



Understanding People's Response to Charge

(Source: William Bridges, *Managing Transition and*
Scott and Jaffee, *Making the Most of Change*)

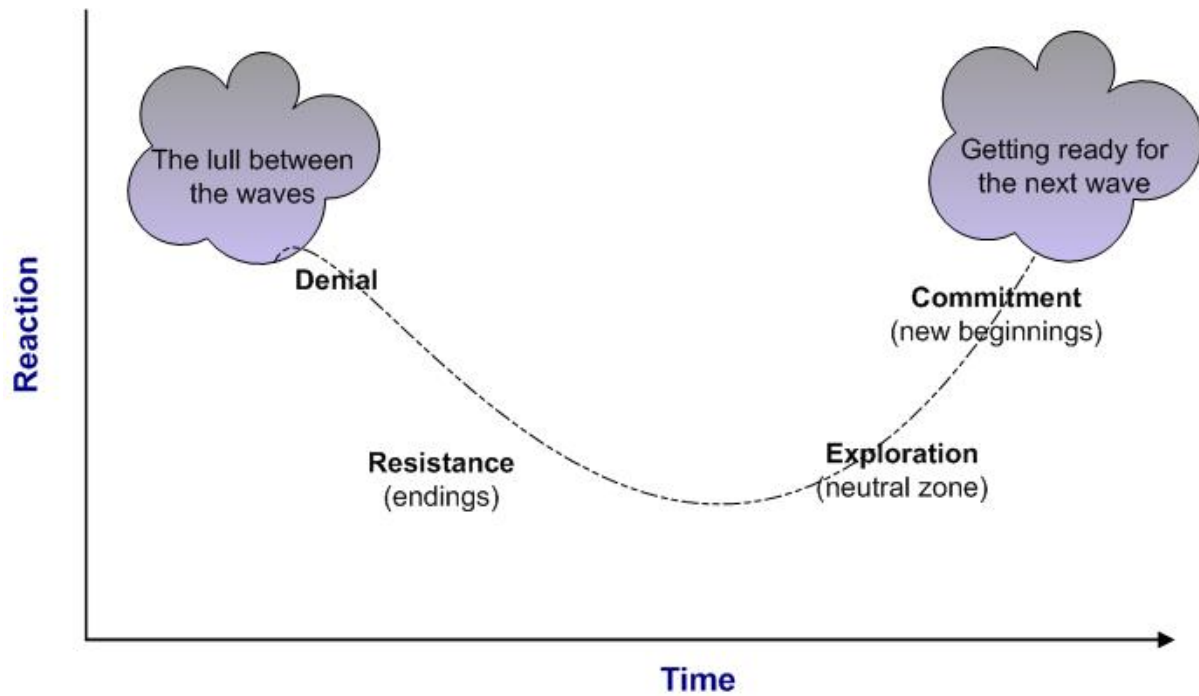
- What:** This tool will help you to recognize the signs of transition and understand people's response to change in order to take stock of where people are at.
- Why:** When people are in transition they react in certain characteristic ways. These reactions signal that transition issues need to be addressed. Being able to 1) identify the signs of transition and 2) understand people's response to loss, will help you remain calm and in control of your own reactions during change and transition. Timing is everything. By understanding how people respond during transition you can determine when to do what.
- When:** Use this tool at any time through the change to guide your thinking about what you are hearing and seeing from those affected by a change.
- How:** People's reactions during change are signals they are making a psychological adjustment to a change. Looking at the reaction will keep you open to a wide range of responses, without feeling guilty, defensive or merely dismissing it as 'just transition'.
- First, take a step back from what you are seeing and hearing and ask yourself: **“What signs am I seeing that would indicate people are in transition?”**
- Second, ask yourself: **“Who is in what stage of transition?”**

What signs am I seeing that would indicate people are in transition?

- Guilt and defensiveness:** Change creates 'winners' and 'losers'. The winners feel guilty and defensive when their co-workers don't benefit from the change. The leaders may feel guilty about delivering bad news and defensive about people's reactions to the news.
- Resentment:** The people who don't feel they benefit from the change or feel their friends, co-workers and colleagues have been hurt, are likely to feel resentful. They may be angry and blame the organization and the leaders.
- Anxiety:** People get anxious starting with the first rumours. When one group is affected by changes other groups worry that they will be next. When the announced changes are complete the survivors worry. "Are the changes really over? Will I be next? When is the next wave coming?"
- Self-absorption:** Transition causes people to focus on themselves. They begin to worry about how the changes will affect them personally. Self-absorption can undermine team work if fellow team members are seen as competitors for jobs and positions.
- Stress:** Transition causes stress. Some of the physical and emotional symptoms of stress include headaches, indigestion, teeth grinding, back pain, mood swings, irritability, apathy, compulsive eating, and hyperactivity. Studies have shown that people with high levels of stress are more susceptible to illness and accidents.

If you are seeing all or many of these signs in your workplace during a change effort, you can safely conclude people are going through transition. Before you take action you might want to look more closely at what you are seeing and hearing. The *Stages of Transition Model* will help you do that.

A Model for Managing Transition



One way to look at transition is to think about the stages people go through. Use Transition Model and the worksheets that follow to help you understand people's response to change and begin to think about what they need.

Who is in What Stage of Transition?

Instructions:

Review the specifics on the following pages to think about what you are seeing and hearing in the workplace. This will help you identify who might be in what stage of transition.

Not yet in transition (Denial): Before people realize how change will affect them.

What People Might Say	What People Might Do	What This Might Mean
"This is no big deal. I don't know what everyone is upset about" "They've said this before and nothing happened." "I'll believe it when I see it." "It doesn't really affect me." "This won't change anything." "What announcement; oh that, I didn't pay much attention." "We're prepared for this, we'll be OK." "We've done this before, no big deal." "They're just putting things back to the way they were before."	Continue with work as usual Agree without question Not react to the change Showing signs of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apathy • Shock • Hope • Co-operation • Agreement • Blind faith 	Although people may have been told, they may not have heard or absorbed the information about the change. Therefore they have not begun to figure out what the change means for them.

Who is talking and behaving this way?

What do people need?

People need help understanding the change and how it might affect them. (See *Strategies to Help People During Transition*).

Endings (Resistance):

People begin to fear how the change might affect them.

What People Might Say	What People Might Do	What this Might Mean
<p>"This is crazy, who's idea was this anyway?"</p> <p>"Why can't things stay the way they are?"</p> <p>"This will never work."</p> <p>"They don't know anything about it, how can they decide this."</p> <p>"Now wait a minute, that's my area."</p> <p>"I feel like I don't have any control over anything any more."</p> <p>"I don't have a problem with change, it's this change that is the problem."</p> <p>"I need way more information. Will I have a job, when will this happen?"</p> <p>"I don't know how to do this."</p> <p>"We've tried this before and it didn't work."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions/need details • Challenge and complain • Blame and finger point • Shoot down ideas • Withdraw • Have difficulty concentrating • Lose sleep <p>If resistance is not dealt with you may see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in workplace accidents • Sabotage of efforts • Increase in workplace errors • Increase sick time <p>Showing signs of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-absorption • Sadness and/or depression • Fear and/or anger • Anxiety and/or frustration • Suspicion • Panic 	<p>Resistance happens even when people agree with change. In any change it is the transition, not the change that people resist. Therefore what they are really resisting is loss. Things like loss of identity and the way things are now, loss of the familiar and loss of the feeling of competence.</p>

Who is talking and behaving this way?

What do people need?

People need help dealing with losses, concerns, issues and fears. (See *Strategies to Help People During Transition and Handling Resistance*).

Neutral Zone (Exploration):

People trying to understand and adjust to the change.

What People Might Say	What People Might Do	What This Might Mean
<p>"Things are a mess, we are so disorganized."</p> <p>"How did we decide to do this, I forget."</p> <p>"I am so tired, I don't know which end is up."</p> <p>"I am waking up in the middle of the night, with all these ideas whirling around in my head."</p> <p>"Sometimes I feel confident and know where I am going, sometimes I feel lost."</p> <p>"It is scary to think we could do just about anything, no one knows what anyone else is doing."</p> <p>"We just gotta get organized."</p> <p>"We need some training?"</p> <p>"What's my job?"</p> <p>"What's the new procedure?"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjust • Bargain • Get involved • Look for new rules • Think of lots of ideas and options • Look for structure and order <p>Showing signs of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewed optimism • Frustration • Confusion • Willingness to learn • Uncertainty • Excitement 	<p>Exploration is a time of chaos and creativity that signals people are moving forward. It is the time between the old and the new, when people feel overwhelmed by the possibilities the change is presenting and all the work that needs to be done.</p>

Who is talking and behaving this way?

What do people need?

People need help getting organized and exploring options. (See *Strategies to Help People During Transition*).

New Beginnings (Commitment):

People adjusting and finding ways to make change work.

What People Might Say	What People Might Do	What This Might Mean
<p>"Oh I get it, I see what you mean."</p> <p>"I got up the other day and felt like myself again."</p> <p>"Our meetings are starting to feel pretty good."</p> <p>"When you get used to this, it isn't bad."</p> <p>"I can see some ways to make this work."</p> <p>"I'm going to take that course I've been looking at."</p> <p>"It's funny how upsetting it all was, it feels like ancient history now."</p> <p>"I can't say I love this new job, but it's OK."</p> <p>"I suppose they will change this too someday, but for now it feels pretty effective."</p> <p>"It took me a while to get used to the people on the team but now it feels like we have always worked together."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebuild • Co-operate • Focus • Plan • Solve problems • Make decisions • Learn • Collaborate <p>Showing signs of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance • Satisfaction • Confidence 	<p>True commitment happens as people begin to make the necessary adjustments and is facilitated by giving people the opportunity to express their concerns during resistance, and explore options during exploration. This is the point when change really begins and when you will find people are most ready, willing and able to make it work.</p>

Who is talking and behaving this way?

What do people need?

People need help adjusting and making the change work. (See *Strategies to Help People During Transition*).

Tips:

People will move through transition at different speeds and have different needs at different times. You need to be patient and remember to monitor where people are at in the transition process.

As a change leader, you may become frustrated with what seems like people's unwillingness to co-operate, especially if you feel personally blamed. It is more likely however that people are struggling with transition as opposed to refusing to co-operate. You need to remain non-defensive, open to suggestions and willing to respond.

People experience these reactions with differing intensity and move through transition at differing speeds depending on a range of other factors. You need to ask yourself:

- To what degree has this change taken them by surprise?
- To what degree does the change place them in an uncertain or unfamiliar situation?
- What are the size or quality of their losses?
- How does their age and stage of life affect their reaction?
- What other changes are they experiencing at the same time?
- What opportunities have they had to talk about their uncertainties?
- How does their personal style and degree of self-awareness affect their reaction?

Pitfalls:

As someone planning the change you may be well ahead of others affected by the change. Be careful about showing impatience with those struggling to "catch up". Patience and support are critical to success.

As a change leaders you may assume that everyone will adopt a change given enough time. However reality is that some people will only adopt a change after they see the majority of people in the organization have done so and there will always be a small minority that adopt change only when faced with consequences for non-compliance. Therefore you need to think about and plan how to enlist people in the change. (See the tool *Enlisting Others*).