Successfully Implementing Change

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Abstract

Does it matter what change model is used to make a change in an organization? If so, why? Are certain models more effective than others based on the kind of change that is made (i.e. technology-based verses people-based)? What overlaps exist between these models? What is the strongest point of each model? What is the weakest point? Are any of the change models currently used in companies? This article defines three change models: ADKAR, Lewin's Change Model and John Kotter's Eight Steps for Leading Organizational Change. Using 16 personal interviews with individuals from large and small companies, I will explain why it may matter what change model is used, depending on the situation and level of former organizational change experience. Some of the individuals I interviewed are aware of a specific change model but do not use it in their company. I will begin by explaining each change model individually. I will compare the models to see what similarities and differences can be found. Then I will explain why the change model used in an organization, whether by an individual or by all of management, may be based more on preference than on superiority.

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ADKAR

The ADKAR model was created to implement change “in business, government and our community” (Hiatt, 2006, front cover). This model focuses on principles of change that are effective on an individual level. These same principles are designed to be applied to a large group of people or even an entire organization. ADKAR is an acronym that stands for Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability and Reinforcement. Each of these words represents a step in the change process and must be done in order so that the desired change is achieved.

The focus of this model is on people—how to change people, not things, programs, etc. In the ADKAR model, you will not find a list of steps to take to complete a project as you would if you were a project manager (PM) using PM tools and templates. Let’s discuss the steps of this model.

- *Awareness* – To initiate a change, an individual must know what needs to change and why. What are the risks of not changing? How will the change benefit the individual? What will she or he gain by making the change? Without knowing that there is a need for change, an individual will not likely have a desire to change. One interviewee, whose profession is based around organizational change, stated that making changes is all about relationships and trust (C. Ganiere, personal communication, August 22, 2012).
- *Desire* – Once an individual knows what needs to be changed, it is imperative to help him or her find the desire to support the change. Without this support, a lot of resistance may be given to those who are implementing the change. “A common mistake made by many business leaders is to assume that by building *awareness* of the need for change they have also created *desire*” (Hiatt, 2006, p. 18, italics in original).

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Someone may know that smoking can lead to cancer, heart disease, and other undesirable health conditions but still continue to smoke because of a lack of desire to change. This individual is aware of the need to change and the risks involved for continuing to smoke, but the desire isn't there. The same can be true of organizational change. What must be done to create desire? Several tactics may be used, which include utilizing past organizational habits and successes, showing how the change will benefit those affected by the change, drawing on past individual successes with similar changes, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivators are specific to an individual, not a group. Something that motivates one individual to change may not motivate all individuals. Extrinsic motivators can be any type of motivation that comes from anyone or anything other than the individual. For example: bonuses, job security, promotions, or even just encouragement from co-workers or friends. One interviewee said that she doesn't need an iPad because she isn't a technology person, but Apple made her *feel* like she did, so she bought one (V. Agnihotri, personal communication, September 11, 2012). Apple created a desire in her to change, and she did.

- *Knowledge* – The information necessary to make a change is given to the individual. This includes information about the new programs, systems or behaviors that will be implemented. Providing the information is important because individuals don't always seek to do things they don't know how to do. For example, someone who doesn't know how to change the oil in a car will probably be less prone to do so until she or he receives instructions on how to do so.

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- *Ability* – This is the step where knowledge turns to action, or as one interviewee explained, this is where concepts turn into reality (D. Lee, personal communication, August 20 and 24, 2013). Knowing how to change the oil and actually changing it are two different things, just like knowing how to swim and actually swimming are two different things. Thus, an individual will need support and help when utilizing the knowledge needed to make a change. Having someone to turn to for questions when you don't know what to do next, as may be the case with changing oil, is a welcomed support when learning something new.
- *Reinforcement* – The individual needs to know when she or he is achieving the desired outcome. Using an accountability system is recommended. One interviewee, who works with PM, encouraged celebrating the small victories won toward the ultimate goal (D. Lee, personal communication, August 20 and 24, 2012). Celebrating the small successes can be the key to continued implementation of a change. Recognizing the progress of an individual who has faced great difficulty in making a change is especially important, because this recognition encourages this individual to keep going. Although group recognition is beneficial, individual recognition by someone the individual respects is even more meaningful. Change can be driven by outside influences, bad decisions or fear. But even when change is motivated by the right reasons, it is still difficult to do right and can create unforeseen consequences, which aren't always positive (C. LaBarge, personal communication, August 14, 2012). Avoid giving negative consequences when an individual displays the desired behavior.

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To recap, ADKAR principles focus on changing one person, an individual. These principles can be used on a larger scale to make changes in an organization or community. One interviewee is familiar with this model, but she doesn't use a specific model in her change implementation and adoption efforts (V. Agnihotri, personal communication, September 11, 2012). Another interviewee who works in organizational development recommended researching Prosci's ADKAR model, which I have just discussed (A. Hall, personal communication, August 16, 2012).

Lewin's Change Model

A very simple change model was invented by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (Kreitner, Kinicki, 2007, p. 584). It includes three steps:

1. Unfreezing,
2. Changing, and
3. Refreezing.

This model assumes the change is planned and emphasizes that no matter what kind of change is being made (i.e. structure-, system- or behavior-related), people are always the root of the change. This model also places a heavy focus on reducing resistance to change by referring to two forces in an organization—driving forces and restraining forces. Driving forces are reasons people are motivated to change. Restraining forces represent reasons people are hesitant to change. With these forces in mind, let's look at Lewin's change model.

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Stages of Lewin's Change Model

1. *Unfreezing* – This stage is the preparatory stage for a change to occur and takes place as driving forces become greater than restraining forces. People are more motivated than hesitant to change. People prepare to make the desired change. However, to get to this point, a lot of resistance, such as fear of the unknown or breaking old habits, must be overcome. The following tactics may be used to reduce resistance. Each can be used in the appropriate setting.
 - *Communication* – Keep people updated about the status of the change. Make employees aware of how the change will impact them, for good or for bad. One interviewee stated that not being transparent bothers people more than the change itself (V. Agnihotri, personal communication, September 11, 2012). An interviewee, who was in the middle of a large organizational restructure, said that most people are willing to look past themselves and support the change if they can understand the “why” behind it (D. Ford, personal communication, August 13, 2012).
 - *Training* – Give people the knowledge and skills needed to reach expectations.
 - *Employee involvement* – Include certain employees in decisions about the change. Allow them to share their ideas.
 - *Stress management* – Give employees opportunities to discuss with someone their concerns regarding the change. Sometimes simply knowing what is doable (in regards to making adjustments to the change based on an employee's concerns) is all an employee needs to be satisfied that his or her concerns were

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taken into consideration as much as possible. Then this individual is willing to support the change (D. Ford, personal communication, August 13, 2012).

- *Negotiation* – Give employees something they want to persuade them to make the change.
 - *Coercion* – Give employees an “ultimatum”: Make the change or be let go. This is an extreme example, but people don’t change simply because they are asked to (C. Ganiere, personal communication, August 22, 2012). They need a reason to do so, and sometimes this method of reducing resistance is necessary.
2. *Changing* – This stage is when the change actually occurs. People learn the new behaviors, systems, structures, etc.
 3. *Refreezing* – This stage is where the change is reinforced. This is done through feedback and organizational rewards for demonstrating the desired behavior.

Lewin’s model demonstrates the process of change in one of the simplest forms possible. Specific resistance-reducer tactics are outlined to facilitate the least resistant and least stressful change process possible.

Kotter’s Eight Steps for Leading Organizational Change

John Kotter, a leadership and change management expert, developed a change model to combat what he felt were eight main reasons for unsuccessful organizational change (Kreitner, Kinicki, 2007, p. 588). He focuses on *leading* change rather than managing it. His model indicates that upper-level management carries a heavy responsibility to lead its organization through a change. One interviewee, who does change management consulting,

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echoed this train of thought. He feels that leadership needs to be leading the change. Changes in an organization can be made from the bottom up, but at some point, the key players—the leaders—need to be involved (D. Romney, personal communication, August 9, 2012). Multiple interviewees stressed the incredible importance of earning the support of the leaders responsible for approving or implementing the change. One interviewee in particular described the importance of leadership sponsorship as “huge” (D. Lee, personal communication, August 20 and 24, 2012). Without this support, the change process can be extremely difficult or slow. Kotter gives the following eight steps to organizational leaders as a guide to successful change:

1. *Establish a sense of urgency for change.* Explain why the change is needed to get employees on board. People don't change the way they do things because it's a good idea, commented one interviewee. People follow leadership (F. Puelle, personal communication, August 13 and 15, 2012). Two interviewees shared how their company's leaders talked about a “burning platform” and that if the employees didn't change, really bad consequences would result (i.e. the “platform” would burn from underneath them) because the change was an absolute must-do (C. LaBarge, personal communication, August 14, 2012; F. Puelle, personal communication, August 13 and 15, 2012). Their company gave its employees an image to emphasize the need to change quickly.
2. *Create the guiding coalition.* Gather a group of people from various departments and levels in the organization that is large enough to lead the change. A change will likely be unsuccessful if only one person is pushing its implementation. A team is needed. Bring together individuals with the knowledge, skills, and authority necessary to make the

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change and assign each person responsibilities and roles to fill and report on (D. Lee, personal communication, September 26, 2012).

3. *Establish a vision and strategy.* This step is particularly important. Many people that I interviewed mentioned that having a clear understanding of what needs to change and why is crucial to making a successful change. Without this clear understanding of the value of making the change, the next step—communicating the change—is much more difficult, and getting employees to make the change is as well. Putting success measurements in place before changing anything was also a common theme among the interviewees. Sometimes everyone is just “trying to survive” and “get it done” (referring to the change being made) rather than be concerned with making sure the results of the change are tracked and quantified, even though these results are very important (D. Lee, personal communication, August 20 and 24, 2012). Knowing if a change is successful is difficult to measure if no before and after data, or documentation at all, is collected. These measurements are what enable change managers and others to see what success looks like and what the goal is (D. Lee, personal communication, August 20 and 24, 2012). Below are examples of success metrics given by two interviewees that may be helpful when planning a change (D. Lee, personal communication, August 20 and 24, 2012; F. Puelle, personal communication, August 13 and 15, 2012).

- a. *Quantitative* – How many people will use the product?
- b. *Qualitative* – How useful will the product be to the users?
- c. *Time* – When will the product be implemented?
- d. *Cost* – Will we save money? How? Are we on budget?

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- e. *Customer Satisfaction* – Will our customers prefer the new product over the old product? Why?
4. *Communicate the change vision.* Constantly communicate the new vision and strategy, especially to those who will be impacted. One interviewee said that if you don't know how to communicate what the change is and why it is important in 30 seconds or less, it is time to go back to the drawing board because the vision of what needs to change isn't clear enough yet (D. Ford, personal communication, August 13, 2012). Another interviewee, who deals with communicating change to employees, said to explain how the change will benefit the employees and to also listen to them a lot. Communication is not what is said but rather what is heard (V. Agnihotri, personal communication, September 11, 2012).
5. *Empower broad-based action.* Remove obstacles to obtain the vision. If roadblocks exist (which, based on the information I gathered during my interviews, roadblocks are more common than not) they must be removed before employees will climb aboard the change ship.
6. *Create short-term wins.* Plan periodic wins and recognize those who help achieve them so employees don't get discouraged.
7. *Consolidate gains and produce more change.* Don't declare victory too soon. Use the reputation of short-term wins to continue making changes.
8. *Anchor new approaches in the culture.* Changes can take years to become entrenched in the organization's culture, so a process needs to be developed to ensure successors in leadership continue reinforcing the change.

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As can be seen, Kotter's model places a heavy emphasis on the leaders' responsibilities and roles in organizational change. The main idea is to get the change momentum going quickly and keep it going until the change is made and becomes a part of the organization's function or culture.

Comparison of Three Change Models

Now that we've learned about each of the three change models, let's compare them to see what similarities and differences exist. I will do this by showing how the ADKAR and Kotter models fit into Lewin's Change Model and also how they vary from it. These comparisons will take into account when each change model would be most effective to make an organizational change.

Each step in the ADKAR model can be found in Lewin's model when the resistance-reduction tactics are included. Examine the parallels below to see how these two models line up.

- Unfreezing = Awareness, Desire and Knowledge
- Changing = Ability
- Refreezing = Reinforcement

Awareness is included in communication, one of Lewin's resistance-reducing tactics, and Knowledge is included in training, another resistance-reducing tactic.

Kotter's Eight Steps for Leading Organizational Change can also be found within the framework of Lewin's model. See the similarities below.

- Unfreezing = First 4 steps

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- Changing = Steps 5-7
- Refreezing = Step 8

Kotter goes into a lot of detail in the Unfreezing stage. Both Lewin and Kotter recognize the importance of reducing resistance and preparing people to fully support the change before actually embarking on changing anything.

Although both ADKAR and Kotter's model fit within Lewin's model, all three contain components or emphases of organizational change that aren't found in each other's model. For example, Lewin focuses more on involving employees and giving them the needed knowledge to change rather than creating a desire to change, as emphasizes the ADKAR model. Lewin also focuses more on overcoming resistance and doesn't expand much on the other aspects of change. Although ADKAR does cover this topic in the "Desire" step, Lewin seems to emphasize resistance more. Kotter focuses on senior management making changes rather than any employee or individual making changes, unlike the Lewin and ADKAR models. Additionally, Kotter gives a much more in-depth explanation overall of how change should be made. Unlike the ADKAR model, Kotter emphasizes not only the need to explain *why* the change is necessary but also the need to convey *urgency*. Kotter explicitly states the need to establish and communicate a vision and strategy. ADKAR simply discusses providing the individual(s) with the information required to make the change. Both ADKAR and Kotter include removing barriers or resistance to change. However, Kotter encourages "risk taking and creative problem solving" to do this (Kreitner, Kinicki, 2007, p. 589). Although both talk about reinforcing the change, ADKAR focuses on doing this with individuals or employees whereas Kotter focuses on doing this through senior management (i.e. succession planning to ensure the next leaders continue

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to reinforce the change). ADKAR targets individuals in any group (personal, government, community) and is a model developed to be applicable to one individual or many individuals. Kotter's model specifically targets what senior leadership needs to do to implement a change (the role of senior management in making an organizational change). Kotter focuses on leading, not managing, a change. ADKAR doesn't focus on this as much.

Which Change Model is the Best?

Many interviewees mentioned either one of the change models discussed above or another change model. After having analyzed each of the change models above, it is clear to see that all three change models have overlaps. They all indicate the need to make people aware that a change must be made and why the change is important. They all include some suggestion or need for reinforcing a change. Many other commonalities may be found. Having determined this, these models also focus their emphasis on different aspects of change, whether these be the audience (senior management verses employees), the group size (one individual verses an organization) or one of the steps of change (reducing resistance verses leading, not managing, a change).

Knowing this, perhaps what matters when determining what change model to use is who is initiating the change, the experience with which this person or group of people is equipped, and how much guidance she or he prefers during the change process. Beginners may want to use the ADKAR model because each change step is clearly defined. In contrast, Lewin's model is quite simple and doesn't include lots of details that a beginner may want or need. However, the advantage with his model is that Lewin gives many suggestions of how to

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overcome resistance, which may be very useful the first few times an individual leads a change initiative. Lewin's model may also be useful if a lot of opposition is received when implementing a change and you need some ideas of how to annul this resistance. If top management is responsible to make a change, perhaps Kotter's model would be the best fit, since his model is geared specifically toward upper-level management and what these individuals need to do to *lead* (not manage) a change. Someone who already has experience with leading organizational change may simply want to refer to all three change models as a reference in times of need.

Therefore, maybe the best answer to the question, "Does it matter what change model is used?" would be, "It depends." If you are an expert already in organizational change, you most likely already have a personal way of implementing change and don't refer to a model; whereas if you are a beginner, you most likely will want some guidance concerning where to start and what to do next. In the latter case, referencing several change models may be the best route to take. Glean what you can from each and use the aspects that you feel will best benefit your organization and you. One interviewee, who has years of experience in change management in many industries, said that using a specific methodology doesn't work—the change leader must base the method on the company and what fits best there (C. Gainer, personal communication, August 16, 2012). Another interviewee, who is a strategic change consultant, said his company uses this phrase: "All models are evil, but some are useful" (D. Romney, personal communication, August 9, 2012). In other words, each change situation will be different. Companies are unique and no one model is best for every company or perhaps for every situation. This interviewee may have said this because implementing a change is not a

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“Use this model and your change will be successful” type of situation. Using a specific model does not guarantee success in your change efforts. What matters are soft skills. These (soft skills) are what make or break any change project, according to an interviewee who works with PM (D. Lee, personal communication, August 20 and 24, 2012). However, according to another interviewee, who has done change management for several years and is currently an information technology project manager, change management, at some level, will be the same regardless of the change that is being made (F. Puelle, personal communication, August 13 and 15, 2012). Another interviewee agrees that change management steps don’t really change, no matter what the change is (V. Agnihotri, personal communication, September 11, 2012).

The main thing to remember is that without individuals who are willing to change, no change will succeed no matter what change model is used. Therefore, be sure to prepare well for, and address, resistance to change. Most change fails because someone is trying to force someone else to do something, commented one interviewee. He said change has to be about *what’s right, not who’s right*” (D. Romney, personal communication, August 9, 2012).

My Recommendation

My personal experience with change management during my internship in the summer of 2012 helped me to see the importance of not getting bogged down in the details of change. One interviewee commented that “the devil’s in the details” (D. Lee, personal communication, August 20 and 24, 2012). To complement this statement, in a separate interview, another individual said, “Keep it simple” (D. Ford, personal communication, August 13, 2012). I agree with this. Changes are made (or at least should be made) based on the organization’s vision,

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goals, focus and strategy. Allowing the details to block out the “why” underlying the change blinds individuals from seeing the importance of the change in connection to what the organization stands for, which causes them to think, “Let’s get this done and move onto the next thing we need to do.” Sometimes because so many details were involved in the change my team was helping to implement, I would lose sight of why the change really mattered and would want to move onto the next task as soon as possible so that we could make the change quickly and be done. I simply wanted the change to be done. I wasn’t focused on what the desired outcome was or what the most foundational reason was for the change. Therefore, my recommendation is that no matter what model you choose to use, keep the change simple. Employees need feedback, and they need to know how the change is progressing. If they don’t know how close they are to finishing implementing a change, or if they feel like nothing is being accomplished, they may very well get discouraged and lose motivation.

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