

# What is Change Management?

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It's time to work on YOU. So sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

In this lesson, you will get to know more about the challenge that is change management. The first objective of this lesson is to develop a clear understanding of what change management actually is. We'll contextualise this understanding by introducing some of the leading change management theories.

The second objective will focus on how to guide a team through a change management process. What is important to remember when doing so? And what steps does one take to ensure that a team successfully adapts to change?

Third on the list of objectives for this lesson is understanding how you deal with change in your own job or sphere of influence. Closely allied to that is the fourth objective, which is to gain an appreciation of why change can be good and positive for you and your organisation.

These objectives will provide you with a good understanding of change management and how it can be achieved. You will also better appreciate the nuanced ways in which it can positively impact you, your employees, and your organisation.

So, let's go for it!

Mary K. Pratt, an award-winning freelance journalist who focuses on management and strategy, provides a comprehensive definition of the concept we're discussing when she says:

*Change management is a systematic approach to dealing with the transition or transformation of an organization's goals, processes or technologies. [1]*

Why is change management implemented? The name gives it away - in short, it is implemented so that change can be affected and controlled. Importantly, it also involves helping management and employees to adapt to needed change. [2]

As in life, change is inevitable for any organisation - on average, organisations today have gone through five major firmwide changes in the past three years. [3] It can also come in many different forms. There are three common types of change that typically occur in organisations. The first is developmental change, which is change that tries to improve that which is already in place in an organisation, such as updating recruitment procedures due to evolving equity demands. The second is transitional change, whereby an organisation needs to move to new ways of doing things, such as after being acquired by a new owner or merging with another company or division. The third is also the most dramatic and difficult to plan, and it's called transformational change. This is when an organisation tries to fundamentally change the very way in which it operates, usually with an emphasis on changing the existing culture within an organisation. [4]

It makes sense that transformational change is the most difficult to predict in terms of time and outcomes, given that organisational culture is a very tricky thing to get right and, indeed, to change effectively.

A good way to better understand change management is to get a handle on some of the leading models on it. [5] The first we'll touch on is the ADKAR model [6], as created by Jeff Hiatt, founder of Prosci - the global leader in change management solutions. His model is an acronym that consists of five steps:

*Awareness - of the need for change.*

*Desire - to participate in and support the change.*

*Knowledge - on how to change.*

*Ability - implement desired skills and behaviours.*

*Reinforcement - to sustain the change that has been acquired.*

Organisational changes often fail because employees don't understand the importance of getting on board the change or how to successfully make the change.

The ADKAR Model addresses these challenges by equipping leaders with the right strategies and tools, and individuals with the right information, motivation, and ability to successfully move through changes in the organization.

The second model is the McKinsey 7-S Framework [7], which homes in on seven key factors needed to affect change. They are strategy, structure, systems, staff, skills, style, and shared values. The theory addresses the critical role of coordination, rather than structure, in organizational effectiveness. Each of the 7 Ss is equally important - there is no hierarchy, they all must be considered together when trying to make business change.

The third and simplest approach is from noted psychologist Kurt Lewin, with the following three-step model. [8]

*Step 1: Unfreeze, which is identifying what needs to change and setting that change in motion.*

*Step 2: Change, which is the actual change process, and*

*Step 3: Freeze, which can also be Refreeze, in which the change is successfully and actively adopted and embedded within an organisation.*

So, how exactly do you guide your team through a change process?

Firstly, acknowledge that most change is difficult to attain. Only 34% of the time do companies report clear success. [3] That is exactly why change management is such an important function within most organisations.

Secondly, and furthermore, change often outright fails - according to one Gartner study, about half of the time. Why is that? It's simple, really: humans don't typically like change. Woodrow Wilson once famously said, "If you want to make enemies, try to change something."

More specifically, hatred or fear of change often comes down more acutely to a lack of understanding. Too often, there is a disconnect between those who plan change and those who are affected by it. Indeed, the same Gartner study says

In order for big changes to take hold, people at every level of the organisation need to understand why these changes are taking place. With a top-down approach, the gap in understanding between the C-suite and entry-level employees is a whopping 31%. Compare this to an open-source change strategy, where that gap shrinks to a mere 3%.

Most of us are creatures of habit and routine, including in the workplace. In fact, probably *especially* in the workplace, right? We derive purpose, focus, and, critically, a sense of security from the habits and routines in our work. So if that work is to be disturbed, there needs to be buy-in.

If you are a leader, you need to make your team or group of employees believe in the change that is being asked of them. There's no point in trying to be authoritarian or dictatorial about it because that is not going to work - not in the modern workplace. Employees need to be convinced of *why* the change is necessary, *when* the change is expected, *where* in the organisation the change will be affected, *how* it will be done, and *what* is expected of them in the given change management process.

The more included, valued and respected employees feel about their role in the change needed, including their inputs and opinions, the more likely the change management process will be successful.

A key aspect of attaining this is to treat employees or team members as individuals in the process and not a homogeneous group on which the change is effectively dumped. Different people react in different ways to change and being able to recognise and deal accordingly with different personalities could be crucially important.

One approach could be the DISC model, which stands for Dominance-Influence-Steadiness-Conscientiousness, by which people are divided into four main personality types, namely those who like action and being innovative, those who are people-oriented and sociable, those who seek balance and those who are practical and task-oriented.

Employee engagement surveys could also be helpful in ascertaining what may be the fears and reasons for resistance to change by employees. This will assist you in being able to address these challenges and allay the fears and resistance of those who need to be part of the change.

You may find yourself on the other end of the 'change stick,' so to speak; that is, being on the receiving end of needed changes and not solely managing the change. As for how to deal with having to change in your job, the following simple considerations could be valuable:

1. Fight your inner, and very human, instinct to be fearful or resentful of change. Rather, see it as a potential opportunity for growth within your job and career.
2. Immediately try to get a handle on what the expected change is, why it is being implemented and what your expected role is to be. Knowing as much as possible about the change will empower you and make it feel less daunting and even disruptive.
3. Take it as an opportunity to evaluate your role within your department and organisation. Perhaps now is the time to suggest where and how you believe your strengths can be better utilised. Being proactive during a time of change or upheaval can make you look like a go-getter who seeks to improve yourself at a time when it takes courage to do so.

Let it be said loud and clear: Stagnation is not good for any professional or any organisation. Complacency sets in, and, at the very least, the striving to improve or be the best possible professional or organisation suffers. Change is an excellent way of breaking complacency and getting out of a stagnant funk, whether as an entire organisation or individual employee. However, any change must have a focus to have any chance of success. There needs to be an end goal, even if it is a complex one or one that may take a lot of effort and even time to realise, such as the complete overhaul of a marketing strategy or the launch of a completely divergent line of products.

Change also needs training or upskilling that matches the new or improved ways in which processes or activities are to be done. For example, you cannot implement an organization-wide and sweeping new commitment to sustainability if employees do not understand the fundamentals or objectives of sustainable development or triple-bottom-line thinking.

Let's recap, shall we? You should now have a clearer understanding of what change management is and how it can be successfully implemented with your

teams. There should also be an appreciation of how change can affect you in your work and, better still, how change can bring about much-needed development and help you get out of that dreaded rut.

Next time you are confronted with change at work, remember to fight your inner instincts of fear or rejection, quickly get a handle on what the expected change is and use this period as an opportunity to evaluate your role in the organisation.

[1] *What is Change Management?*, George Lawton and Mary K. Pratt, (2022)  
<https://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/change-management#:~:text=Change%20management%20is%20a%20systematic,people%20to%20adapt%20to%20change.>

[2] *What is Change Management?*, ASQ.org  
<https://asq.org/quality-resources/change-management>

[3] *Organizational Change Management*, Gartner  
<https://www.gartner.com/en/human-resources/insights/organizational-change-management>

[4] *Change Management: The essential guide to transformational growth*, Jayson Darby, Thomas.Co, (2023)  
<https://www.thomas.co/resources/type/hr-guides/guide-change-management#:~:text=How%20do%20you%20motivate%20employees,feedback%20during%20the%20change%20process.>

[5] *Change Management: The Essential Guide to Transformational Growth*, Beehive, (2024)  
<https://beehivepr.biz/change-management-guide/>

[6] *The Prosci ADKAR Model*, Prosci Inc.  
<https://www.prosci.com/methodology/adkar>

[7] *Enduring Ideas: The 7-S Framework*, Lowell Bryan, McKinsey Quarterly, (2008)

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/enduring-ideas-the-7-s-framework>

[8] *Organizational Change Management: Definition & Importance*, Michigan State University, (2023)

<https://www.michiganstateuniversityonline.com/resources/leadership/organizational-change-management/#:~:text=Managing%20a%20successful%20organizational%20change,production%20cycles%20and%20reducing%20costs.>