

Leading Change > Transition Management > Understanding Endings

In the 'Endings' stage, staff may want to deny the existence of the initiative and other related change events. Their denial can move them to fear and uncertainty about the future. This diminishes their level of activity and readiness to deal with the accelerating pace of change as the process starts to impact on the organisation.

Staff may acutely feel the loss of the familiarity and security they felt in the organisation before this and other changes occurred. They are likely to be trying to reconcile or accept the fact that things will now be different from the way they have been. They will be trying to accept that they will have to let go of their current sense of identity in the organisation.

Leading Change > Transition Management > Understanding the Neutral Zone

The Neutral Zone or exploration stage is the time between the current and the desired state. Staff will be attempting to orient themselves to the new requirements and behaviours. During this time, they will be confused about the future and will feel overloaded with competing demands.

This can have a negative impact on activities. Because things can be chaotic at this stage, staff may question the status quo or the accepted way of doing things. It is important to note that with encouragement this stage can be a time of exploration that is ripe with creative opportunity.

Leading Change > Transition Management > Understanding New Beginnings

The New Beginnings stage of the Transition Curve is that time when people are ready to commit to the new direction and the change. They feel secure in the new organization and are ready to function as a significant contributor. This typically occurs as the initiative starts to achieve some of its desired goals.

Leading Change > Transition Management > Emotional Responses to Change and Transition

"It can be a bit scary ... and if people do not get hold of that and I think managers should come clean on it and say it will be a bit scary and if they don't and say oh no it will be fine there will be people who will be sitting there and thinking oh no they are saying it should be fine and I am scared to death so there must be something wrong with me and there will be managers who are scared too...it is just where I come from.... A bit centred I know but there you go."

In a transition there are emotional responses to the losses that people experience because of the changes. This is normal but often these responses are taken by others as signs that the change is being resisted. Those leading change need to recognise these emotions in others and themselves, and develop ways to manage their own

emotions and assist others to manage theirs. Unmanaged, these responses may undermine the changes and have personal consequences.

This process has been likened, psychologically, to the grieving process.

"I think you can follow it back if you want to bereavement and all sorts of things like that. Saying that you cannot move through bereavement and become creative at the other end till you have got hold of what the loss means and there is a sequential event about that. It does not match over fully but there are elements within it."

Everyone deals with such major changes in their own way but we can identify a number of stages that staff might go through.

- Shock and Denial
- Distrust
- Anger and Guilt
- Depression, Anxiety and Stress
- Regret

The stages are discussed below together with some typical views from those who have experienced such a process. Each of the stages in the process needs to be recognised and responded to accordingly. For example, it's no good expecting grudging acceptance when staff are still in shock. You are more likely to get anger and no argument, no matter how reasonable to you, is likely to win staff around.

For those, managing the change, the challenge is to get staff through from shock to grudging acceptance in as fast a time as possible whilst minimising stress and limiting the effect on other areas of the organisation.

Shock and Denial

"I couldn't believe it! We had agreed to work towards building up student numbers in the department at a previous consultation meeting. The final decision to close us down came out of the blue. I still don't understand the criteria for the decision."

No matter how well impending decisions have been trailed - once they become known there is a period of shock. People refuse to believe them at first - all large organisations abound with rumours that never come to fruition.

The shock stage is usually short-lived.

- Communicate the broad headline issues, the reasons for change and the actions that will happen.
- Don't expect people to make decisions or take actions people will not be interested about the future as much as the past.
- Be available and prepared to listen.
- Think about a strategy to help staff through the remaining stages of the process.

Distrust

"There were other departments that weren't recruiting well but it was decided that ours should be the one to go. The data that was at the heart of the decision wasn't trusted by many academics throughout the institution. "

After the shock employees may feel as though 'the rug has been pulled out from under them'. The trust level within the organisation drops, and people who feel betrayed develop a generally suspicious, 'save-your-own-skin' attitude. Some organisations have reported suspicion among peers and a withholding of information for fear of advancing somebody else's interests.

- Communicate again the reasons and who is likely to be involved.
- Clarify and make clear the timescales for the decision-making process - and ensure these are kept to.
- Be honest about the future.
- Don't develop a blame culture - deal with issues not people.
- Be available - but don't expect a rush of people to talk to you.

Anger and Guilt

"People were very angry. The Unions were involved and the case went to tribunal which the institution lost. Three years on, some people are still angry about how it was handled."

Change creates winners (those who benefit from the change) and losers (those who don't). The winners can often feel guilty and the messengers of the change may also feel guilty. Guilty people usually express their feelings indirectly and may feel uncomfortable around the losers. They may overcompensate ('don't blame me, I didn't plan this change') or they may even blame and/or patronize the losers for not being able to cope with the change well. This can also affect communication - those not involved don't know what to say to those that are leading to an even greater sense of alienation by those most affected.

Those who don't benefit from the change or those whose friends/colleagues don't benefit can feel resentment, especially towards the hierarchy. They can become angry, blame the organisation and can look for ways to payback (working slowly, leaving work undone, leaking documents, making mistakes or organising opposition).

At this stage:

- Provide opportunities to let off steam.
- Expect open anger from some staff and acknowledge it as a natural reaction.
- Respond with empathy to people's sense of loss
- Start to explain the need for change in more detail but don't expect to be listened to straight away.
- Be careful about the wording of even confidential documents - they may become public.
- Don't expect engagement in new processes or decision-making at this stage.

Depression, Anxiety and Stress

"The response to the decision was that people started looking for other jobs and in the middle

of the year some staff left which put the rest of us in a difficult position. This was very demotivating and very stressful."

Some people get anxious from the first rumour of change and when the changes are complete they then worry about the next set of changes. Nervousness, working extra time and taking on extra work to 'please the boss' can be examples of how some employees respond to change. 'If I get more paperwork out, start the day earlier and stay later, come in on weekends, maybe I'll get to stay or keep my staff or this office.' Anxiety can be a stimulus initially but can eventually lead to a decline in focus on tasks and reduce motivation, energy and adaptability. Stress and its negative effects usually accompany this behaviour. It is instructive to note that absenteeism, medical claims, stress related claims all increase at times of significant organisational change (although there may be a few months lag time). Living with the anxiety of the unknown associated with a change can create fears that taking risks and setting work goals too high or being too creative may result in displeasing the boss. Goals are set low, creative approaches to problem solving are scarce, and no one wants to take any chances of looking bad.

Some people focus on 'How does this affect me? What will happen to me?' Transitions focus people back on themselves, which can undermine teamwork and increase competition for positions as well as undermine customer service. It is hard to take care of others when you are preoccupied with your own survival. Self-absorption can also undermine loyalty and commitment to the organisation.

It's important to try to move through this stage as quickly as possible.

- Accept some temporary lack of motivation.
- Talk to staff.
- Reinforce the reasons for change and stress that the decision is not necessarily a reflection on the abilities of those involved. Rebuild confidence and self-esteem.
- Recognise that this may not be the best time for creativity.
- Provide counselling if necessary.

Regret

"I felt that I had been loyal to the institution and expected some loyalty in return. I felt isolated from the institution, not informed and not valued. I really feel that it could have been handled better. The worst aspect was the uncertainty."

This is a more positive stage. Staff have come to terms with the change and its personal affects. In the mind, the past always represents a better time and a regret for its passing is natural. The challenge is to ensure that staff don't stay in the past and revert to old ways but engage actively in the new reality.

- Start communicating the future and set out the decisions to be taken.
- Discuss new roles.
- Set short-term goals that are achievable.
- Be positive but realistic.
- At this stage it can be useful to have a wake for the old ways - celebrating what was achieved and drawing a line under the past.

Acceptance

"I always acted in the best interests of my students. This was difficult at first but I have now become accustomed to my new role and new opportunities have opened up."

This stage is assisted by moving from short-term to long-term vision and building and embedding the new reality. Don't dwell on the past. This is the time to start enthusing about the future.

- Celebrate new successes.
- Make sure everyone is clear about new roles.
- Don't expect a radical change overnight - major wounds take a while to heal.
- Convert complaints to action.
- Promote personal responsibility and accountability.
- Delegate as much as possible where appropriate.
- Model new behaviours.
- Reduce the number of meeting relating specifically to change.
- Document any new procedures.
- Revise Job Descriptions and Performance Objectives

Leading Change > Transition Management > The Seven Principles of Transition Management

You have to end before you begin.

Frequently people talk about what's about to begin and there is no mention of what has to end. No one can develop a new identity or a new purpose until he or she has let go of the old one. It is best to deal with endings realistically and help people gain closure on the past. They will move on more readily and take advantage of what the future has to offer if you do.

Between the ending and the new beginning, there is an hiatus.

In between letting go of the old way and taking hold of the new, there is a difficult journey through the wilderness or 'a time in between the trapezes'. This is a dangerous time when systems don't work well and people lose heart easily. People need to know that it is usual to go through a chaotic interim between letting go and taking hold again and that it's normal to be discouraged and confused by the experience. Build in temporary sources of support and ways that people can feel in control by being involved in decisions that affect them.

The hiatus can be a creative time.

The same forces that make the in-between time difficult, mean that the normal resistances to new ideas and new behaviours don't work well either. For that reason, the interim is a potentially creative time, when new things can be introduced more quickly and easily than usual. This can be a time to step back and take stock, to try new things and a time to view every problem as an opportunity to abandon outmoded ways and create more adaptive and effective ones.

Transition is developmental

What ends is often not just a particular situation but a whole chapter and stage of development in the organisation's life cycle. Behind the scenes, a new organisation is taking shape. This is easier to see in retrospect, but it's worth remembering at the time that there is a purpose to all the distress and disturbance. Assist people to see that the old way was fine for its' time, but a new chapter is needed for a new day. It is also very important for managers to publicly identify, protect and carry forward the parts of the past that are valuable and still viable.

Transition is also the source of renewal

The leap from one stage of development to another, like comparable leaps in nature, releases energy. That is why organisations so often come out of a painful crisis with new energy and a new focus. Renewal for individuals or groups comes from going through transition successfully, not in time away from the situation. Emphasise the need to re-prioritise as a way of unloading irrelevant policies and procedures. Discontinuing the old ways can be a release, especially if it is paired with an effort to clarify and celebrate the new mission, strategies and the new identity that the organization is growing into.

People go through transition at different speeds and in different ways.

People get strung out along the path of transition like runners in a marathon. The leaders who designed the change are often far out ahead. They had a head start; they feel more in control of their fate and probably aren't as personally affected as many of the rank and file. Some people are more resilient during change. Leaders understand these things and communicate in terms that make sense from where people presently are, not just where the leaders are.

Most organisations are running a transition deficit.

Many organisations don't give people a chance to complete the transition cycle. They think that they are saving time by hurrying people, but actually all they are doing is leaving people with still more unfinished business to carry along with them. Sooner or later the load will get too heavy, and some apparently small change will send the whole system into transition bankruptcy. To keep that from happening, slow down. Listen more and talk less. Investigate what old hurts and resentments may be getting in the way of people dealing directly with this transition. Do whatever you can to address them and lay them to rest. Build your case that this time will be different - and make sure it is!

The Timings of New Beginnings

Like any organic process, beginnings cannot be made to happen by a word or act. They happen when the timing of the transition process allows them to happen, just as flowers and fruit appear on a schedule that is natural and not subject to anyone's will. That is why it is so important to understand the transition process and where people are in it.

Only when you get into people's shoes and feel what they are feeling can you help them to manage their transition. More beginnings abort because they were not preceded by well-managed endings and neutral zones than for any other reason.

But if beginnings cannot be forced according to one's personal wishes, they can be encouraged, supported and reinforced. You cannot turn the key or flip the switch, but you can cultivate the ground and provide the nourishment. What you can do falls under four headings:

- You can explain the basic purpose behind the outcome you seek. People have to understand the logic of it before they turn their minds to work on it.
- You can put a picture of how the outcome will look and feel. People need to experience it imaginatively before they can give their hearts to it.
- You can lay out a step-by-step plan for phasing in the outcome. People need a clear idea of how they can get where they need to go.
- You can give each person a part to play in both the plan and the outcome itself. People need a tangible way to contribute and participate.

Change may focus on goals, structures, resources, or people - or any combination. It is rarely easy or simple but often messy, difficult and challenging. Our discussions with staff from across the sector have broadly supported Scott's observation that the following are common myths about change management (Scott, 1999).

The knight on a White Charger myth. All that is required is to appoint a dynamic, reform-oriented leader and successful change is assured.

The consensual myth. A proposed change will only work if everyone it affects has approved of it; that is, a 'bottom-up' approach to change always works.

The linear myth. Change proceeds in a fixed, one-off linear fashion from initiation through development, implementation and institutionalisation.

The brute logic myth. Change is achieved by brute logic; that is, provided the proponent's argument for a change is compelling, those it affects will automatically adopt it.

The change event myth. Change is an event, like the launch of a new policy or curriculum rather than being a long iterative learning (and unlearning) process for all its participants.

The silver bullet myth. There is a set procedure which, if followed, will guarantee successful change.

The one size fits all myth. All that is necessary is to develop a standardised curriculum or procedure and users will implement it fully and exactly as intended in every location cross the system.

The either/or myth. Change management involves having to make rigid choices between, for example, taking a 'top down' or a bottom-up' approach giving clear direction or allowing a large degree of flexibility, adopting an organisation-wide or a local emphasis, focussing on enhancement or innovation.