FOR LEADERS WHO KEEP FUNDING CHANGE THAT REVERTS IN THE FIELD

The AIRAS Method for **Accelerating Transformation**

Change management sequences a rollout. AIRAS sequences the behavior: align, inspire, reflect, apply, scale. It is the sequence that survives the sponsor who launched it.

AIRAS

The five-stage delivery rhythm inside TransformationOS™, grounded in four decades and 3,500+ studies of adversity, motivation, and learning science, applied at Olympic, Ivy-League, and Fortune 500 levels.

BY

Jesse Hopps, Founder
Commercial Excellence Consortium™

FORMAT

Executive brief

READING TIME

14 minutes

THE BOARD-LEVEL VIEW

We fund more transformation every year — and three in four fail to deliver the results.

Spending rises. Support falls. The failure rate barely moves. Three independent data sets describe the same decade, and the middle one is the one to watch: willingness to go along with enterprise change has roughly halved in under ten years.

What the money keeps buying is a rollout that lands on schedule and a return that falls short of the case that funded it. The constraint was rarely the budget. It is what people do the week after the launch.

$4T+

PROJECTED ANNUAL SPEND ON TRANSFORMATION BY 2027, UP FROM $1.8T IN 2022

IDC

38%

OF EMPLOYEES WILL SUPPORT ENTERPRISE CHANGE, DOWN FROM 74% IN 2016

GARTNER

76%

OF TRANSFORMATIONS STILL FAIL TO GENERATE LASTING VALUE

BCG

This is not an execution problem.

It is a capital-allocation problem.

THE FAILURE MODE A ROLLOUT LEAVES IN PLACE

People rarely resist openly. They comply in the meeting —

and revert the next day.

ADKAR names the terms of compliance. Not the ones for commitment.

ADKAR is the change-management model most Fortune 100 companies run on. Created by Prosci founder Jeff Hiatt and formalized in his 2006 book, it names the five sequential conditions an individual meets to adopt and sustain a change. For three decades it has been the default playbook, and for its era a genuine contribution.

A	**Awareness**	Understanding why the change is necessary: rationale, risk, strategic context.
D	**Desire**	A personal decision to support the change, at least at the surface.
K	**Knowledge**	Training, documentation, the information required to execute differently.
A	**Ability**	Putting the new behaviors into practice, at least under observation.
R	**Reinforcement**	Incentives, recognition, and accountability applied to sustain the behavior.

It is a logical model, and a necessary one. It was simply not a sufficient one. Moving an organization through a defined change is a different job from building one that keeps adapting once that change ends.

The distinction matters more now than in 2006. A company running one transformation every five years can manage each as an event. Four at once needs people who adapt without being walked through it.

Compliance is a condition you can install.

Commitment has to be earned.

Five gaps sit between managing a change and building a company that adapts.

01 It drives compliance more than commitment.

A manager who complies uses the framework when observed and eases off when not, and the model does little about the passive resistance that follows.

02 It treats motivation as a communication problem.

Its Desire stage conflates burning-platform messaging with intrinsic motivation, leaving out the autonomy, competence, and relatedness that Self-Determination Theory shows are required.

03 It leaves open whether the learning endures.

Structured training decays fast: up to 90% forgotten within a week. Retention comes from doing and teaching the real work, rarely from sitting through instruction.

04 It does little to prepare people for adversity.

The model leaves unaddressed how people respond when transformation gets hard, measured as AQ®, among the strongest predictors of whether change survives.

05 Its reinforcement leans on outside pressure.

Reinforcement depends on external governance; when the sponsor moves on or Q4 pressure mounts, it fades.

These are not training gaps.

They are motivational ones.

The diet you quit started with real desire.

Every January I watch the gym fill up, and by March it is back to the same twenty people it had in December. Nobody in that January crowd was faking it. They paid for the membership, they bought the shoes, and they meant every word of it on the second of January.

Same with anyone who has decided to drink less — the wanting is rarely the confusing part.

What is missing is everything that comes after the wanting.

I think that is the part a rollout skips. It asks for Desire, it gets Desire, and then it moves on to training and governance — leaving the person alone with the hard part, which is every ordinary Tuesday after the kickoff.

Take anyone who has won something that mattered to them. Hardly anyone gets an Olympic medal by wanting it more than the person in the next lane. They get it because somebody built them a program, watched them do it wrong, made them do it again, and stayed with them through the long stretch where they were getting worse before they got better.

So what is the difference between the people who change and the people who only wanted to?

Not the wanting. It is everything stacked around it: someone to practice with, a way to read a bad week that keeps the attempt alive, and enough repetitions that the new way stops feeling new. Simple, but not easy.

And it is harder at work than at the gym, because the people at the gym signed up. It is kind of like personal training hundreds of people who never asked to get into shape.

If wanting it were enough,

nobody would ever need a coach.

AIRAS closes those gaps in five stages, run cohort by cohort.

AIRAS is the delivery rhythm a transformation runs on: how mindset, skill, and tools get installed in a population rather than announced to one. Each stage is built on a specific behavioral mechanism, and each one addresses a gap the rollout playbook leaves open.

A

Align

Shared context, commercial reality, and personal stakes before any new content.

I

Inspire

The intrinsic 'why' surfaced through guided discovery, not through messaging.

R

Reflect

Between sessions, AQ® tools reframe resistance and doubt as signal.

A

Apply

Live commercial problems, worked alongside operator-coaches who have done it.

S

Scale

Ownership transfers: participants teach, coach peers, and embed the behavior.

The order is deliberate. Align and Inspire build the motivation to engage before any framework arrives. Reflect gives people a way to work through the hard middle. Apply puts the capability into live P&L work, and Scale moves ownership from the program to the people, who then run the next cohort. Reverse any two of those stages and the rhythm behaves like a rollout again.

A rollout installs information.

AIRAS installs motivation.

Each gap in the playbook is a stage in the method.

The five gaps are not a critique looking for a remedy. They are the design brief AIRAS was built against: one stage per gap, in the order the behavior requires it.

WHERE THE PLAYBOOK STOPS		THE STAGE THAT CLOSES IT
Compliance without commitment	→	**Inspire: the 'why' reached by discovery**
Motivation treated as messaging	→	**Align: autonomy, competence, relatedness**
Training that decays in a week	→	**Apply: capability built on live P&L work**
Adversity left unaddressed	→	**Reflect: AQ® tools turn friction into signal**
Reinforcement from the outside	→	**Scale: participants coach the next cohort**

Reflect has no equivalent in the playbook, and it decides week six. **When the work gets hard, is that evidence the change is wrong, or the part where it starts to matter?**

The playbook manages what people know.

The method moves what they want.

AIRAS rests on three sciences — two of them published before ADKAR.

AIRAS was assembled inside Demand Metric, the advisory firm behind the Commercial Excellence Consortium™, by operators who kept watching well-run programs finish on plan and revert a quarter later. It synthesizes three bodies of science the playbook leaves out.

ADVERSITY SCIENCE

AQ® & GRIT™

Dr. Paul Stoltz's paired measures: AQ® for absorbing pressure and setbacks, GRIT™ for pushing toward goals that matter.[1]

1997

MOTIVATION SCIENCE

Self-Determination Theory

Autonomy, competence, and relatedness produce intrinsic motivation, which the Desire stage asks for and rarely creates.[2]

1985

LEARNING SCIENCE

Project-based learning

Capability is built by doing the real work rather than delivered to a room, and it outlasts the classroom.[3]

2019

1 Stoltz, P. G. (1997). *Adversity Quotient: Turning Obstacles into Opportunities.* Wiley. 2 Deci, E. L. & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior.* Plenum. 3 Chen, C.-H. & Yang, Y.-C. (2019). Revisiting the effects of project-based learning on academic achievement: a meta-analysis. *Educational Research Review, 26,* 71–81.

ADKAR gave the field a vocabulary.

The science of why people commit was already on the shelf.

Mindset before skillset, skillset before toolset.

Most programs install those three layers in reverse, the platform first, the training next, the mindset last or not at all, then treat the resulting indifference as a change-management problem. AIRAS runs the sequence the other way, one cohort at a time.

Tool-Set

Frameworks embedded in the workflows people already use.

Skill-Set

Real capability, built on the team's own live P&L problems.

Mind-Set

Adaptive capacity: AQ® and GRIT™, built first.

Skip it and the skills and tools that follow get rejected.

The tools are rarely the problem.

The order they arrive in is.

AQ® is measurable, improvable, and unlike IQ, it moves.

The mindset layer is not a motivational posture. It is a measured construct with four decades of research behind it, and the reason AIRAS can baseline a cohort before it starts and benchmark the same cohort after.

Dr. Paul G. Stoltz

Originator of AQ® and GRIT™

RESEARCH BASE

38 years · 3,500+ independent studies · 5M+ people across 137 countries

MASTER COACH TO

The entire U.S. Olympic team, coaching the coaches

TAUGHT IN EXECUTIVE EDUCATION AT

Harvard · MIT · INSEAD · Carnegie Mellon

TRUSTED BY LEADERSHIP TEAMS AT

Apple · Amazon · FedEx · Marriott · P&G, and dozens more Fortune 500 enterprises

AQ® measures defense: how a person absorbs and recovers from pressure and setbacks. GRIT™ measures offense: how they turn that adversity into forward motion on the goals that matter to them.

Being measurable is what lets a sponsor treat mindset as a managed variable, not an article of faith.

This is not fringe science.

It is measured, and it responds to training.

Higher adversity capacity predicts the outcomes you are funding for.

These are AQ® research findings, the foundation the mindset layer stands on, rather than results from any one program. Across 3,500+ independent studies and 5M+ people tested, higher AQ® predicts and strengthens what a mindset-first method is built to move.

250–320%

SALES-VOLUME DIFFERENTIAL BETWEEN HIGH- AND LOW-AQ INDIVIDUALS

STOLTZ / PEAK LEARNING

3×

INNOVATION OUTPUT OF HIGH-AQ INDIVIDUALS VS. LOWER-AQ PEERS

STOLTZ / PEAK LEARNING

11–23%

AVERAGE AQ IMPROVEMENT THROUGH STRUCTURED DEVELOPMENT, SUSTAINED PAST 10 YEARS

LONGITUDINAL TRACKING

HIGHER AQ® PREDICTS & IMPROVES: INDIVIDUAL, TEAM, AND ENTERPRISE

- Performance
- Productivity
- Innovation
- Agility
- Resilience
- Change pace
- Problem-solving
- Optimism & energy
- Morale
- Retention & hiring
- Talent
- Leadership
- Culture
- Engagement

Source: PEAK Learning / Peak Performance International research base; independent studies including Cornell University and Educational Testing Service (ETS).

Adaptive capacity is trainable.

That is what makes it a management lever.

The first cohort changes behavior inside a quarter.

AIRAS runs on a calendar, not a launch date. A cohort of real operators moves through the five stages together over roughly 90 days, on their own live commercial problems, with an AQ® baseline taken before any content is delivered.

The calendar below is the shape of a first cohort. Later cohorts run it faster, because the people who finished the last one are the ones coaching it and the tools are already sitting in the workflow.

What separates it from a training plan is that the mindset work is scheduled ahead of the method, and Apply runs on problems the business already needs solved.

STAGE 1

Weeks 1–2

- Align on commercial reality
- AQ® and GRIT™ baseline
- Personal stakes named

STAGE 2

Weeks 3–8

- Inspire: the 'why' by discovery
- Reflect: friction as signal
- Mindset ahead of method

STAGE 3

Weeks 4–12

- Apply: 90-day Growth Projects™
- Weekly operator-coach support
- Behavior change in-quarter

STAGE 4

Quarter 2+

- Participants coach the next cohort
- Projects roll out on field pull
- It runs without you in the room

Run as a rhythm, the first cohort proves it.

Run as an event, it is training again.

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11 · BEFORE YOU COMMIT TO IT

What installing AIRAS asks of you — and where it breaks.

This is not plug-and-play. It asks more of the sponsor and the team than a training rollout does. That is the point, and the risk. **Which of these conditions can you put in place next quarter?**

WHAT IT REQUIRES

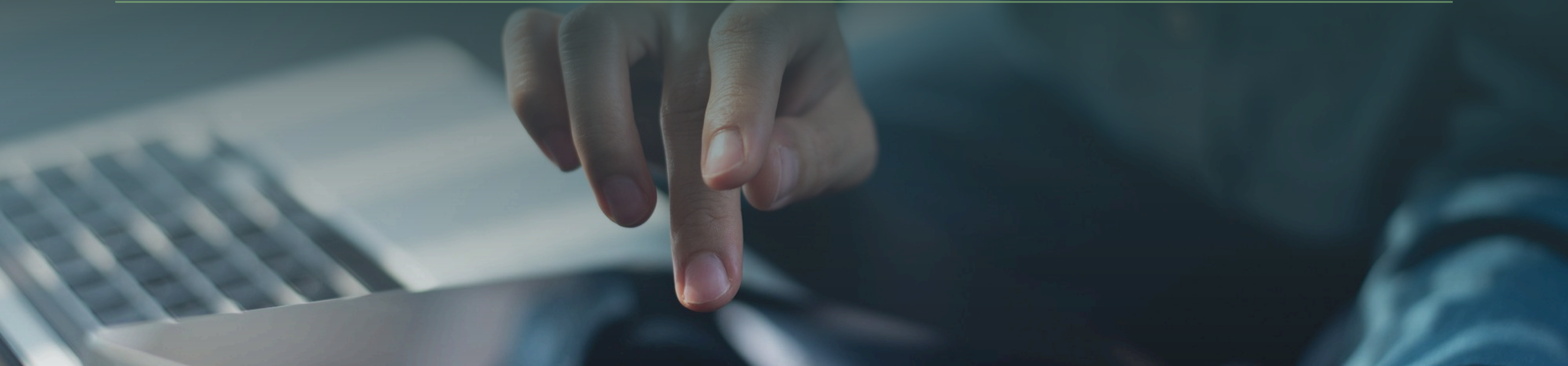
- A sponsor who protects the mindset work through the weeks it shows no measurable output
- Real operators on live problems: a cohort with P&L accountability, not a training audience
- Operator-coaches who have done the job, rather than consultants who have read about it
- 90-day cycles, run cohort by cohort

WHERE IT BREAKS

- Tools first. Skip the mindset layer and the tools get rejected. No label changes that
- No live problem. Without real stakes, Apply reverts to training theater
- A sponsor who wants proof by Friday. Mindset change rarely moves a completion rate
- Treated as an event. One cohort is a pilot; durability shows across two or three

It asks more of the sponsor.

That is the trade it makes.



Adaptive capacity moves first — and it predicts the rest.

Three indicators, in the order they move. The first two belong to Commercial Excellence and Transformation; the third stays with the business.

LEADING · MOVES IN WEEKS

Adaptive capacity

AQ® for defense, GRIT™ for offense, benchmarked before and after. The research base shows it predicts successful outcomes better than the alternatives.

COMMERCIAL EXCELLENCE OWNS THIS

BEHAVIORAL · MOVES IN MONTHS

Execution discipline

Growth Project™ progress, adoption of new ways of working, and the consistency of follow-through, observed by coaches rather than self-reported.

COMMERCIAL EXCELLENCE OWNS THIS

LAGGING · MOVES IN QUARTERS

Business impact

Pipeline, margin, win/loss, market entry, measured in your own systems, on the Growth Projects™ the work put in motion.

THE BUSINESS UNITS OWN THIS

A sponsor who asks for business impact in month two is asking the lagging indicator to move before the leading one has. That is how mindset work gets cancelled a quarter before it would have paid.

The leading indicators are yours to own.

Revenue and margin stay with the business.

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13 · PROOF CASE · THE OPERATOR

At LANXESS, 300+ leaders adopted it **with minimal resistance.**

Roy van Griensven inherited a classroom capability program from a top consulting firm, a design he had watched fail before, because it treated behavior as a downstream result of training rather than the thing to solve for. He scrapped it and rebuilt the program mindset first, designed with Demand Metric and run on the AIRAS rhythm.

THE OPERATOR

Roy van Griensven

Head of Business Transformation · LANXESS (global specialty chemicals)

Participants started with an adversity-response baseline, then ran 90-day projects on their own live problems, coached weekly by a senior operator rather than a consultant. His mandate has since expanded from Commercial Excellence to Head of Business Transformation.

300+
Frontline commercial leaders through the program, adopting with minimal resistance

52
90-day projects launched on real opportunities: new-market entry, cross-unit deals, pricing, AI

7
Cohorts delivered globally, with the coach-the-coach model embedded to run the next ones internally

By the sixth cohort LANXESS coaches were coaching some of the projects themselves, which is how the coaching capability moves in-house.

One cohort is a pilot.

Seven is a capability.

ADKAR and AIRAS, across the dimensions that matter.

THE ADKAR WAY	THE AIRAS WAY
Premise. One bounded change, managed to completion.	An enterprise that keeps adapting on its own.
Motivation. Extrinsic: messaging and senior endorsement.	Intrinsic: autonomy, competence, relatedness first.
Sequencing. Awareness → Desire → Knowledge → Ability → Reinforcement.	Mindset → Skillset → Toolset, run through the five AIRAS stages.
Passive resistance. Treated as an awareness gap to communicate away.	Treated as a rational signal, addressed at the motivational root.
Learning. Instructional delivery: events, e-learning, process docs.	Guided discovery and project work on the team's own live problems.
Adversity readiness. Not addressed as a variable.	The foundational layer: AQ® gains of 11–23%.
Reinforcement. External governance; fades as oversight does.	Internal: intrinsic motivation, AQ®, peer coaching cadences.
Measurement. Awareness scores, training completion, observation.	Adaptive capacity before and after, plus impact in your systems.

ADKAR manages the surface.

AIRAS changes the motivational root.

The job changed.
So did the question worth asking.

ADKAR gave the field structure, vocabulary, and a repeatable process for managing the human dimension of change. For three decades it was the best available tool for the job.

But the job has changed. Commercial leaders are now driving fundamental shifts in how their organizations create and capture value, under pressure, against inertia the playbook leaves in place. Big-consultancy change practices, Prosci and the LMS manage the same surface ADKAR named. Few of them install the behavioral layer underneath.

So the question for the next initiative shifts. **Not 'how do we manage the change?' but 'what makes these people want to run it after we stop watching?'** That is the question AIRAS was designed to answer, and the reason the behavioral science it rests on is worth the extra quarter it asks for. If the honest answer is 'because we told them to,' the behavior has an expiry date attached to the sponsor's tenure.

Compliance needs someone watching.
Commitment tends to run without one.

THE NEXT STEP

Ready to run your next transformation on the behavioral science?

For Consortium members and their leadership teams, the next step is straightforward: book a confidential Executive Briefing. No pitch. No proposal. A candid, peer-level diagnostic.

For senior Commercial Excellence, Strategy, Transformation, and Growth leaders at $1B+ enterprises.

Schedule Your Briefing →

Request to Join the Consortium →

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jesse Hopps

Founder and Group Moderator of the **Commercial Excellence Consortium™**, an invite-only peer community of 300+ senior executives at large global enterprises responsible for enterprise transformation and organic growth.

The Consortium hosts monthly executive roundtables and convenes practitioners who believe that operators, rather than consultants, are best positioned to solve the hardest problems in commercial excellence.

The Commercial Excellence Consortium™ is where you start. Fellowship™ is where you build.

Free membership is the peer room. For Commercial Excellence leaders ready to accelerate transformation and prove measurable impact, the Fellowship™ is the next step.

Commercial Excellence Consortium™

Free · Peer roundtables, Growth Platform access, AQ® assessments.

Request to Join →

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By invitation · A working circle for Heads of Commercial Excellence, Strategy, Transformation, and Growth at $1B+ enterprises: operators building the next commercial operating model, together, with a seat on the Executive Council for peer benchmarking, roundtables, and 1:1s.

Explore the Fellowship™ →