

Thrive Through Organizational Change!

As customer demands, globalization and competition increase, the need for change is inevitable if an organization plans to be around in five years. With change comes the critical question and challenge for any organization; how can you maximize productivity and profitability amidst extensive change? This article examines the four stages of change, the four transitions change creates, and provides some management tips on how to thrive through organizational change.

We all know change affects people differently. One person may perceive it as a threat, while another may perceive it as an opportunity. Regardless of which end of the spectrum you are on, when change occurs overall productivity, performance and morale decline and turnover increases. This can negatively impact the bottom line. The goal is to guide your organization from resistance and low performance to acceptance and high performance.

Individuals go through six phases of change: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance and hope. In essence individuals grieve the loss of familiarity, competence and control.

Organizations go through four stages of change: Fear, Resistance, Adaptation and Opportunity; and four transitions of change: Grieving, Releasing, Embracing and Producing.

As a transitional leader or manager, the focus must be on guiding everyone through the maze of emotions and behaviors that each stage and transition creates by supplying staff with effective support and the necessary tools to thrive, not just survive change.

Stage 1 **Fear** **Transition:** **Grieving**

Fear is one of the first emotions we feel when change strikes. Staff may fear uncertainty, job shifts, making mistakes, failure, a new boss, new roles and responsibilities, disapproval, rejection, and/or being exploited.

As change occurs, staff will experience the early phases of change - denial, anger, and bargaining. They may be shocked by the changes and try desperately to hold on to old ways of doing things. The panic, confusion, and apprehension are palpable. Concerns revolve around personal well-being, acceptance, and trust; and these issues result in staff producing and performing at lower than acceptable levels. They are more concerned with scrutinizing each other and assessing how they fit into the new picture than with focusing on the work at hand.

Leaders need to be highly directive with staff and need to clearly communicate:

- The reason for the change
- The desired goals and outcomes of the change
- How the organization, department, or team will work together
- The ground rules and boundaries
- The roles and responsibilities of every member
- How decisions will be made and who will have authority to make them
- Timelines and deadlines
- Budgets and resources



To grow past this stage staff requires time and space to grieve the loss of:

- Job competency
- Familiarity
- Status
- Power
- Control
- Security

Stage 2 Resistance
Transition: Releasing

During the Resistance stage, emotions run high, ranging from anger to depression. There is a lot of conflict and mistrust between staff and management and among co-workers. Some staff become belligerent and demand answers. Others are apathetic and dejected.

Staff experience the anger, bargaining and depression phases of the change cycle. They try to hold on to old ways of doing things. If they are angry, their efforts are seen as a sabotaging, competing, gossiping, and backstabbing. Staff members who are depressed will be unmotivated, procrastinate, be listless and treat everything like it's a catastrophe. The focus is on gaining power, control, and justice.

This stage is a true test for a leader, because it requires direction, strong guidance, and an ability to rally high support. Three keys will help the staff and organization progress:

- Re-communicate everything from stage one
- Clearly define each person's responsibilities
- Establish accountability among the members

Leaders also need to develop the following skills with their group(s):

- Active listening skills
- Feedback skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Problem solving skills
- Toleration and diversity skills

To cultivate these skills and foster progress, leaders must offer encouragement, recognition, and a safe environment for open and honest discussion.

To move past resistance toward growth, staff must let go of or release:

- Familiar ways
- Resentments
- Bitterness
- Anger
- Narrow mindedness
- Negativity
- Control
- Assumptions
- Judgments

Stage 3 Adaptation **Transition: Embracing**

During the Adaptation stage, members of an organization embrace new policies, procedures, and processes. In other words they adapt to the new conditions. In this phase staff generally become more happy, flexible, open, and resourceful because they have established their place in the big picture.

As staff develops skills in listening, feedback, conflict resolution, problem solving, and diversity, they begin to recognize the strengths of their colleagues as assets. They begin to accept the talents and gifts of others and to acknowledge their contributions to the goals and mission of the organization. Also during this stage people develop greater curiosity about each other. They recognize that as a group they are smarter, wiser, more creative, and more insightful than any one of them could be on their own. Past competition may develop into cohesiveness and collaboration. As staff develops a growing sense of belonging and leadership, these bonds become more easily shared with one another because of the staff's increased trust and confidence. The focus shifts to sharing control and supporting one another.

Leaders can be less directive during this stage, in part because they will see increased performance and productivity among the team. To further cultivate the process, leaders should concentrate on:

- Integrating the talents and skills of group members
- Aligning individual values and purposes with the company's values and purpose
- Offering training
- Continuing to develop skills
- Encouraging different perspectives to further creativity and problem solving
- Sharing control and leadership
- Celebrating learning and successes

To grow beyond this stage, staff must embrace:

- New policies, procedures, and processes
- Other perspectives and ideas
- Differences and diversity of everyone
- Mistakes
- Learning and growth

Stage 4 Opportunity **Transition: Producing**

Congratulations! With hard work, persistence, and a lot of perspiration, your organization has successfully reached the highest transition level. During the Opportunity stage, staff feel hopeful, confident, courageous, creative, energetic, and eager to begin taking risks and exploring new opportunities.

They have evolved and are now flexibly interdependent. They can work independently, in small groups, or as a company-wide team. Morale is high and loyalty has been re-established. Staff is less intent on approval from others and more engaged in problem solving, creativity, innovation, and experimentation. The focus is on new challenges, learning and growth.

Leaders won't need to direct much during this phase because staff is intrinsically compelled to perform and produce at their highest level. Leaders can help maintain this efficiency and confidence by:

- Giving staff new challenges
- Continuing to focus on creativity, innovation, and productivity

- Celebrating mistakes as well as accomplishments
- Recognizing and appreciating individuals
- Giving reasonable decision-making power and authority to staff
- Encouraging staff to take risks
- Discovering new opportunities and expanding boundaries
- Maintaining optimism

Organizations that effectively move through and manage these four stages and transitions of change will celebrate a competitive advantage and an improved bottom line due to decreased turnover and increased performance and productivity. They won't merely survive, they will thrive!



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