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Menu

- [RSS](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Flipboard](#)
- [Linkedin](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Facebook](#)

- [Start Here](#)
- [People](#)
 - [The Future of HR is Human.](#)
 - [What skills for the Future of Work?](#)
 - [Future of Work](#)
 - [Skills](#)
- [Organisation](#)
 - [Introducing the Organisation Evolution Framework](#)
 - [Organisation Design](#)
 - [What is Organisation Design?](#)
 - [Consistency and Intentional Design. Building the Organisation of the Future.](#)
 - [Business Models: the theory and practice](#)
 - [Strategy Frameworks: The Theory and the Practice](#)
 - [Operating Models: the theory and the practice.](#)
 - [Organisation Models: a Reasoned List between Old and New](#)
 - [Tools](#)
 - [How to run the Perfect Workshop](#)
 - [Change Management: The 10 Best Approaches & Models](#)
 - [How to Develop a Creative Culture](#)
- [Experience](#)
 - [Employee Experience](#)
 - [Customer Experience](#)
 - [Who Owns the Experience?](#)
- [Inspiration](#)
 - [Books](#)
 - [Book Suggestion](#)
 - [The Top 25 Management Books according to me](#)
 - [Curated News](#)
 - [The Rebel at Work List of Books](#)
 - [Events](#)
 - [Video](#)
 - [My Quotes Collection](#)
 - [Knowmad Magazine](#)
- [About](#)
 - [Personal](#)
 - [Newsletter](#)
 - [Speaker's Corner](#)
 - [Publications](#)
 - [Contact](#)
 - [Privacy Policy](#)

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- [Instagram](#)
- [Facebook](#)

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- [People](#)
 - [The Future of HR is Human.](#)
 - [What skills for the Future of Work?](#)
 - [Future of Work](#)
 - [Skills](#)
- [Organisation](#)
 - [Introducing the Organisation Evolution Framework](#)
 - [Organisation Design](#)
 - [What is Organisation Design?](#)
 - [Consistency and Intentional Design. Building the Organisation of the Future.](#)
 - [Business Models: the theory and practice](#)
 - [Strategy Frameworks: The Theory and the Practice](#)
 - [Operating Models: the theory and the practice.](#)
 - [Organisation Models: a Reasoned List between Old and New](#)
 - [Tools](#)
 - [How to run the Perfect Workshop](#)

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- [How to Develop a Creative Culture](#)
- [Experience](#)
 - [Employee Experience](#)
 - [Customer Experience](#)
 - [Who Owns the Experience?](#)
- [Inspiration](#)
 - [Books](#)
 - [Book Suggestion](#)
 - [The Top 25 Management Books according to me](#)
 - [Curated News](#)
 - [The Rebel at Work List of Books](#)
 - [Events](#)
 - [Video](#)
 - [My Quotes Collection](#)
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- [About](#)
 - [Personal](#)
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 - [Speaker's Corner](#)
 - [Publications](#)
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I am an experienced and innovative HR professional dedicated to improving the way organizations achieve results through their people.

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- [April 2022](#) (4)
- [March 2022](#) (7)
- [February 2022](#) (5)
- [January 2022](#) (2)
- [December 2021](#) (8)
- [November 2021](#) (1)
- [October 2021](#) (1)
- [April 2021](#) (1)
- [December 2020](#) (6)
- [November 2020](#) (12)
- [October 2020](#) (19)
- [September 2020](#) (18)
- [August 2020](#) (6)
- [July 2020](#) (6)
- [June 2020](#) (17)
- [May 2020](#) (19)
- [April 2020](#) (19)
- [March 2020](#) (17)
- [February 2020](#) (24)
- [January 2020](#) (32)
- [December 2019](#) (21)
- [November 2019](#) (19)
- [October 2019](#) (15)
- [September 2019](#) (20)
- [August 2019](#) (3)
- [October 2018](#) (8)
- [March 2014](#) (1)
- [May 2013](#) (1)
- [April 2013](#) (2)

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- [November 2012](#) (4)

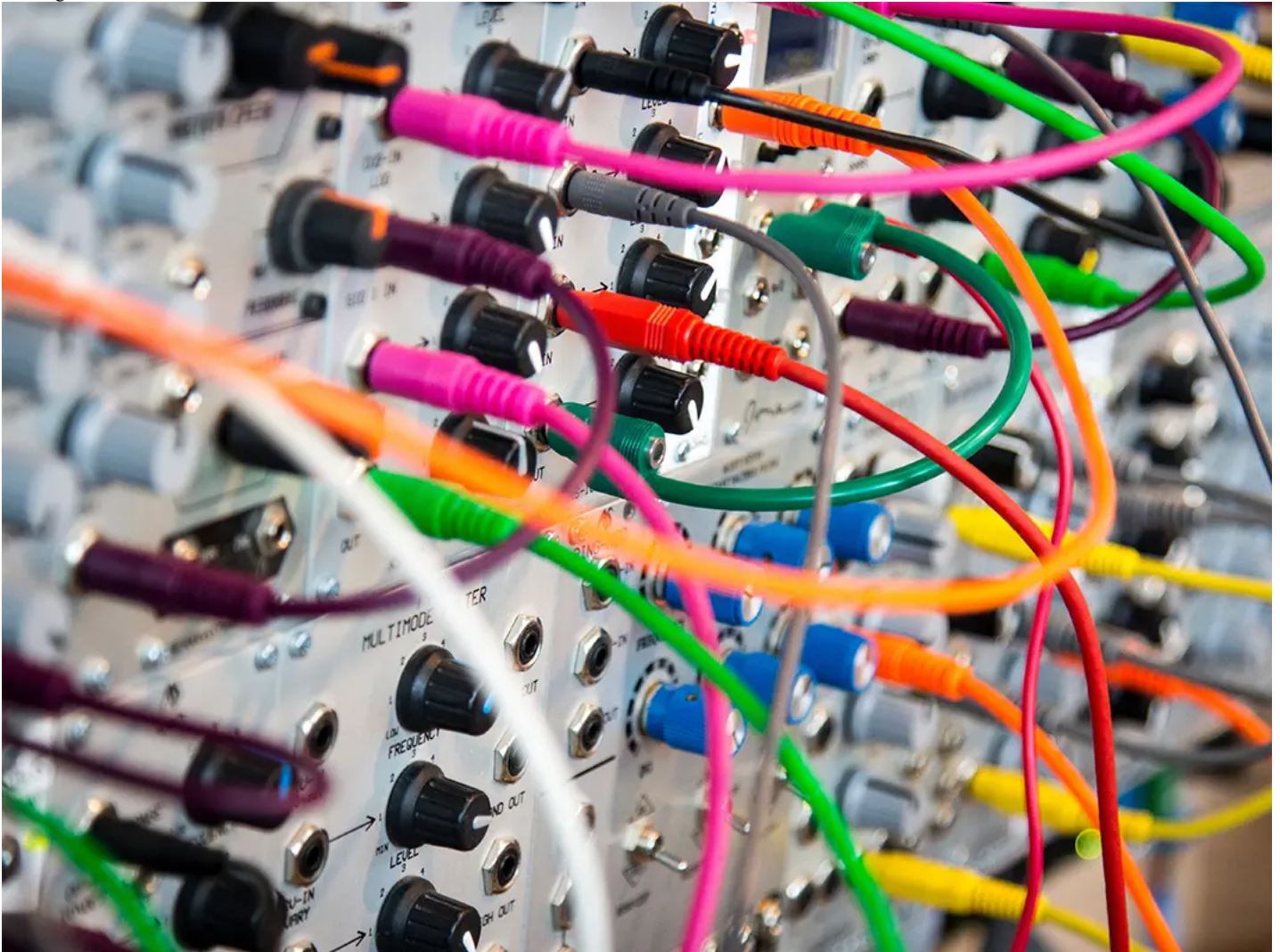


[Home](#) | [Organisation](#) | [Tools](#) | Models: The Lippitt-Knostrer Model for Managing Complex Change

Models: The Lippitt-Knostrer Model for Managing Complex Change



Posted on March 3, 2020
 Edited on October 10, 2020
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The **Model for Managing Complex Change** is widely used in Change Management presentations and articles around the web, as it outlines required elements fo change, and possible negative outcomes. What's interesting is that it is often referenced by a second-hand source: **Timothy Knostrer** used the model in the [TASH](#) conference in 1991, and since many sources refer to this model as the "[Knostrer Model](#)".

However [digging a bit deeper](#), I found out that the model is referenced in a book about education "[Restructuring for Caring and Effective Education: Piecing the Puzzle Together](#)" published in 2000, which references as original source a [model copyrighted in 1987](#) by [Mary Lippitt](#), "The Managing Complex Change Model". Another Author is sometimes referenced, D. Ambrose, also from 1987, and in any case part of the Enterprise group.

In any case, I decided to refer here to this as the "[Lippitt-Knostrer](#)" Model, as these are the two more broadly used names.

Table of Contents

1. The Lippitt-Knostrer Model for Managing Complex Change
2. The Key Components of the Lippitt-Knostrer Model for Managing Complex Change
 - 2.1. Vision
 - 2.2. An additional element: Consensus
 - 2.3. Skills

- 2.4. Incentives
- 2.5. Resources
- 2.6. Action Plan
3. The possible negative change outcomes
 - 3.1. Confusion
 - 3.2. Sabotage
 - 3.3. Anxiety
 - 3.4. Resistance
 - 3.5. Frustration
 - 3.6. Treadmill or False Starts
4. What's Good About the Model
5. What's Bad About the Model
6. Conclusion

The Lippitt-Knostrer Model for Managing Complex Change



Fig.1: Model for Managing Complex Change

According to the [model](#), there are [five](#) or six elements required for [effective change](#): vision, consensus, skills, incentives, resources and an action plan. If anyone of these elements is missing, the change effort will fail, with varying Negative Change outcome. Let's see both in detail.

The Key Components of the Lippitt-Knostrer Model for Managing Complex Change

Vision

Initially, there must be a vision. *Why is change needed?* We have already seen [how much the Why](#) is important. Is the vision shared and are people buying in? Are there measurable, achievable goals? A lack of vision leads to confusion. When the team asks questions such as “Why should I do this?” or “What are they thinking?” they may not realize the overall vision for change.

An additional element: Consensus

Apparently, [in the presentation done by Knostrer](#), this element was added: *Consensus*. The idea is that a leader cannot assume they have the power to push through change without gaining a consensus. The fact that this element is not present always, is probably linked to the fact that Knostrer applied the model to an educational context. I do think however that in a world marked by much flatter and self-directed organisational models, the underlying concept of “buy-in” is critical, which is why I present the model complete with this element.

Skills

The next necessary element is skills. What skills are needed? Do staff members have expertise or training in what they are being asked to do? If not, will it be provided from someone they trust? Feeling as if skill or training is lacking may lead to anxiety.

Incentives

Employees typically also need incentives to make a change. How will it benefit them? There is nothing worse than feeling as if time is being wasted. Everyone must see the value in the change before it can happen. Incentives is the piece that can either build consensus or build resistance among staff. Incentives can be tangible such as monetary, or intangible such as personal achievement or prestige. And it's important to create them [with consistency and direct linkage](#) to the vision.

Resources

Resources are also important to change efforts and can be physical or emotional. We often hear comments such as “They want us to do more with less” or “They don't support me.” A lack of resources leaves people frustrated. What resources are readily available? Are they appropriate? Are there in-house people who are resources? Is the distribution of resources fair? What resources are needed and how will you get them?

Action Plan

The final element required for change is an **action plan**. The action plan for change should be clear and developed by a representation of all stakeholders. Without it, staff may feel as if they are running in place and not moving forward. They feel like they are going round and round without any clear direction even though they are working diligently. Without a plan, gaining traction and moving forward is impossible.

The possible negative change outcomes

Confusion



Models: The Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change 10

If you have consensus, skills, incentives, resources and an action plan but you don't have a vision — that guiding force behind what you're trying to do — you will not end up with change. You will end up with confusion because there won't be a guiding star during the Change process.

Sabotage



Models: The Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change 11

If you have the vision, skills, incentives, resources and action plan, but you don't have Consensus — the buy-in into change by the key stakeholders of the organisation—you might end up in a situation where open sabotage of change can happen.

Anxiety



Models: The Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change 12

If you have a vision, consensus, incentives, resources and an action plan, but leave out the skills necessary (i.e. communication, public speaking, political or advocacy) to effect the change you seek, you will be left with anxiety among your team members. If you have people who are unprepared to do the work, it doesn't matter if they have a great vision and buy-in, they will feel anxious to fail.

Resistance



Models: The Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change 13

If you have the vision, consensus, skills, resources and action plan, but leave out the incentives — the types of things (rewards, recognition, celebrations) that keep key community stakeholders engaged — you might have changed, but it will be slow and generally marked by a high degree of resistance. People will simply try to stick to the old ways of doing.

Frustration



Models: The Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change 14

If you have the vision, consensus, skills, incentives and action plan, but leave out the resources (money, people, time, equipment), you will end up with frustration because you've got a plan, and you know how to accomplish it, but you don't have the resources to get the job done.

Treadmill or False Starts



Models: The Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change 15

If you have the vision, consensus, skills, incentive and resources, but no action plan — a plan broken down into steps that people can take and accomplish in small bits — you will end up with a situation that resembles a "treadmill": you are running, but you're not moving ahead. Other definitions of this Negative Change Outcome use the concept of *false starts*, as sometimes people will start the change process, but will have to go back due to a step being missed for example. Both definitions show that results will be of slowness.

What's Good About the Model

The **Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change** is an excellent tool both to plan Change, as well as to diagnose issues when a project is already happening. It provides a consolidated map of all the elements needed, and I particularly like the focus on Incentives, as these are way too often missed in many alternative models.

What's Bad About the Model

There's nothing inherently bad about the Model for Managing Complex Change, except that it does not provide a sequence of the elements that are needed. Compared to [Kotter's model](#), for example, it lacks the direction or phasing of the various elements.

Conclusion

Knowing the **Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change** gives a clear advantage as it allows to truly understand the importance of every element that is needed for Change to be successful. It also gives a clear understanding of the Negative Change outcomes in case any element is missing. Using it as a "map" that ensure consistency and coherence is a must in any change process, as it creates the right mindset for success.

This post belongs to a series of articles related to **Change Management**. An introductory article: [Change Management: The 10 Best Approaches & Models](#) is available, containing links also to all other posts of the series.

I'd like to thank [Dr Anke Dählmann](#) from TU Delft for pointing out misspelling and corrections to this article.

Sergio

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- [Organisation \(31\)](#)

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- [Design \(72\)](#)
- [Review \(68\)](#)
- [Future of Work \(49\)](#)
- [Change \(43\)](#)

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- [2022 \(18\)](#)
- [2021 \(11\)](#)
- [2020 \(198\)](#)
- [2019 \(86\)](#)
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[Leadership Models: The Theory and the Practice](#)

After having analysed the four foundational pillars of the Organisation Evolution Framework, it's time to investigate its fifth element: Leadership. I have been careful to provide, within the model, a purely opportunistic definition of leadership that "fits" the model, and the reason will be clear towards the end of this...

August 21, 2020

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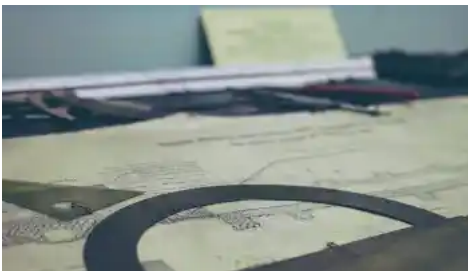


[Models: the ADKAR Change Management Model](#)

The ADKAR Change Management Model was created by Jeffery Hiatt (founder of Prosci) and published in the book ADKAR: A Model for Change in Business, Government and our Community in 2006. The founding idea of this model is to look at the individuals behind the change, thus creating a truly bottom-up...

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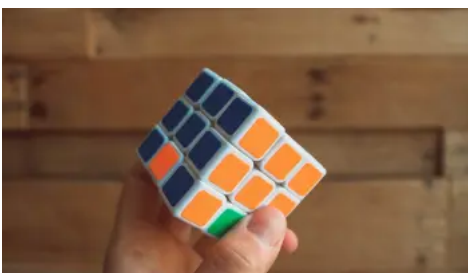


[Operating Models: the theory and the practice.](#)

With this post, I explore the third element of the Organisation Design Blocks that we have mentioned, and that constitutes a foundational element of the Organisation Evolution Framework. Conceptually, the Operating Model comes after the definition of Strategy. Not a new idea. Business historian Alfred Chandler laid this out in 1962 in his book Strategy &...

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Organisation Evolution Framework



Introducing the *Organisation Evolution Framework* - a visual representation of Organisation Design Components.

Now in Version 2.0! Access the introduction page and give your feedback. The Framework can be downloaded as PDF as well.

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