



# Managing change

The biggest mistake: not understanding the importance of people

By Nathan Chanesman

*"It is not the strongest species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones who are most responsive to change"*

Charles Darwin

Organisations don't change. People do. 70 percent of all restructuring fails - not because of strategy, but because of the "human dimension". Michael Hammer, author of *Reengineering the corporation* said, "I wasn't smart enough about people. I was reflecting my engineering background and was insufficiently appreciate of the human dimension. I've learned that's critical".

Lesson learned: Organisations don't change. People do - or they don't. If staff don't trust leadership, don't share the organisation's vision, don't buy into the reason for change, and aren't included in the planning - there will be no successful change - regardless of how brilliant the strategy.

Your business might be re-locating, welcoming a new partner, re-assigning staff tasks, renovating your surgery, changing suppliers or introducing new equipment. All of these things and more require the cooperation of employees and partners to make transition successful. In a nut shell, you need all your staff and stakeholders to buy in to the changes proposed.

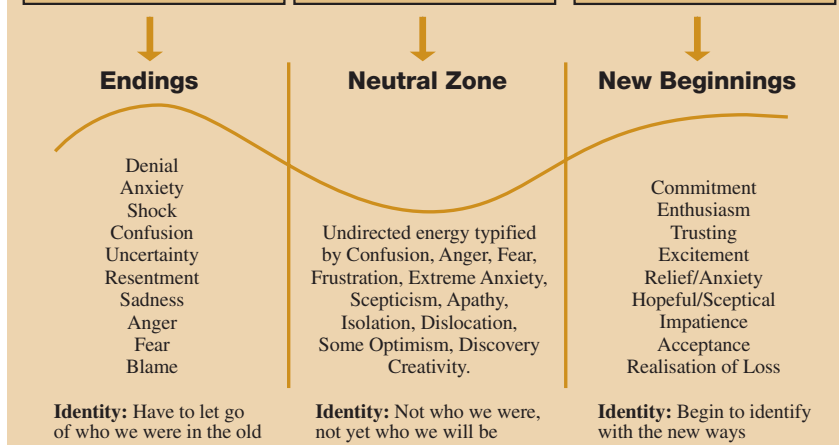
Problem is, it's not that easy. Some of us don't want a consensus on what we should do, we just want to do it, after all "I'm the boss". Others adopt a different approach looking for buy in. The truth is that change requires leadership. It requires a leader to take charge and initiate change. But for change to happen, it requires the cooperation of the people directly involved.

## The Three Phases of Transition

People discover they have to let go of what were normal, predictable and comfortable environments. They feel a loss of control. There are those who may be genuinely optimistic. It is important to ensure people respect each other's perspectives.

As people go through the points of transition they can blame and become angry. People can feel uncertain, lost, afraid, "in limbo" or make unusual outbursts of frustration or anxiety. The key here is to be patient. Focus on going forward, not on the past. As with Endings, those who are optimistic should continue to be encouraged.

People have chosen to commit and participate in building the new processes within the new environment. Now that they are more comfortable with the transition, they can become impatient for progress and may be hopeful about building new trust, relationships and achievements.



### Change creates uncertainty

In any 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.

### Each person manages change differently

When managing change, it's important to recognise that transition is an individual reaction. The role of managers is to help others through to new beginnings whilst maintaining the level of activity or service. Teams may travel the transition curve (see chart) together, individuals will arrive at their "new beginnings", at their own personal rate.

In your surgery or business you will find that people, although different, are,

when it comes to behaviour, “predicably different”. That is, each person’s personality style reacts predicably to a given situation. Your workplace probably has people who exhibit these four quite different traits:

1. There are those that want to be in charge, do it their way, do it now. They’ve no time for sentimentality and it’s all about results, productivity, efficiency and measurable systems.
2. Then there are those who want to be around people, they get energised by them, they enjoy a chat and want to work in a team where excitement is generated and where they can be popular and socialise. After all, work is supposed to be fun.
3. There are those who are ready to volunteer and help without regard for reward. They do their jobs without fuss, happy to help and stay out of office politics. It’s important for them to have a good work life balance, especially with their family, friends and pets. For them, it’s about doing this the easiest most practical way in a no fuss manner.
4. And finally there are those who want to work by the rules, where processes and systems are regulated and procedures followed. They don’t get too involved with other staff, after all, work is not supposed to be fun, it’s about doing things the right way and doing them well.

Take a moment to identify the people around you. Do they enjoy working with people and forming relationships or are they private and prefer to work alone? Do they make decisions quickly or do they take their time? Do they run late or are they always on time? Are they big picture people or do they want details?

To manage change effectively you should consider how each of your staff will react. Change is something that each of us process differently. It’s transition that some staff find hard to cope with. Here’s the proof - If you employ new staff that have not gone through the transition, then they just do their job. There’s no baggage, no hesitation, it is what it is, not what it was. They have no idea of what went before them so they accept face value the conditions that they have been employed under.

## How to help each style cope with the challenges of transition

**1. Fast paced, in control, results oriented, do it now types** - These people enjoy the challenge, so change is not a problem for them provided they are moving into an environment that’s up beat and fast. They’re ready to get on with it provided they can have some authority and be in control. Their fear is being taken advantage of. So to help these “Driver” type people transition, set them a goal, give them choices, explain their responsibilities and reporting structure, tell them the overall objective and what results you expect. They want to do things their way. Get out of the way and let them get on with it!

**2. Talkative, social, fun, outgoing types** - These people won’t mind change, they’ll love it. Meeting new people, making new friends, going to new places. Provided you don’t put them in a room on their own or without a telephone they’ll be OK. To help these “Promoter” types transition, give them the big picture and don’t go into too much detail. Make the change a challenge and a chance for them to meet new people or do new things. Be positive and tell them how they will be able to use their ideas and creativity. Promoters live in the moment so set short terms goals. They want to do things the fun way. As long as the environment is friendly and exciting they’ll do well. Recognition and praise will get you everything!

**3. Steady, reliable, conservative types** - These people naturally dislike change. Once things are working well they can’t see the benefit of change. They want to keep things as they are. This gives them security and comfort. They want a stable, predictable environment. They will feel threatened by change. Supporters want to do things the easy way. To assist these “Supporter” types introduce plans early, do it slowly. No sudden changes. Give them lots of information about why and how their contribution is important. Make them part of the change process. Give them a task to do that uses their people and logistics skills. Make them feel secure and give them assurance and appreciation for their effort.

**4. Detailed, precise and logical types** - These people will dislike change only if they don’t understand what it’s about, its purpose and rationale. They fear the unknown. They like to have things planned well in advance and want to do things the right way. They take a long term view and will work toward accomplishing transition provided it’s not thrust upon them unexpectedly. To help these “Analytical” types through transition, give them time to adequately prepare for the change. Explain the logic and rationale behind the transition. Ask them to prepare a plan to ensure a smooth transition. Analytical people enjoy an ideal environment that is structured and procedural. Change can be disruptive and this may stress them. Provide them with reliable support during the transition period. Allow them to complete in an orderly manner.

## Top 5 mistakes in managing change

1. Not understanding the importance of people.
2. Not appreciating that people throughout the organisation have different reactions to change.
3. Treating change or transformation as an isolated event, rather than a mental, physical and emotional process.
4. Being less than candid. Under the rationale of “protecting” people, we presented change with a too positive “spin”: Communicate openly and honestly. Today’s employees are demanding it.
5. Not appropriately “setting the stage” for change. All too often, change was announced in an environmental vacuum, with little reason or rationale for what the business was trying to accomplish and how this change fits into the corporate vision. People need to know the vision, goals, and strategy of the company.

## About the author

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