



# The Portable Guide to Change

David Burkus

Most people view organizational change the same way they view a clown standing down the street from them.

It may be a positive experience, but we'd rather it be someone else's positive experience.

Despite our best efforts, the world continues to change and grow. In order to remain competitive, organizations need change alongside their environment. Changing certain parts of an organization are easy, but changing people is hard.

Most people try to avoid the clown.

For over fifty years, organizations have looked for help in leading people through change. They relied on thought leaders and researchers for help making sense of the mental processes people use to understand and cope with their changing roles. These models can help people become more willing and able to embrace change. At any level in the organization, leaders will be involved in leading change.

So leaders must meet the clown.

## Three Stage

Change is a complex process, but many organizational changes follow a common process. The idea to develop a model around this process was first pursued by sociologist Kurt Lewin. Lewin uses the image of an ice cube to explain how to change an organization: unfreeze-change-refreeze.

*Unfreeze.* Before any change can occur, people must be change ready. Lewin calls unfreezing the process where people begin to realize the need for change and prepare accordingly. Impulsive leaders wrongly believe they must begin by casting a new vision of the changed community. However, these visions will not be received until the frozen followers have thawed to the idea of change.

*Change.* After people are change ready, the real work of change begins. This stage of the model does not happen immediately; it can take a long time. People are staring down an uncertain road, and need to be reminded how following this road will ultimately benefit them and the organization. Leaders must communicate frequently and give people time to let that communication internalize.

Freeze. Often after a change effort, it's tempting to stop there and declare victory. However, Lewin argued that in order to make any change permanent, it must be made part of the organization's culture. The refreezing stage allows people to plant roots and grow accustomed to the way things will be. Leaders can promote refreezing by helping followers see the connection between new behaviors and new success and by celebrating the people who helped bring about that success.

Lewin's model is a simple approach to a complex issue, and as such is bound to be lacking certain details. However, Lewin laid a foundation for future change management theories and this foundation is apparent in the writings of more modern theorists.

## Intervention

Many times change requires more than the conscious decision of organizational members. Companies, like people, typically need help changing. They need an intervention. Behavioral scholar Chris Argyris studied this need for intervention, eventually publishing his findings in the late 1960s as Intervention Theory.

Argyris first defined intervention. To intervene is to enter into ongoing system or come between people, groups or objects to provide assistance. An intervener helps the system become better at problem solving, decision-making and implementation so that the system can continue to be effective. With a definition in place, Argyris moved on to outline three basic requirements, or primary tasks, for intervention. First, intervention must generate useful and accurate information to describe the factors that lead to the organization's ineffectiveness. Second, the intervener must allow the system or organization to make an informed, free choice to become more effective. Third, the organization must gain internal commitment to implement the changes required to become more effective.

Argyris' theory is not a model, but a series of vital recommendations for leading change. Argyris built on classic organizational behavior theories such as Theory X and Theory Y to create a series of recommendation and requirements that create a sort of oath of office for organizational consultants.

## ADKAR

Change is a gemstone that must be view from multiple angles. The ADKAR model provides another perspective of the change process. Rather than describe what is happening, or prescribe what actions must be taken, the ADKAR model predicts that organization change only happens individuals change. Developed by Jeff Hiatt, the ADKAR model focus on the five outcomes individuals must experience before organizations can change.

- Awareness of the need for change.
- Desire to support and participate in the change.
- Knowledge of how to change.
- Ability to implement the change.
- Reinforcement to sustain change.

Besides leveraging the power of acronyms, this model has made an impact in change management because of its softer, individual focus. There is nothing new in the ADKAR model, except how its unique perspective allows for unique application. Not unlike the five stages of grief, its easy for individuals and leaders in a changing organization to understand and diagnosis their own stage and develop a plan of action accordingly.

## Lead Change

There is perhaps no change model more cited than John Kotter's eight-stage change process. Kotter's work has been repackaged and resold by countless "change consultants." Considering what is said about imitation, the Harvard Business School professor must be the most flattered guru in management. Kotter first presented this model in his 1995 book *Leading Change*. Kotter outlined an eight-stage process that leaders should take their organizations through when implementing change:

1. Create a sense of urgency. Identify potential threats and start honest discussions about the need for change.
2. Form a powerful coalition. Identify true leaders and ask for emotional commitment.
3. Create a vision for change. Develop a short vision with the coalition and practice communicating it.
4. Communicate the vision. Talk openly about the change vision and apply it to all aspects of operation.

5. Remove obstacles. Take action to identify change leaders and remove their barriers.
6. Create short-term wins. Look for sure-fire projects and highlight their success.
7. Build on the change. Set goals to continue building on the momentum created.
8. Anchor the changes in culture. Talk about the progress at every opportunity and ensure that people tie future success to the change effort.

Kotter's work is heavily relied on because of its prescriptive nature. Some have even theorized that Kotter's eight-stages build upon the three-stages developed by Lewin by providing instructions for leaders to follow while unfreezing, changing and refreezing.

Lewin would be flattered.

## About the Author

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*LeaderLab* is a community of resources dedicated to the advancement of leadership theory. We believe there is a great need for real-life leaders to embrace the research and promote the practice of leadership theory. However, leadership theory is often condemned to strictly academic circles because practitioners haven't been given simple explanations on how to apply the best of leadership theory.