



MANAGE TRANSITIONS TO MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN FASTER AND EASIER

The key to successful change is to think through **who** will have to let go of **what** when that change occurs.

Change involves transitions. Unless transition occurs, change will not happen.

Change is situational. It involves new processes or products, a new boss, or a new team member. It is external and focused on the outcome.

Transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation. It is internal. It depends on letting go of the old reality and the old identity you had before the change took place.

Transition starts with an ending. Think of starting a new job. You have to let go of the old peer group, a commute, your favorite lunch place, or current competence level. Even if you are making positive changes, transitions involve letting go and a sense of loss. For example, moving your office to a new building can be seen as a loss of something related to a person's job.

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The Neutral Zone comes after letting go. This is the space between the old reality and the new one. This is time when you let go of the old identity and create a new one.

It is a time when people feel uncomfortable, unanchored, and confused. They may try to escape no-man's land by rushing through it and becoming discouraged, or think there is something wrong with themselves and their inability to manage the transition, and they may leave the organization.





Follow these steps to support successful organizational change.

1. Identify the change you are making.

This could be a merger, new boss, new work space, consolidating teams, using a new technology, or transferring work functions to another group.

2. List out exactly how employee's behaviors and attitudes will have to change.

Identify their current behavior and the ideal future behavior.

For example, consider the consolidation of two teams into one. It is not enough to say, "Work together as one team." Be clear and direct in describing how teamwork looks now in behavioral and attitudinal examples. Define what individual's must stop doing and start doing. Define the new behavior:

- "I'm ending the Monday in-person meeting. It is now replaced with a Friday morning virtual meeting. Here are the details for it."
- "What I expect from you is to show up, be prepared to share your top 3 concerns and requests, turn off all electronic alarms, buzzers, and reminders, and contribute to the discussion."

3. Determine who is going to lose something with this change.

In the example in Step Two, the group that always did virtual meetings



loses nothing. The group that enjoyed their Monday face-to-face meeting is losing a type of connection that is important to them, with their colleagues and boss.

4. Sell the problem that is the reason for the change.

The group that enjoys the Monday staff meeting has to see the problem from your perspective because right now, it's not a problem for them.

"The reason I'm ending the Monday team meeting is because I cover the same content in both meetings. Now that I've added the Friday group to my division, I want to reduce the redundancy. "

Example of doing the Four Steps

1. Identify the change you are making.

The COO of a company decided to change the leave policy. It made sense to go from separate sick/holiday/annual leave pool to one paid-time-off (PTO) pool. It would reduce costs and save administrative time.

2. List out exactly how employee's behaviors and attitudes will have to change.

Answer the question: "Who is going to have to let go of what?"

Dig into specific behavior and attitude changes for everyone. Define the new process and procedure for requesting PTO, the role of the supervisor, accrual, carryover. Identify the behaviors and attitudes of new vs. long-term employees need to exhibit.



3. Determine who is going to lose something with this change.

Maybe the company is growing and the loss of accrued time and lack of appreciation for the extra time contributed to the organization. Or it is a loss of 'the good old days' when employees were in one office and helping do several different functions. Or it could be the unspoken assumption that things will always be the same for those employees who have been with the company a long time. It may seem to be a threat to the company values, vision, or mission.

4. Sell the problem that is the reason for the change.

Most managers spend 90% of their time and energy on selling the solution and 10% on selling the problem. Employees need to 'see' the problem before they can hear possible solutions.

List all the ways having separate leave buckets impacts the bottom line, payroll, customer billings, and employees. Give specific examples of the problem with the current process.

What to Expect During Transitions

You can expect employees to express resistance to the losses and endings. This is normal and to be expected.

1. Do not minimize the losses by arguing with what you hear from your colleagues. It is their reality and reality is subjective. Acknowledge people's feelings. Say statements like, "I hear you." "I'm sorry that we're having to make this policy change. It does affect everyone."



2. Deal directly with the losses openly. Do not sugar coat it in any way.
3. Acknowledge the loss. It hurts. It's uncomfortable. Expect people to overreact. People do not have much experience with openly experiencing the stages of transition. It's your job to teach them how so the next change and transition will be easier.

Effective leaders acknowledge loss openly, empathetically, and understand and expect others to exhibit signs of grieving: anger, bargaining, anxiety, sadness, disorientation, depression, and finally acceptance.

When Loss Occurs in Transitions, Look for Ways to Compensate for Them

This principle is important to plan for if change is to be successful. Remember, you are managing people's loss and leading them to the other side of acceptance and commitment to the change.

People go through stages of grief at varying degrees. Sometimes it is linear. Mostly it's a back-and-forth between resistance and exploration.

1. Shock and Denial – avoidance, confusion, fear, numbness, blame
2. Anger – Frustration, anxiety, irritation, embarrassment, shame
3. Depression and detachment – overwhelmed, feeling blah, lack of energy
4. Dialog and bargaining – reaching out to others, desire to tell one's story, struggle to find meaning for what has happened



5. Acceptance – exploring options, a new plan
6. Return to meaningful life – empowerment, security, self-esteem, meaning

Identify options to give back to balance the 'loss' associated with the change to help them move faster through these grief stages.

Examples

If people are losing responsibilities, add them to a training task force that relies on their technical expertise to move everyone through the transition.

If it has to do with losing recognition, host a one-time employee recognition event that highlights their contributions. Acknowledge that their work is allowing for the next group to excel; standing on their shoulders and showing appreciation for this foundational work. Without their contributions, the company would not be in a position to grow.

If people experience a sense of loss around knowledge, skills, and abilities, provide just-in-time and just-enough training for them to experience immediate learning successes.

Successful leaders plan for ways to give back to employees when they make changes that feel like a loss.

Plan for successful change by compensating for perceived losses.

For more information, read [Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change](#) by William Bridges.



Business Bio

Moira Lethbridge, M.Ed., is the principal and owner of Lethbridge & Associates LLC. She draws on 25 years of organizational experience and success to help individuals and companies increase their productivity and improve their performance. Previously, she was president and CEO of a professional services firm; she grew the company from 5 to 200 employees, increased revenue from \$3 million to \$35 million, and was named one of *SmartCEO* magazine's "Smart 100" in the Washington, DC, area for three years running. She is certified to administer leadership assessment tools including The Leadership Circle Profile (TLC), the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), and the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI). Her services include business and executive coaching, strategic planning, and leadership and personal development.

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