



What is Change

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Accept there are no normal or abnormal ways of reacting to change, but that we must start from where we are.

What is Change?

Daryl Conner has studied change and its effects around the world. In his 2005 research paper **Managing Intent: Delivering on Promises and Avoiding Disappointment**, he indicates that only one-third of strategic initiatives actually turn out exactly as designed. Human nature, production, and plenty of other factors will have an impact on the results and influence the original vision. You will also need to fix problems that crop up. This will lead to a different result that can range from slight to significant.

For example, when you go to a car show and look at the new vehicle designs, there are often significant differences between how the car was initially designed and what people are actually driving. Projects run into cost overruns and must be scaled back. As well, sometimes the technology changes so quickly that what we thought we were designing will be redundant by the time we finish unless we make changes as we go.

Here are some key points about change:

- Change affects everyone differently; there is no “normal.”
- Change is an essential element of the world and it must be accepted.
- Adapting to change is about our attitude.
- We have to grieve for what we are letting go of.
- Change is an opportunity for self-motivation and innovation.
- We can identify strategies for accepting and implementing our changes.

William Bridges, who has contributed significantly to research about how change affects us, tells a story about his early days as a university professor. In the 1960s it was common to have Saturday classes. Students attended classes Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, or Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Most students hated Saturday classes and so did most professors, so Bridges thought it would be a really easy thing to change. His solution was to have longer classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so there was no need for classes on Saturday.

However, it wasn't a simple change to make. Although they knew that almost everyone hated Saturday classes, some professors wanted the percentages. Several of them argued strenuously to retain Saturday classes; they had taken Saturday classes themselves and it hadn't hurt them. Finally one professor said, “But if we change from three classes to two, I'll have to rewrite all my lecture notes.” The other professors agreed, and the change was voted down. Bridges didn't think the professors were selfish, lazy, or stupid, but nobody had addressed how the changes would affect them. They were struggling to protect what was familiar, and many of us would have done the same thing.

We all have a personal connection to how we work, so it takes work to do this. Bridges says, “It isn't the changes that do you in. It's the transition.”

Change is the situation: the move to a new building, a retirement, or renovating a house. Transition, on the other hand, is a three phase process people go through as they come to terms with the new situation that change has brought.

Change is about doing things differently, seeing things in a new way, adjusting to surprises, and adapting to ideas with new twists.

Change is a new laptop. Transition is learning how to use it.

With that new laptop, I am:

- Thrilled by possibilities of things I can do with it.
- Excited by the size of its memory and the new programs.
- Stimulated by the idea of working on things in way that I have never tried before.

However, I'm also:

- Fearful and uncertain of how to use all the features, like the fact I can flip the screen down and make it work like a tablet.
- Anxious and worried that I won't figure everything out before the next time I have the laptop with me in a meeting or a training session.

I must:

- Give up something to get something. I gave up the old familiar laptop.
- Unlearn what I knew about the old familiar programs and adjust to things that are very different.
- Temporarily give up my cushion of comfort.

Test Your Knowledge

Can you identify with any of those statements?

How are you feeling about something going on in your life?

What are you exchanging?

How might you expand your thinking?

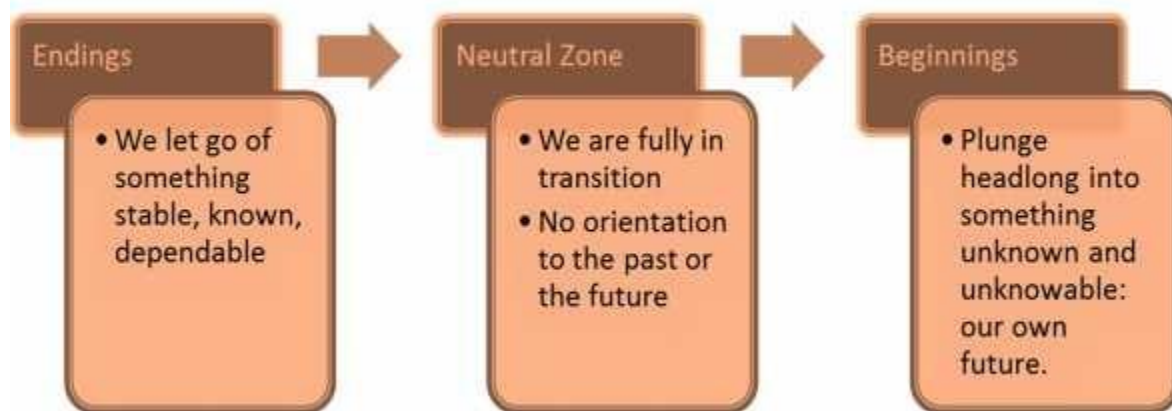
What aspects of your life or work do you see as producing stress for you?

The Change Cycle

The Three Phases

William Bridges went on to earn his doctorate and became an organizational consultant focused on change. He believes it isn't the change that is the problem; the change is a situation. People have difficulty with the transition, which can be described as a three-part process. The transition isn't optional, and we must all go through those three stages if we want to make the change stick.

There are three stages each of us goes through in accommodating ourselves to any change.



Endings

All change begins with an ending. We may try hard to intellectualize it, thinking that if we understand it, we can deal with it. However, we don't always have the skills to deal with emotional reservations. Like the organ reject theory, our minds may know that the change is good for us, but the body still rejects it. Intellectually, we may accept a change, but emotionally, we may still resist it.

Change is sometimes perceived as exciting, stimulating, and motivating. Jack Welch, the former CEO of GE and a popular consultant, talks about change with excitement. He believes in seizing the opportunity and being open to what's ahead.

Change is often viewed as loss. An ending can be a loss, but a loss can be celebrated. It simply means that we are letting go of one thing to grasp on to another. Failing to identify and get ready for loss is the biggest difficulty for people in transition.

Test Your Knowledge

What can we do to help others and ourselves get through this stage?

Transitions/Neutral Zone

This is a time to complete endings and begin new patterns. People in this stage may have a strong need for support from others. Major transitions can unleash powerful conflicting forces in people.

Western culture often tries to avoid this phase of the experience and jump to new beginnings. The neutral zone is treated like a busy street to be crossed as quickly as possible. However, it is important to take the time to complete endings and integrate new patterns effectively.

Test Your Knowledge

What can you do to help yourself or someone else through this phase?

Beginnings

Organizations think about beginnings long before people do. There is often conflict between the organization's motivation and the critical mass to make it happen, so it is essential to get people involved, especially those who are leaders and have influence.

At this stage, people need drawing leadership (with a vision and purpose) rather than pushing management (focusing on goals and plans).

Test Your Knowledge

Insights

Think of a change you have experienced.

Did you feel threatened at the time? Did it open up new insights, opportunities, or possibilities?

What did you do that helped you accept the change and move on? What things did other people do that helped?

Do you remember feeling like you were confused or angry?

Did you have moments of anticipation and energy?

Do you have some success stories to share, sometimes that change brought better things than you had expected?
