

CHANGES AND TRANSITIONS

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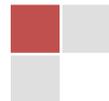
Change is nothing new. We understand that organizations cannot be just endlessly "managed," replicating yesterday's practices to achieve success. All sorts of conditions change and yesterday's assumptions and practices no longer work. There must be innovation, and innovation means change.

In years past, perhaps, leaders could simply order changes. Even today, many view it as a straightforward process: establish a task force to lay out what needs to be done, when, and by whom. Then all that seems left for the organization is *to implement the plan*. Many people imagine that to make change work, people needed only to follow the plan, which shows how to get from here (where things stand now) to there (where they'll stand after the plan is implemented).

Fine. But then, why don't people "Just Do It"? And what are we supposed to do when they *Just Don't Do It* -- when people do not make the changes that need to be made, when deadlines are missed, costs run over budget, and valuable workers get so frustrated that they jump ship at the first opportunity.

That happens because transition occurs in the course of every attempt at change. Transition is the state that change puts people into. The *change* is external (different policies, practices, or structures), while *transition* is internal (a psychological reorientation that people have to go through).

The trouble is, most people imagine that transition is automatic and that it occurs simply because the change is happening. But it doesn't. Just because the computers are on everyone's desk doesn't mean that the new customer database is transforming operations. And just because



two organizations are fully "merged" doesn't mean that they operate as one or that the envisioned cost savings will be realized.

Even when a change is showing signs that it may work, there is the issue of timing, for transition happens much more slowly than change. That is why the ambitious timetable that the leader initiated turns out to have been wildly optimistic: it was based on getting the *change* accomplished, not on getting the people through the *transition*.

Transition takes longer because it requires that people undergo three separate processes.

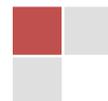
1. ENDINGS

The first requirement is that people have to let go of the way that things (and, worse, the way that they themselves) used to be. As the folk-wisdom puts it, "You can't steal second base with your foot on first." You have to leave where you are, and many people have spent their whole lives standing on first base. It isn't just a personal preference you are asking them to give up. You are asking them to let go of the way of engaging or accomplishing tasks that made them successful in the past. You are asking them to let go of what feels to them like their whole world of experience.

2. SHIFTING INTO NEUTRAL

Even after people have let go of their old ways, they find themselves unable to start anew. They are entering the second difficult phase of transition. We call it the *neutral zone*, and that in-between state is so full of uncertainty and confusion that simply coping with it takes most of people's energy.

The neutral zone is uncomfortable, so people are driven to get out of it quickly. Some try to rush ahead into the new situation, while others



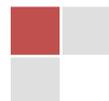
back-pedal and retreat into the past. Successful transition, however, requires that people spend time in the neutral zone. This time is not wasted, for that is where the creativity and energy of transition are found and the real transformation takes place. It's like Moses in the wilderness: it was there, not in the Promised Land, that Moses received the Ten Commandments.

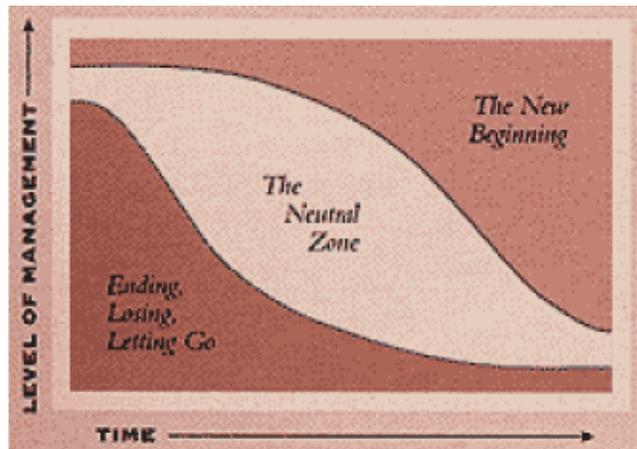
The *change* can continue forward on something close to its own schedule while the *transition* is being attended to, but if the transition is not dealt with, the change may collapse. People cannot do the new things that the new situation requires until they come to grips with what is being asked of them.

3. MOVING FORWARD: BEGINNINGS

Some people fail to get through transition because they do not let go of the old ways and make an ending; others fail because they become frightened and confused by the neutral zone and don't stay in it long enough for it to do its work on them. Some, however, do get through these first two phases of transition, but then freeze when they face the third phase, the new beginning. For that third phase requires people to begin behaving in a new way, and that can be disconcerting -- it puts one's sense of competence and value at risk. Especially in organizations that have a history of punishing mistakes, people hang back during the final phase of transition, waiting to see how others are going to handle the new beginning.

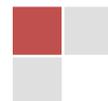
Once people understand how the new beginning will improve their situation, they are likely to "get on board" with the changes. They will then be enthusiastic members of the team, promoting new ways of working together and getting the job done.





Ways To Help Manage Transitions

1. Although the details of a transition management plan are unique to each situation, here are some helpful things to remember:
2. Learn to describe the change and why it must happen, and do so succinctly in one minute or less.
3. Be sure that the details of the change are planned carefully and that someone is responsible for each detail. Timelines for all the changes should be established, and a communications plan explaining the changes is also helpful.
4. Understand with the assistance of those closest to the change who is going to have to let go of what; what is ending (and what is not) and what people may need to let go of.
5. Make sure that steps are taken to help people respectfully let go of the past. These may include events that demonstrate that change is occurring, information about the change, and understanding the symptoms of grieving, as well as efforts to protect people's interests while they are giving up the status quo.



6. Help people through the neutral zone with communication (rather than simple information) that emphasizes connections with and concern for the followers. Keep reiterating the "4 P's" of transition communications:
 7. The *purpose*: Why we have to do this
 8. The *picture*: What it will look and feel like when we reach our goal
 9. The *plan*: Step-by-step, how we will get there
 10. The *part*: What you can (and need to) do to help us move forward.
11. Create temporary solutions to the temporary problems and the high levels of uncertainty found in the neutral zone. For example, transition monitoring teams can alert the leader to unforeseen problems, and will disband when the process is finished.
12. Help people launch the new beginning by articulating the new attitudes and behaviours needed to make the change work and then modeling and rewarding those behaviours and attitudes.

