

Life is tough right now

but there are ways to get through it

We can't really say what the effect of current events will be. We can't begin to comprehend the full extent of what faces the world ahead, let alone what organisations or public services will look like on the other side of this. All we know for certain is that, right now, things have changed. If we dare to admit it, most of us like to be in control and this level of uncertainty and lack of structure is having a huge psychological impact on us.

Why is this Change going to be so Hard?

A lot of us are experiencing upheaval, nervousness and anxiety, not just in work but also in our personal lives. Our norms and structures have gone out of the window and it's leaving most of us feeling very unrooted and vulnerable. When we talk about struggling with change, what we actually mean is that we're struggling with the psychological transition.

In this document, we've adopted Bridge's Transition Model to help articulate in some way what could be happening and then, hopefully, outline some pointers based on what we know, that may be useful in navigating this change.

The Bridges Transition Model focuses on transition rather than change. It differentiates between **Change** – 'a shift in the external situation or environment' and **Transition** – 'the psychological reorientation in response to change' and divides the transition into three stages:

- **The Ending** – this is where the change is acknowledged, the new environment begins to be understood, and individuals grieve for what has been lost
- **The Neutral Zone** – people may feel overwhelmed or disorientated by the change, anxiety rises while motivation falls. Some people may see this as a need to drive forward and others may still hope to keep things the same
- **The New Beginning** – new understandings and new values start to be integrated into individuals' understandings of themselves and their environment

As shown below, these stages can be modelled as functions of Importance and Time.

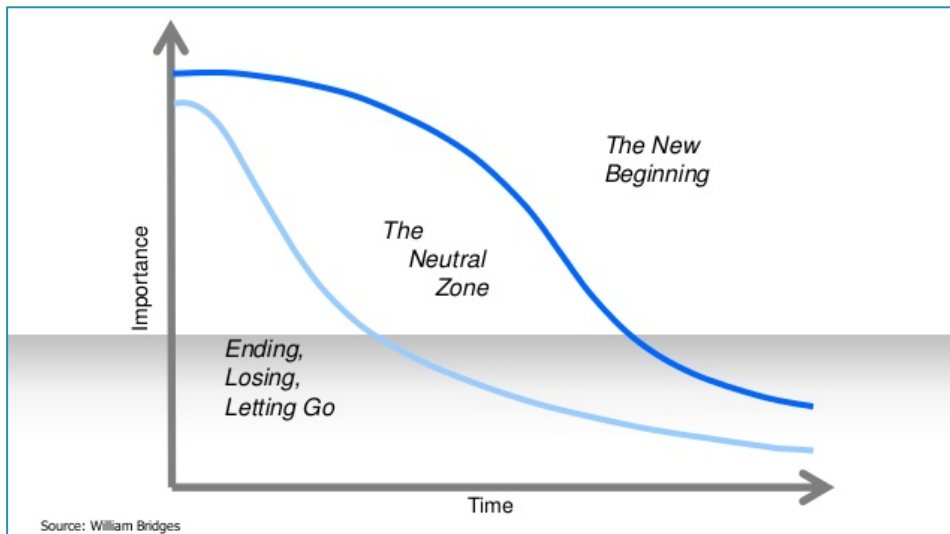


Figure 1: **Bridge's Transition Curve**

The less important the transition is, the more drawn-out the ending stage can be. However, in critical situations such as those caused by the current pandemic, there is less time to grieve and adjust, but the stability of a New Beginning may still be a long way off.

This is the stage that acts as the bridge between the old and the new. As such, the nature of this stage is filled with confusion, uncertainty and impatience. Individuals may exhibit behaviours such as low morale and motivation, anxiousness and resistance toward the change.



Stage 1
Ending,
Losing and
Letting Go

When first experiencing change, individuals are faced with the emotions of losing something that they feel comfortable with. In order to proceed with change, individuals must accept that something old is ending.

Stage 2
The Neutral
Zone

This stage represents acceptance and new energy as individuals are beginning to adopt the change.

Stage 3
The New
Beginning

Behaviours exhibited in this stage may include: motivation, openness to new ideas and buy-in to the vision.



Navigating the Neutral Zone

A lot of us are probably in the Neutral Zone right now. People are experiencing upheaval and anxiety, not just in work but also in their personal lives. New routines and identities are being renegotiated, mistakes are being made and old resentments and weaknesses may emerge.

Once you acknowledge that it is the **transition**, not the **change** itself that you are struggling with, you can begin to recognise and manage some of the feelings you are experiencing. Common symptoms of transition are:

Guilt ▪ Resentment ▪ Anxiety ▪ Self-absorption ▪ Stress

Our **top tips** for coping with these and working toward a successful New Beginning are:

1. Honour the past. Recognise what was great about how you were working before, and why
2. Facilitate the new beginnings. Try to work around or remove mental or physical obstacles preventing you from succeeding (“I can’t do x unless I’ve access to y”)
3. Create new rituals differentiating between the endings and the new beginnings

Leading your Team through the Neutral Zone

With everyone experiencing significant change at the same time, it is more important than ever to have strong and effective leadership in place. The likelihood is that everyone in your team will be experiencing the same transition symptoms as you are, which actually puts you in a great position to empathise and support. We have some dos and don'ts:

Do

- Maintain connection and show concern. Social distancing may make this more difficult but use the tools and technology you have to hand to keep in contact with your team
- Identify what's actually ending and who's losing what, acknowledging losses openly and sympathetically
- Define what is over and what isn't
- Be prepared for panic or overreaction, expecting and accepting the signs of grieving
- Mark the ending and create rituals that will differentiate the new beginning
- Show how the New Beginning will secure the continuity of what really matters
- Be flexible in your approach to different people and at different stages of the transition. Figure 2 below suggests how your role may differ at various points as they go through the change journey within that transition



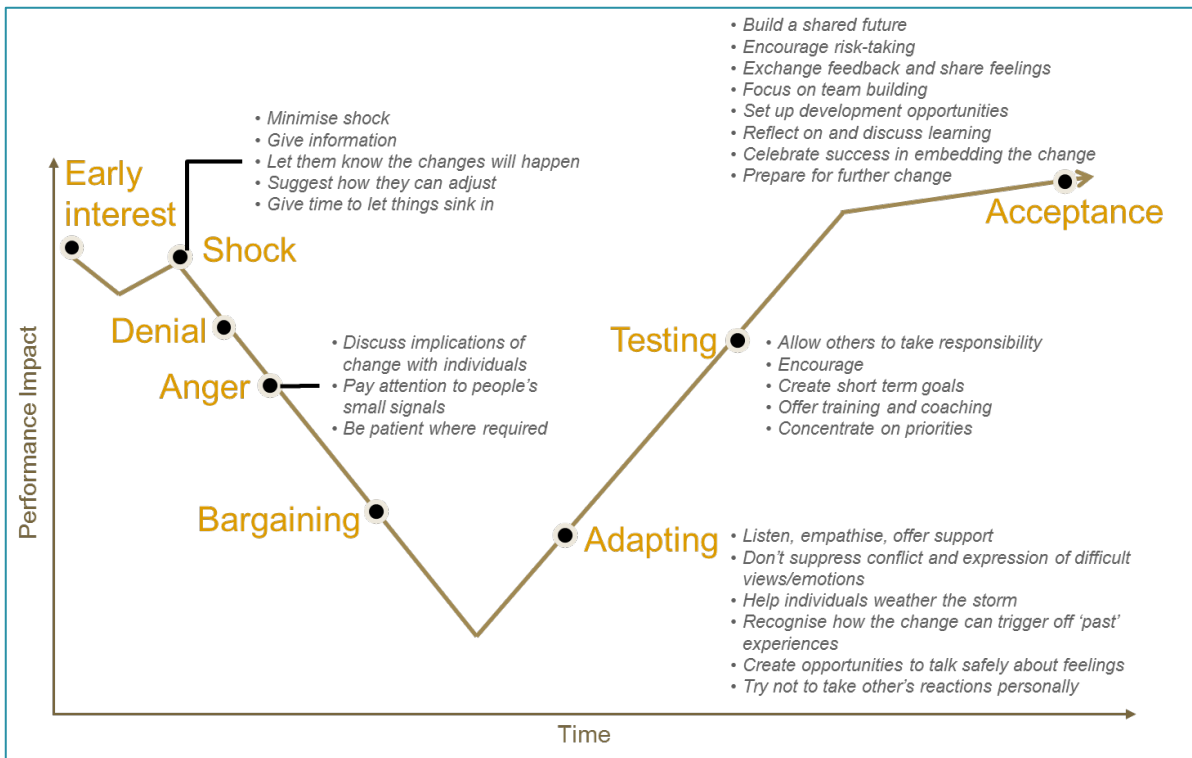


Figure 2: **The Leaders Role during Change**

Don't

- Introduce additional policies and rules, people are already feeling overwhelmed
- Assume that everyone is okay, particularly if you haven't heard from them
- Attempt to rush people through the difficult stages
- Fall victim to Transition 'Myths' ("this will go away", "I can't make a difference" etc.)
- Assume that this will be easy, however well prepared you were
- Forget to address 'Me' issues for the individuals or try to compensate for their losses

Whatever way the current global situation unfolds, businesses with effective leadership will adapt. This time is ripe with creative opportunity, as well as the chance to develop positive and nurturing relationships within your team.

Once you have reached your New Beginning, remember to take stock of how you and the team fared during the transition, acknowledge your successes and consider what lessons can be learnt.

