OSKAR Model

Idea In Short

Coaches, managers and organizational leaders who rely on problem-analysis frameworks should adopt the OSKAR (Outcome, Scaling, Know-how, Affirm and Action, Review) model where the objective is behavioral change, performance improvement or leadership development. Paul Z. Jackson and Mark McKergow developed OSKAR in 2002, drawing on the solution-focused brief therapy [SFBT] tradition of Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg. The model generates momentum from the first session, strengthens coachee accountability and scales across individual, team and organizational contexts. The core operating principle is direct: ask what already works, amplify it and build from there. For any executive or coach reading this, the decision is straightforward — where you want change that produces results quickly, OSKAR offers the most structured path forward.

Jackson and McKergow1 invented OSKAR around the year 2000 for a client project and published the framework in their 2002 book The Solutions Focus: Making Coaching and Change SIMPLE.2The framework draws directly from SFBT, a clinical approach developed at the Brief Family Therapy Center [BFTC] in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, by de Shazer and Berg beginning in the mid-1980s. The SFBT tradition rests on one organizing principle: the client already holds the resources required to create change.

Jackson and McKergow's contribution was not new psychological theory — it was operationalization. They translated a clinically proven approach into a structured protocol that managers, internal coaches and organizational leaders could learn and deploy without clinical training. The SFBT evidence base underpins OSKAR's credibility. A 2024 umbrella review published in Psychotherapy Research confirmed that SFBT produced significant positive outcomes across different issues, settings and cultural contexts, with no evidence of harm.3A separate meta-analysis found that participants receiving SFBT showed a 59 percent reduction in psychosocial outcomes, with a 32 percent reduction compared to treatment as usual.4

Structural Architecture of the Model

OSKAR is a linear framework with a defined start and end. This structural feature distinguishes it from cyclical models and makes it particularly well-suited to time-bounded coaching engagements with executives and managers. Each stage builds on the preceding one, generating compounding clarity for the person being coached.5

Outcome opens every session. Coach and coachee jointly establish what success looks like — for the immediate conversation and for the broader development objective. The discipline here is precision: a coachee who cannot articulate a concrete, observable desired state has not yet committed to the work.6The Outcome stage surfaces this early and corrects it before the conversation moves forward. Core questions here include: What do you want to achieve? What would success look like? What difference would achieving it make for you?

Scaling converts a subjective conversation into a measurable exchange. The coach invites the coachee to rate the current situation on a zero-to-ten scale, where zero represents the worst the situation has ever been and ten represents the desired future state. The follow-on question carries the analytical weight: You are at four — what did you do to reach that point rather than zero? That single reframe shifts the conversation immediately from problem acknowledgment to existing capability. The scale also creates a persistent reference point that both coach and coachee carry across sessions, enabling a longitudinal progress narrative that is coachee-generated, not coach-interpreted.

Know-how and Resources is the diagnostic core of the model. Here the coach surfaces the skills, knowledge, relationships and personal attributes the coachee already holds in relation to the desired outcome. ECI Coaching describes this stage as a deliberate strengths inventory, categorizing existing capabilities into those absent, those present but requiring development and those already operating at the required standard. Questions in this stage ask when the desired outcome has already occurred, even partially and what the coachee did to produce it. This exception-finding technique, inherited from de Shazer's SFBT work, regularly reveals that coachees have already solved a version of their current challenge in a different context. Identifying that exception frequently becomes the turning point of the entire engagement.

Affirm and Action links reinforcement to forward momentum. The coach reflects back what the Know-how stage surfaced — demonstrated competencies, past successes, concrete

strengths — and then directs the conversation toward the smallest viable next step.The letter A in OSKAR carries a double load — affirmation and action — deliberately so. McKergow and Clarke note in their sfwork paper that the A in OSKAR is made to work twice as hard as the other letters. The deliberate smallness of the chosen action is not caution — it is applied behavioral science. Small actions lower activation energy, produce early wins and build the motivational momentum required to sustain longer-term transformation.

Review closes one cycle and opens the next. This stage typically begins the subsequent coaching session rather than ending the current one. The coach asks what has improved, what the coachee specifically did to produce that improvement and what broader effects those actions have generated. Even marginal improvement receives careful examination to understand the mechanism that produced it. This reinforces coachee agency and builds a cumulative, evidence-based record of progress that the coachee owns.

The Epistemological Break

The distinction OSKAR represents relative to earlier coaching frameworks is not merely methodological — it is a fundamental reorientation of where coaching attention lands. Traditional frameworks, including Sir John Whitmore's widely used GROW (Goal, Reality, Options, Will) model from the 1980s, allocate significant session time to examining current reality and the problem space. The implicit assumption is that understanding a problem fully will eventually surface its solution.

OSKAR inverts this logic. The SFBT research tradition demonstrated that people can construct viable change pathways from existing resources without fully analyzing why a problem exists. In executive coaching, where time is constrained and organizational environments are too complex for comprehensive causal analysis, this distinction is practically significant. A senior leader managing a strategic pivot or a people-leadership challenge gains more from identifying what has already worked than from conducting a forensic review of failure. Prolonged engagement with the problem narrative reduces self-efficacy, which the behavioral change literature links consistently to delayed and weakened action.

The Outcome and Scaling stages do establish an honest current-state picture. What the model deliberately avoids is allowing the problem narrative to become the primary reference point of the coaching relationship — a structural choice that separates OSKAR from most

protocols in active organizational use today.

Organizational and Executive Applications

OSKAR applies across individual executive coaching, team coaching and organizational development and its linear architecture suits each context differently.

In individual executive coaching, the model offers a time-efficient structure for high-stakes developmental conversations with senior leaders who operate under schedule pressure. The Scaling stage is especially well-matched to executive audiences. Senior leaders process performance through quantitative lenses by default; the scale converts a subjective conversation into a measurable progress discussion anchored to numbers the leader has generated independently. That alignment between model mechanics and executive operating style accelerates trust and productive engagement.

In team coaching, OSKAR functions as a facilitation architecture. A team facing a collective performance challenge can move through the five stages together, surfacing distributed know-how that no single member holds alone.7The Affirm stage in team settings builds collective confidence grounded in demonstrated capability rather than aspirational language. In post-restructuring or post-merger environments where teams lack a coherent shared performance narrative, the Affirm stage constructs a factual foundation for collective identity.

Projektmagazin notes that OSKAR's range of organizational applications includes coaching, mentoring, personnel and career development, personal development, team development, retrospectives and meetings.8Technology-enabled coaching platforms increasingly incorporate OSKAR's architecture into session templates, enabling organizations to deploy solution-focused conversations across large populations without proportional increases in coaching cost. The Scaling stage generates quantitative data points that can be tracked across sessions and aggregated at team or business-unit level — a capability most qualitative coaching frameworks cannot replicate.

Relationship to Adjacent Frameworks

Also in 2002, Karen Whittleworth and Andrew Gilbert introduced the OSCAR model as a parallel variant, replacing Know-how with Choices and Consequences. Growthspace notes

that both models cover the same ground but categorize the content differently: OSKAR addresses choices under the Action component, while OSCAR makes choices explicit in a dedicated stage.9The practical selection criterion between them is whether the coaching priority is capability activation [OSKAR] or deliberate choice-awareness [OSCAR].

Wiley's Coaching Practiced (2022) places OSKAR alongside GROW, PRACTICE and SPACE as established solution-focused coaching models in active organizational use.10The critical structural difference between OSKAR and GROW is session velocity: OSKAR moves faster from present-state assessment to resource activation because it does not dedicate a stage to problem-space examination. In time-constrained executive settings, that structural advantage is material — problem exploration can consume available session time before generating any forward momentum.

The CLEAR (Contracting, Listening, Exploring, Action, Review) model, developed by Peter Hawkins, incorporates a deeper relational and emotional dimension in its middle stages, making it better suited where the coaching relationship itself is the developmental priority. OSKAR is more effective where the stated priority is measurable behavioral change and task performance. Both models include a Review stage, reflecting the value the solution-focused community places on evidence-based progress tracking across sessions.

Limits of the Model

OSKAR performs best where the coachee holds genuine motivation and meaningful agency over their circumstances. Where motivation is absent or environmental constraints are severe, the model's forward orientation can appear to minimize legitimate structural barriers.11Coaches must identify that boundary condition early and adjust their approach accordingly rather than applying OSKAR as an unconditional default.

The model demands disciplined facilitation. In inexperienced hands, the Affirm stage degrades into generic encouragement, which sophisticated executives detect and discount immediately. The Know-how stage requires the ability to ask genuinely open questions and resist the impulse to provide answers — both trainable competencies, but neither automatic. Organizations that deploy OSKAR at scale without investing in facilitator development will see inconsistent returns across the coaching population.

OSKAR is a conversational framework for behavioral and performance coaching. It is not a

strategic planning instrument, a decision-making methodology or a substitute for organizational diagnosis. Applying it to systemic or structural challenges that require root-cause analysis will expose its scope limits quickly. Within its proper domain, however, the model is one of the most efficient and scalable coaching protocols in current organizational practice.

Deploying OSKAR at Scale

Organizations that achieve durable results from OSKAR treat it as a cultural capability rather than a training event. This means building the model's principles into manager development programs, performance conversation frameworks and coaching supervision structures. It also means creating the organizational conditions within which OSKAR conversations generate authentic disclosure: psychological safety, protected time for reflection and a shared language of strengths.

The most productive deployment pattern introduces OSKAR in stages. Outcome and Scaling are accessible to novice coaches and line managers and integrate into routine performance conversations immediately. Know-how and Affirm require practice in lower-stakes settings before application in critical conversations. Review, applied consistently, converts individual coaching engagements into longitudinal development programs with a visible, coachee-owned evidence base of growth.12

Coaching Leaders, reviewing Jackson and McKergow's framework, concluded that the 2002 publication marked a genuine step forward in thinking about organisational change precisely because it gave practitioners a repeatable, client-centered protocol grounded in evidence rather than consulting convention.13That assessment holds today. The model's clean five-stage linear structure maps onto digital session formats, cross-cultural coaching contexts and leadership development curricula without modification, a versatility that few purpose-built frameworks match.

Summary

OSKAR — Outcome, Scaling, Know-how, Affirm and Action, Review — is a five-stage solution-focused coaching framework developed by Jackson and McKergow in 2002,

grounded in de Shazer and Berg's SFBT research. It activates existing capability rather than analyzing problems, generates measurable progress from the first session and scales efficiently across individual, team and organizational contexts.