

Managing Organisational Change & Navigating The Unknown

“Growth means change and change involves risks, stepping from the known to the unknown.” George Shinn

Volatility, complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity are all facets of an increasingly turbulent environment where the ability to adapt is critical to survival. Drivers of this change, according to Bridges (2009), include

- globalization,
- changing economics,
- evolving technology and
- growing competition.

In one of the last interviews with Steve Jobs, he talked about the challenge of change, the risks, the leadership required, the opportunities, the need to take bold decisions, to push the limits of the possible in order to achieve great things.

Recognising the chaotic nature of change and the need to disrupt normal processes is critical to success. Such change requires **transformational leadership** characterized by the ability to inspire and engage through a compelling vision that is aligned with meaningful values and purposeful action.

Change is often resisted as it brings up fear and uncertainty.

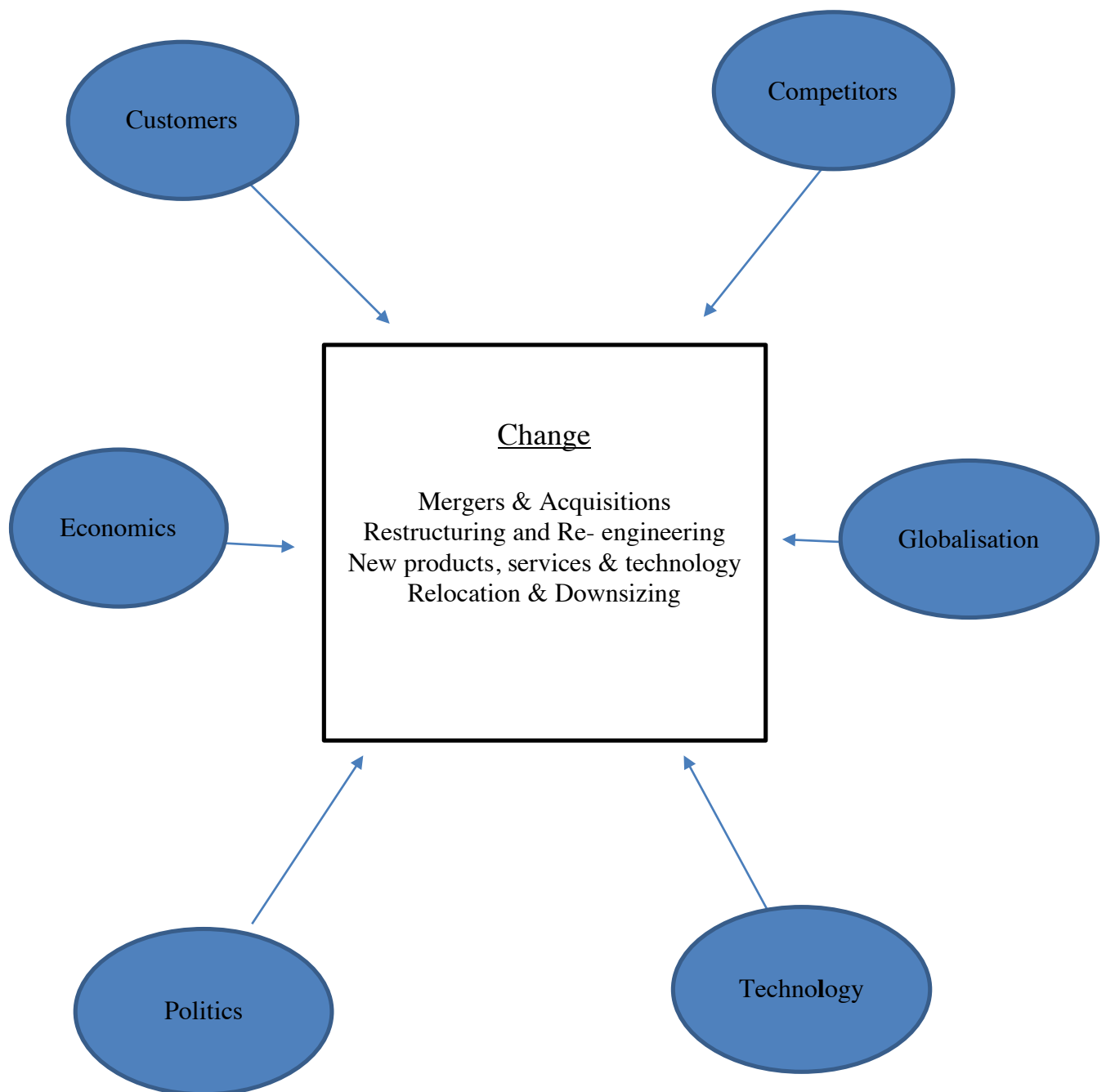
“We resist transition not because we can't accept the change, but because we can't accept letting go of that piece of ourselves that we have to give up when and because the situation has changed.”
Bridges, 2009

Change requires courage, persistence and an attitude of curiosity

“The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.” Steve Jobs, Apple

Change demands that we step out of our comfort zone.

Change and its Drivers in the Workplace



“To be uncertain is uncomfortable but to be certain is ridiculous.”

Chinese proverb

The table above highlights the many factors that influence change in an organisation. Change can be destabilizing and costly in terms of performance, profitability and people i.e. it can contribute to heightened absenteeism and lowered retention and engagement. To be effective, change needs to be managed proactively and strategically.

Managing Change

Over a numbers of years, working with a variety of organisations in the financial, mining and engineering industries has enabled me to create effective change processes that support the business to manage change not just strategically but sensitively.

One CEO from financial services commented that “*Managing the balance between social responsibility and commercial reality as the business changes really is the ‘art’ of cultural change.*”

Creating an alignment with the people, organisational goals and growth targets of the business is vital. This shared sense of purpose builds motivation, trust and respect between staff and management plus a shared understanding of the need for change which in turn creates a sense of inclusion.

More than ever during change, people need clarification and clear working structures with commonly defined guidelines and procedures, clear roles & expectations, realisable goals, regular and transparent communication plus a supportive environment.

Ingredients for a Successful Change Process

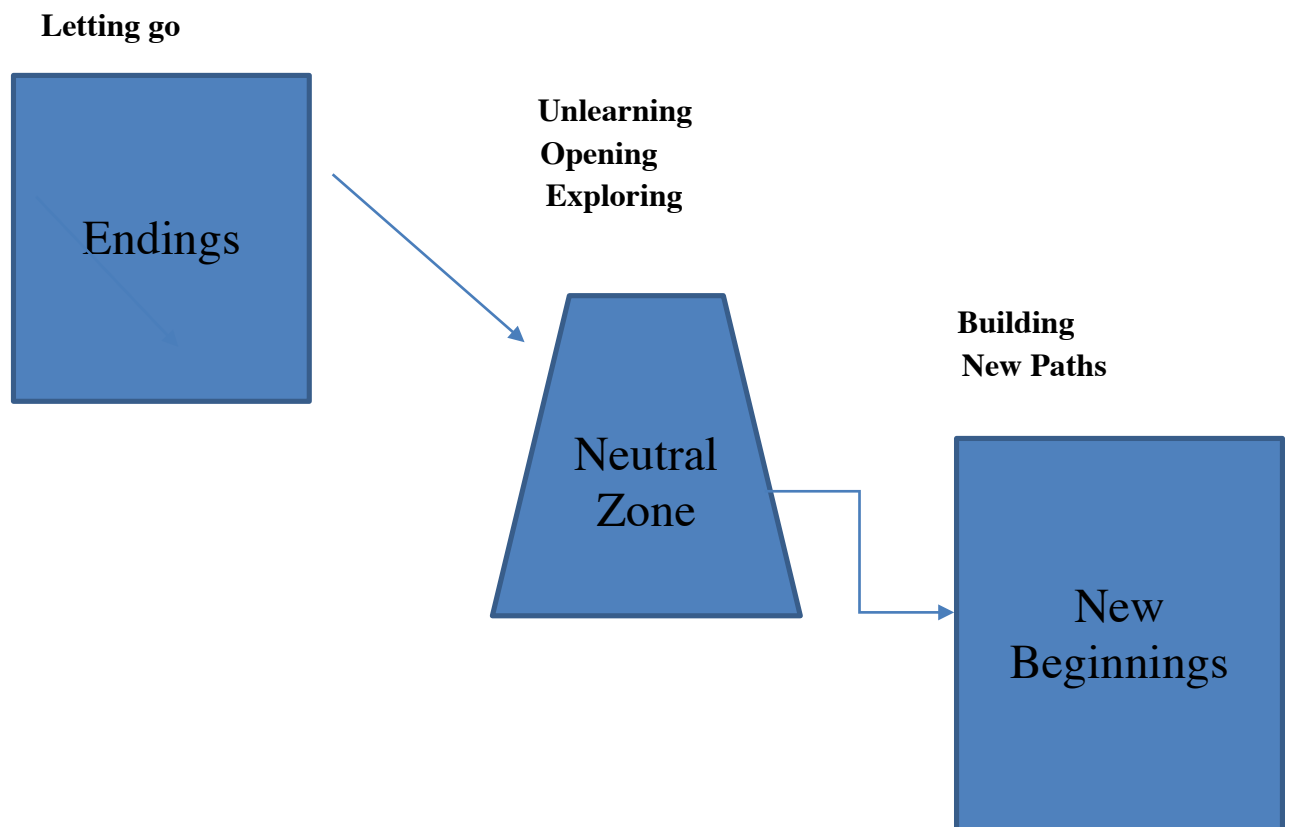
Bridges (2009) maintains that it takes about three years to effectively change the culture of an organisation. Essential to successful change are the following ingredients:

- Keep the communication flowing. Have regular, open and honest conversations, meetings and briefing sessions. Keeping people informed not only alleviates stress, it also engages them on the change journey.
- Demonstrate confident, committed and authentic leadership.
- Build strong relationships by connecting and engaging with staff.
- Articulate the vision. Create a common purpose. Have a plan. Prioritize and action it according to specific deadlines and responsibilities.
- Aim for tangible business results that impacts people and profitability
- Build a strong internal foundation of trust and mutual accountability by clarifying expectations.

Stages in the Process of Change

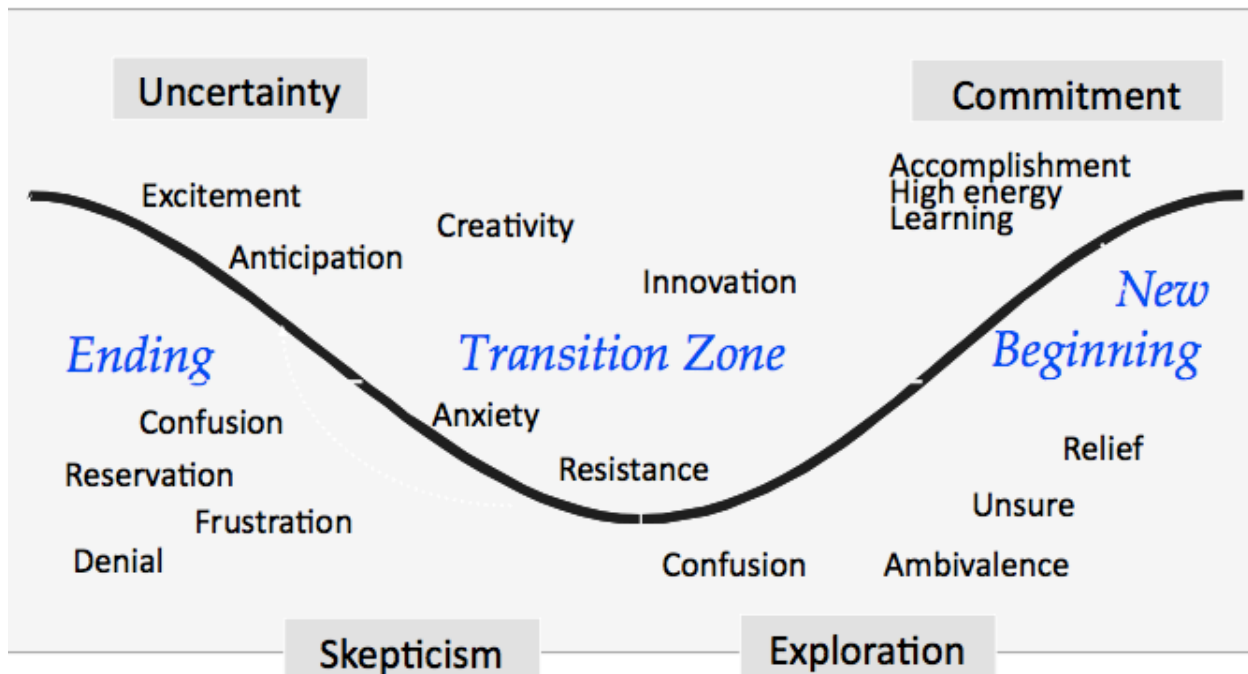
How well we manage ambiguity and uncertainty is a major factor in determining how successful we are at navigating change. The following outlines the stages of the change process.

The Bridges Change Model



Steps in Navigating Transitions

Managing Change: New Beginning Phase



Adapted from *Managing Transitions*, William Bridges

Step 1 - Build Awareness

Understanding that change is a process, with distinct stages along the way. Emotional upheaval is a normal part of the process. This awareness enables us to make sense of the journey.

Step Two – Acknowledge Endings. Let Go

Acknowledge endings and move on. In letting go, we commit to moving forward. This may be a time of coming to terms with changed circumstances. Sometimes, we have to let go an identity, a job, position, title or sense of certainty in order to move to the next stage of change. This period differs for each person and it is important to recognize when it is time to move on or whether more time is needed to pause and regroup before moving to the next stage.

Step Three – Move into the Neutral Zone - The Bridge between Realities

The next step is learning to negotiate the neutral zone. This phase requires commitment to a new journey or new purpose.

This is where our ability to cope with ambiguity and uncertainty is challenged. We need to define new rules or ways of working/living as we traverse the neutral zone. It is normal at this stage to want to return to the 'old' or 'habitual' ways of doing things. However, we need to let go. Letting go the familiar can be difficult as we want to stay in control. Letting go the illusion of control is essential.

A simple way of understanding how easily we get lured into patterns of behaviour is to pause for a moment. Now cross your arms as you normally would, as you've probably done all your life. Notice which arm is on top. Now, change arms and put the arm that is normally underneath on top. Notice how that feels. For most, it feels decidedly odd, not comfortable but different or new. That is what change feels like. We are outside our comfort zone in the middle of neutral zone.

Step Four – Explore New Beginnings

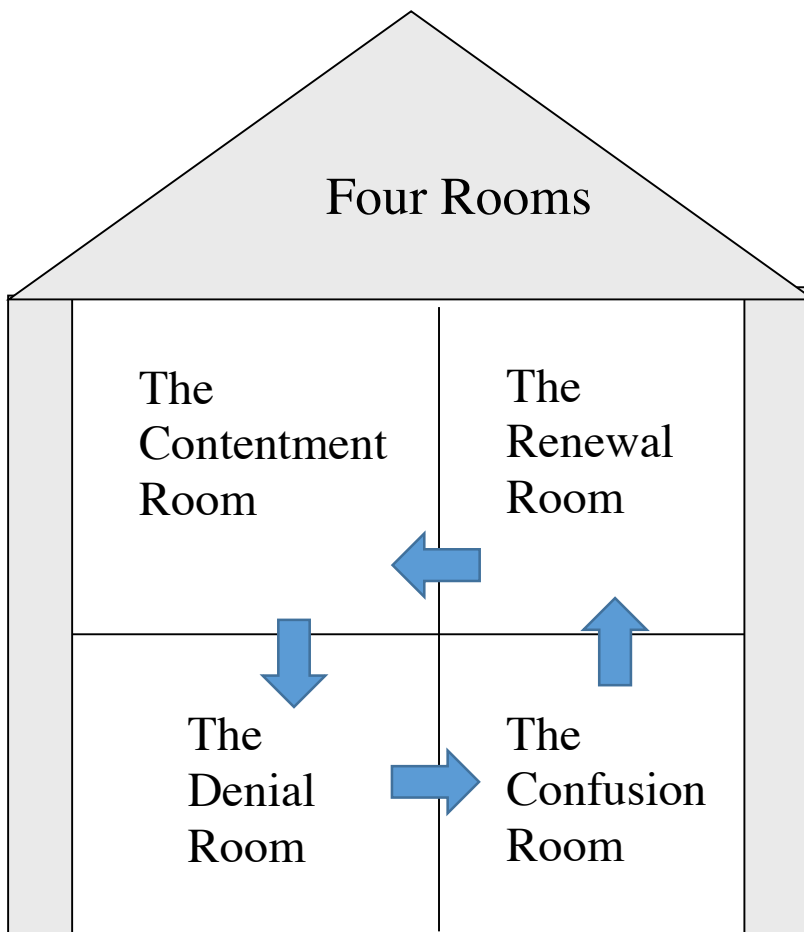
The final stage in transitions requires the willingness to explore new beginnings. An attitude of curiosity and openness helps. This is the phase where trust and openness to exploring new possibilities is essential.

At this point, adopting new behaviours, new skills, new beliefs or new patterns is required. An understanding of what motivates or what causes procrastination is helpful. This can be an exciting and scary, nerve racking and ultimately rewarding time as we move into the action phase.



The Change House - How People Deal with Change

Bridges uses the four rooms of a house to illustrate the ways we manage the change process. He suggests we cycle through these rooms, from the 'contentment room' to the 'denial room' through to the 'renewal' or 'confusion' room and back again. Staying too long in any one room leads to stagnation. We have to know when to stay and when to move.



- **Contentment**

People feel OK and don't believe any change is necessary

- **Denial**

People are aware that a change is imminent but reject the change and its consequences

- **Confusion**

People feel overwhelmed and confused because of the scope & pace of change

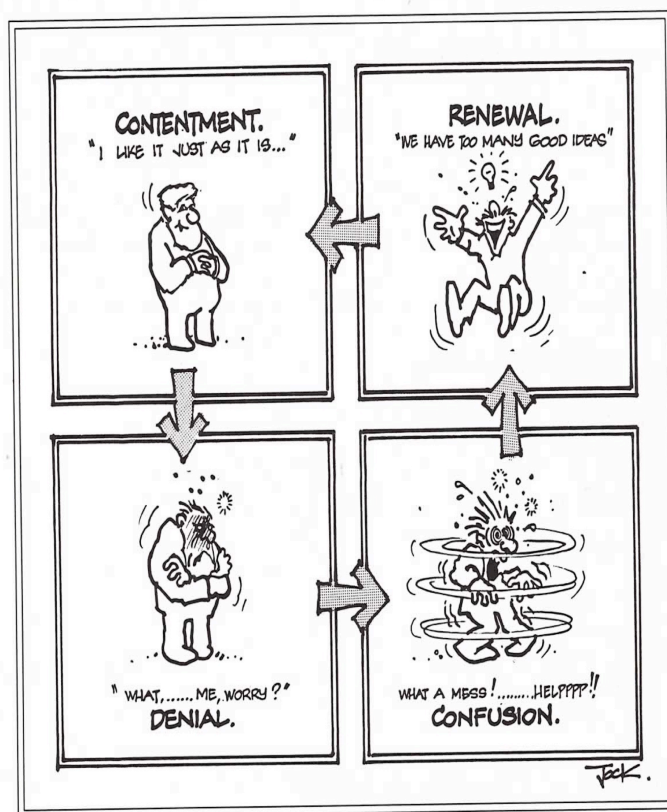
- **Renewal**

People have embraced the change and begun working whole heartedly in the changed environment

Navigating the Rooms – Managing Emotions

Macneish & Richardson (1994:50) maintain that there is only one ‘unhealthy’ room which is the Denial Room. The rest, they suggest “...are part of the seasonal landscape of any living organisation”. They warn about too much lounging in the Contentment Room as this can lead to procrastination or failure to address the need for change.

In organisational change, individuals may be in different rooms at any given time, feeling confused or worried. In a change management program, it is important to understand where people are located. This gives a clearer indication of how ready people are to meet the changes.



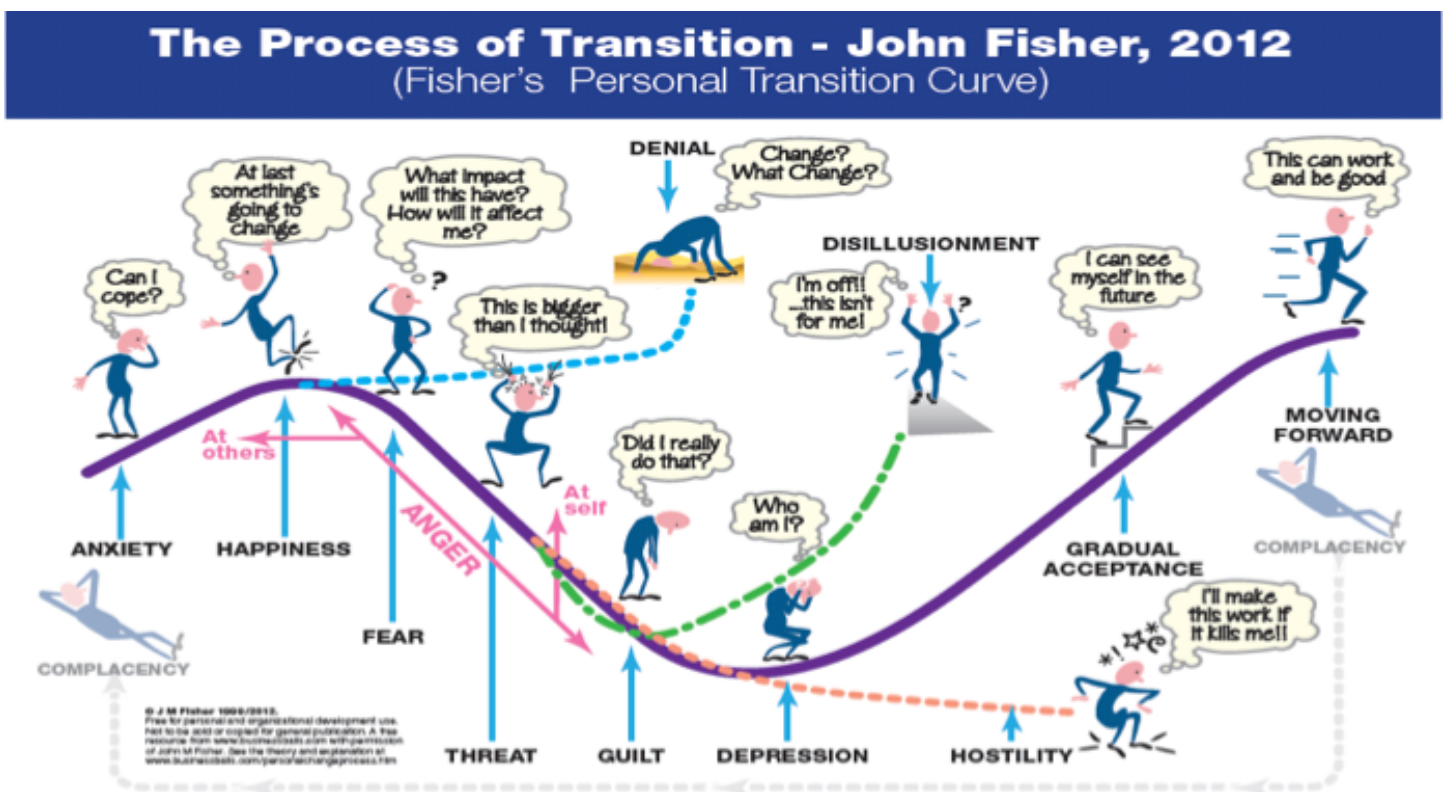
Dr. Spencer Johnson (1998) in his popular book ‘Who Moved my Cheese’ says, “*When you move beyond your fear, you feel free.*” Fear is one of the most common emotions in facing change.

Change brings up many other emotions including anxiety, anger or frustration. Managing the emotions is central to managing change.

Managing The Emotional Roller Coaster of Change

Chaos can be a byproduct of change as we negotiate the unknown, manage external circumstances and internal doubts. This roller coaster ride can be exhausting, daunting or exhilarating!

Many questions arise. Can I cope? How do I deal with this? Why did this have to happen? Why me? Why now? Sometimes it is hard to admit that we don't know what to do. Sometimes, it's hard to experience the myriad of emotions as depicted in the table below. etc. Fostering emotional intelligence by understanding that these emotions including anger, anxiety, sadness, confusion or hostility are all a normal part of the change process.



Change pushes us to challenge the boundaries of the possible, to embrace new experiences, to build new pathways or even a whole new identity. It creates opportunities perhaps unimagined to that point. It is a catalyst for growth and renewal. It is a journey requiring courage, fortitude and determination.

Strategies in Managing Change

- ✚ Understand that change is a journey with a beginning middle and end. Let go of the past/ old ways of doing things in order to move forward.
- ✚ Identify the opportunities for growth for yourself, your team, your business
- ✚ Clarify goals, roles, interpersonal relationships and operating procedures
- ✚ Focus on what you can do as opposed to what you can't do
- ✚ Accept that uncertainty is part of life
- ✚ Identify support and who needs to be supported
- ✚ Commit to action: develop a realistic plan with timelines.
- ✚ Align the plan with your values and company direction
- ✚ Focus on the future. Take the first step and keep going

“It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change.” Leon Megginson

Further Reading

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