

— FOR LEADERS WHO KEEP FUNDING CHANGE THAT REVERTS IN THE FIELD

Beyond ADKAR: why the 21st century demands a **new operating model** for commercial transformation.

Change management is necessary — but on its own it was not sufficient. A rollout, however well-governed, rarely builds an enterprise that keeps adapting on its own.

TransformationOS™

A commercial transformation operating model — grounded in four decades and 3,500+ studies of performance science, applied at Olympic, Ivy-League, and Fortune 500 levels.

BY

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Commercial Excellence Consortium™

FORMAT

Executive brief

READING TIME

14 minutes

We fund more transformation every year — and get **the same result.**

\$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.**

ADKAR is built to **manage change**.

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 describes the five sequential conditions an individual must meet to adopt and sustain a change. For three decades it has been the default playbook for rolling out change — and for its era, a genuine contribution.

A Awareness

The individual understands why the change is necessary — the rationale, the risk of inaction, the strategic context.

D Desire

A personal decision to support the change. Motivated, at least at the surface, to engage.

K Knowledge

Knowing how to change — training, process documentation, the information required to execute differently.

A Ability

Implementing the new behaviors in practice — moved from knowing to doing, at least under observation.

R Reinforcement

The new behavior sustained through incentives, recognition, accountability, and performance management.

It is a logical model — and a necessary one. It was simply not a sufficient one. Managing an organization through a defined change is not the same as building one that keeps adapting after the change ends.

ADKAR helps drive *compliance*.

The 21st century demands *commitment*.



— THE FAILURE MODE THE DASHBOARD MISSES

**People rarely resist openly.
They comply in the meeting
— and **revert in practice.****

Five gaps between what ADKAR manages and what **transformation now requires**.

01 **It drives compliance more than commitment.**

A manager who complies uses the framework when observed and eases off when not — and ADKAR does little to address the passive resistance that can follow.

02 **It treats motivation as a communication problem.**

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

03 **It does not account for whether learning endures.**

Structured training decays fast — up to 90% forgotten within a week. Retention comes from doing and teaching the real work, not from sitting through instruction.

04 **It does little to prepare people for adversity.**

ADKAR does little to prepare people for how they 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 can fade — with little intrinsic motivation left to keep the change in place.

THE THROUGH-LINE

None of these are training or communication gaps.

They're motivational ones.

ADKAR has no layer to close them.

TransformationOS™, **defined.**

A commercial transformation operating model that turns *compliance* into *commitment*. It builds the **mindset to absorb change before the **skillset** to execute it and the **toolset** to sustain it — to accelerate adoption of new ways of working.**

NOT A FRAMEWORK

A framework is a diagram on a wall.

An operating system runs underneath the work and keeps it running. This is the layer beneath the training, the tools, and the governance — not another one of them.

IT GOVERNS THE ORDER

Mindset, then skill, then tools.

Most programs install those three in reverse, then wonder why nothing takes. The operating model enforces the sequence that makes each layer land.

IT PERSISTS

Commitment outlasts the sponsor. Compliance can't.

Behavior driven from outside needs a watcher to survive. Behavior people own carries itself — the point where ADKAR degrades is exactly what this is built for.

The layer change management left out — where **rapid mindset and behavioral evolution are built.**

Built by operators, on science **older than ADKAR.**

TransformationOS did not come out of a change-management textbook. It was assembled inside Demand Metric — the advisory firm behind the Commercial Excellence Consortium™, an invite-only community of senior commercial operators — who kept watching well-run programs pass their adoption metrics on the dashboard and then revert in the field.

Rather than write another communication model, it synthesizes three bodies of performance science that ADKAR leaves out. Two of the three were established well before ADKAR was formalized in 2006, and left on the table.

ADVERSITY SCIENCE · 1997

Adversity Quotient (AQ®) & GRIT™

Dr. Paul Stoltz's paired measures of how people handle hardship: AQ® for how they absorb pressure and setbacks, GRIT™ for how they push through toward goals that matter.¹

MOTIVATION SCIENCE · 1985

Self-Determination Theory

The autonomy, competence, and relatedness that produce intrinsic motivation — what ADKAR's Desire stage asks for but cannot create.²

LEARNING SCIENCE · 2019

Project-based learning

Capability is built by doing the real work, not delivered to a room — and it outlasts anything the classroom can teach.³

**ADKAR gave the field a vocabulary.
Not the science of **why people commit.****

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.



— WHAT REPLACES TRAINING THEATER

**Capability built in the work
itself — live commercial
problems, **operator-
coaches alongside.****

How the pieces fit — and why **the order matters.**

LAYER 01 · INSTALL FIRST

Mindset

Built before any framework. Skip it and the skills and tools that follow get rejected.

THE COACHING

AQ® and GRIT™, run by Operator-Coaches.

LAYER 02 · THEN

Skillset

Real capability, built on the team's own live P&L problems — not a training audience.

THE REAL WORK

90-day Growth Projects™ on the team's own priorities.

LAYER 03 · LAST

Toolset

Frameworks embedded in daily workflows, for a population already motivated to use them well.

ON DEMAND

1,000+ Demand Metric playbooks, pulled when the work needs them.

All three install cohort by cohort through **AIRAS**, the five-stage rhythm — detailed next.

Deploy tools into an adversity-averse population and they get rejected.

Build the mindset first and new tools and processes finally get adopted — and stick.

The five-stage rhythm, run **cohort by cohort**.

AIRAS is the delivery rhythm beneath the model — how the mindset, skill, and tool layers actually get installed. Each stage builds intrinsic commitment, not just awareness.

A

Align

Establish shared context, commercial reality, and personal stakes before any new content — activating relatedness, the third pillar of intrinsic motivation.

I

Inspire

Surface the intrinsic 'why' through guided discovery — questions that let participants reach their own conclusions. Where ADKAR's Desire stage should be, but cannot be.

R

Reflect

The stage with no ADKAR equivalent. Between sessions, participants use AQ® tools to reframe resistance and doubt as signal rather than obstacle.

A

Apply

Project-based application to live commercial problems, facilitated by operator-coaches who have done the same work themselves — the retention that only doing the real work produces.

S

Scale

Transfer ownership. Participants teach, coach peers, and embed new behaviors into operating rhythms — where the measurable business impact begins.

From today's pattern to **the one that lasts.**

The same organization, run on a mindset-first operating model. Left is the pattern most transformations are stuck in; right is what the work actually produces.

THE PATTERN TODAY

WHAT THE MODEL DRIVES

Transformation activity is high, but velocity is slow.



Teams **adapt and execute faster** under pressure.

Programs run, but adoption is uneven across teams and regions.



Adoption **lasts after the pressure lifts.**

Training happens, but behavior doesn't change.



Capability is **built in the work**, and it stays.

Passive resistance slows everything down.



Resistance is **surfaced and reduced at the root.**

Commercial Excellence struggles to prove its strategic contribution.



Commercial Excellence becomes a **credible growth engine.**

AIRAS is what moves you from **left to right.**

Align, inspire, reflect, apply, scale.

AQ® — Adversity Quotient — is measurable, and can be permanently improved.



THE SOURCE

Dr. Paul G. Stoltz is the originator of AQ® and GRIT™ and the world's leading authority on human adaptability, resilience, and performance under adversity.

RESEARCH BASE

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

ADOPTED IN EXECUTIVE EDUCATION AT

Harvard · MIT · INSEAD · Carnegie Mellon

MASTER COACH TO

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

TRUSTED BY LEADERSHIP TEAMS AT

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

WHY IT MATTERS

This is not fringe science — it is measurable, and it moves.

AQ® measures defense — how a person absorbs and recovers from pressure, setbacks, and ambiguity. GRIT™ measures offense — how they turn that adversity into forward motion on goals that matter. Over four decades and 3,500+ studies, the same methodology has been used at the most elite levels of sport, academia, and enterprise — and unlike IQ, it can be assessed, strengthened, and linked directly to outcomes.

What high adversity capacity **predicts** — and **improves**.

These are AQ® research findings — the foundation the mindset layer is built on, not results from any one program. Across 3,500+ independent studies and 5M+ people tested, higher AQ® predicts and strengthens the outcomes a mindset-first model is built to move.

**250–
320%**

SALES-VOLUME
DIFFERENTIAL BETWEEN
HIGH- AND LOW-AQ
INDIVIDUALS (REAL
ESTATE)

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 — NOT
OBSERVED TO REVERSE
IN 10+ YEARS

LONGITUDINAL TRACKING

HIGHER AQ® PREDICTS & IMPROVES — INDIVIDUAL & TEAM

Performance

Productivity

Innovation

Agility

Resilience

Change pace

Problem-solving

Optimism & energy

Morale

ENTERPRISE

Retention & hiring

Talent

Leadership

Culture

Engagement

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

What it takes to install — and **where it breaks.**

This isn't plug-and-play. It asks more of the sponsor and the team than a training rollout does — that's the point, and the risk.

What it requires

- **A sponsor who protects the mindset work** when it doesn't show up on a completion dashboard next week.
- **Real operators on live problems** — a cohort with P&L accountability and real stakes, not a training audience.
- **Operator-Coaches** who have done the job, not consultants who have read about it.
- **90-day cycles**, run cohort by cohort — not a one-day offsite.

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 doesn't move a completion rate.
- **Treated as an event, not a rhythm.** One cohort is a pilot; durability comes across two or three.

WEEKS 1-2 · ALIGN

Shared context, commercial reality, and an **AQ® baseline** before any content.

WEEKS 3-8 · INSPIRE & REFLECT

The mindset layer goes in **before** the method. Resistance gets reframed as signal.

WEEKS 4-12 · APPLY

Growth Projects on live P&L problems. **First behavior change inside a quarter.**

QUARTER 2+ · SCALE

Participants coach the next cohort. **Capability runs without you in the room.**

Run as a rhythm, the first cohort proves it.

Run as an event, it's **failed training, again.**

Three signals — and the **one to own**.

The metrics Commercial Excellence and Transformation own — leading, behavioral, then financial. The financial ones belong to the business.

LEADING INDICATOR

Moves in weeks

Adaptive capacity

AQ® for defense, GRIT™ for offense, benchmarked before and after. The science shows it predicts successful outcomes better than any other metric.

Commercial Excellence owns this

BEHAVIORAL INDICATOR

Moves in months

Execution discipline

Growth Project™ progress, adoption of new ways of working, and the consistency of follow-through — observed by coaches, not self-reported.

Commercial Excellence owns this

LAGGING INDICATOR

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

THE ONE THAT PREDICTS THE REST

Commercial Excellence and Transformation own the **leading indicators**. Revenue and margin stay with the business units.

And **adaptive capacity** is the one to own — it predicts successful outcomes better than any other metric.

PROOF CASE

THE OPERATOR



Roy van Griensven

Commercial Excellence lead · LANXESS (global specialty chemicals)

 [VERIFY ON LINKEDIN](#) ↗

He scrapped a failed consulting playbook and rebuilt it **mindset first**.

At LANXESS, Roy van Griensven inherited a classroom capability program from a top consulting firm — a design he had watched fail before. It treated behavior as a downstream result of training, not the thing to solve for.

He rebuilt it as the Commercial Excellence Academy, designed with Demand Metric. Participants started with an adversity-response baseline, then ran 90-day projects on their own live problems, coached weekly by a senior operator — not a consultant.

“The best development experience of my career.” — a German-HQ skeptic

300+

Frontline commercial leaders through the program, **adopting with minimal resistance**

52

90-day projects launched on **real commercial opportunities** — new-market entry, cross-unit deals, pricing, AI

6

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

[Watch the interviews](#) →



THE RARE PROFILE THIS PRODUCES

Roy is what we call a **Transformation Architect**.

He doesn't just run a program — he builds transformation capability that outlasts him. His mandate has since expanded to **Head of Business Transformation**.

ADKAR vs. TransformationOS, across the dimensions that matter.

DIMENSION	ADKAR	TRANSFORMATIONOS
Paradigm	Change management: move an organization through one bounded change, then finish.	Behavioral evolution: build an enterprise that keeps adapting on its own.
Core objective	Drives behavioral compliance through a defined sequence of conditions.	Ignite intrinsic motivation and reduce passive resistance to raise transformation velocity.
Theory of change	Information + incentives + governance = adoption. Resistance must be overcome.	Mindset + guided skill + tools = commitment. Passive resistance is a rational signal.
Motivation model	Extrinsic. Build Desire through burning-platform messaging and senior endorsement.	Intrinsic. Activate autonomy, competence, and relatedness before new behaviors.
Sequencing	Awareness → Desire → Knowledge → Ability → Reinforcement.	Mindset → Skillset → Toolset. Adversity readiness precedes skills; skills precede tools.
Passive resistance	Treated as insufficient Awareness or Desire — met with more communication.	Treated as a rational signal of misalignment — addressed at the motivational root.
Learning method	Instructional delivery: training events, e-learning, process docs.	Guided discovery and project-based learning — capability built by doing the real work.

DIMENSION	ADKAR	TRANSFORMATIONOS
Adversity readiness	Not addressed. No mechanism to strengthen response to challenge and pressure.	Central. AQ® development is the foundational layer — improvement 11–23%, permanent.
Who delivers it	Change-management consultants and internal change offices.	Operator-coaches who have executed commercial transformation at scale.
Reinforcement	External: governance, incentives, metrics. Degrades when oversight reduces.	Internal: intrinsic motivation, AQ® resilience, peer coaching cadences.
Measurement	Stage progression: awareness scores, training completion, observation.	Adaptive capacity (AQ®) benchmarked before and after, execution discipline, and business impact in the client's systems.
Durability	Dependent on sustained reinforcement. Reverts when governance pressure reduces.	Durable. AQ® gains and intrinsic motivation do not degrade when oversight ends.
Track record	Widely deployed. 70–80% of major transformations fail (McKinsey; HBS).	Deployed at LANXESS (2025): 300+ leaders, adoption stuck with minimal resistance.

THE BOTTOM LINE

ADKAR manages the **surface. Compliance needs a watcher — it fades when the pressure lifts.**

TransformationOS changes the **motivational root. Commitment carries itself — and lasts long after oversight ends.**

The job has changed. The **sharper question** for your next initiative.

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 ADKAR does not dissolve. The usual alternatives — big-consultancy change practices, Prosci, the LMS — manage the same surface ADKAR named. None install the mindset layer underneath.

**Compliance needs someone
watching. Commitment does not.**

**Motivation that belongs to your people
is the one advantage **capital cannot
buy** — and the surest reason change
outlives the sponsor who launched it.**

— THE NEXT STEP

Ready to equip your people to **harness the adversity** transformation generates?

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 →](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Founder and Group Moderator of the **Commercial Excellence Consortium™**, an invite-only peer community of 250+ 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* — *not consultants* — are best positioned to solve the hardest problems in commercial excellence.

— BY INVITATION ONLY —

The Executive Fellowship

A working circle for **Heads of Commercial Excellence, Strategy, Transformation, and Growth** at \$1B+ enterprises — operators building the next commercial operating model, together.

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