The Change Management/ Managing Transitions Model

Adapted by Frank Voehl from an article by William Bridges and Susan Mitchell Bridges

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The model described in this LeanBrief was adapted by Frank Voehl from a Spring 2000 article by William Bridges and Susan Mitchell Bridges, and was used in conjunction with the ASQ Connected Community Change Model during 2000-2001. It was revised by the Orlando Community ASQ Good Works initiative during a 3-year period from 2004 through 2008.

This current version of the model is a combination of the Bridges model and the Kotter seven-stage process for managing change or transitions. It is companion to the Change Management Toolkit, powerpoint v11 (April 2013).

A Strategy Associates/Harrington Institute LeanBrief

The Managing Transitions Model

Adapted by Frank Voehl from an article by William Bridges and Susan Mitchell Bridges (Leader to Leader, No. 16 Spring 2000)

♦ ONE

About Change and Transitions

Change is not a new concept for leaders or their constituents. Leaders understand by now that organizations cannot be just endlessly "managed," replicating yesterday's practices to achieve success. Business conditions change and yesterday's assumptions and practices no longer work. There must be innovation, and innovation means change. Yet the thousands of books, seminars, and consulting engagements purporting to help "manage change" often fall short. These tools tend to neglect the dynamics of personal and organizational transition that can determine the outcome of any change effort. As a result, they fail to address the leader's need to coach others through the transition process. And they fail to acknowledge the fact that leaders themselves usually need coaching before they can effectively coach others.

In years past, perhaps, leaders could simply order changes. Even today, many view it as a straightforward process: establish a task force to lay out what needs to be done, when, and by whom. Then all that seems left for the organization is (what an innocent sounding euphemism!) to implement the plan. Many leaders imagine that to make a change work, people needed only to follow the plan's implicit map, which shows how to get from here (where things stand now) to there (where they'll stand after the plan is implemented). "There" is also where the organization needs to be if it is to survive, so anyone who has looked at the situation with a reasonably open mind can see that the change isn't optional. It is essential.

Fine. But then, why don't people "Just Do It"? And what is the leader supposed to do when they Just Don't Do It -- when people do not make the changes that need to be made, when deadlines are missed, costs run over budget, and valuable workers get so frustrated that when a headhunter calls, they jump ship.

Leaders who try to analyze this question after the fact are likely to review the change effort and how it was implemented. But the details of the intended change are often not the issue. The planned outcome may have been the restructuring of a group around products instead of geography, or speeding up product time-to-market by 50 percent.

Whatever it was, the change that seemed so obviously necessary has languished like last week's flowers. That happens because transition occurs in the course of every attempt at change. Transition is the state that change puts people into. The change is external (the different policy, practice, or structure that the leader is trying to bring about), while transition is internal (psychological reorientations that people have to go through before the change can work).

The trouble is most leaders imagine that transition is automatic -- that it occurs simply because the change is happening. But it doesn't. Just because the computers are on everyone's desk doesn't mean that the new individually accessed customer database is transforming operations the way the consultants promised it would. And just because two companies (or hospitals or law firms) are now fully "merged" doesn't mean that they operate as one or that the envisioned cost savings will be realized.

♦ TWO

The Process of Transitions

Even when a change is showing signs that it may work, there is the issue of timing, for transition happens much more slowly than change. That is why the ambitious timetable that the leader laid out to the board turns out to have been wildly optimistic: it was based on getting the change accomplished, not on getting the people through the transition.

Transition takes longer because it requires that people undergo three separate processes, and all of them are upsetting.

Saying Goodbye: *The first requirement is that people have to let go of the way that things -- and, worse, the way that they themselves -- used to be. As the folk-wisdom puts it, "You can't steal second base with your foot on first." You have to leave where you are, and many people have spent their whole lives standing on first base. It isn't just a personal preference you are asking them to give up. You are asking them to let go of the way of engaging or accomplishing tasks that made them successful in the past. You are asking them to let go of what feels to them like their whole world of experience, their sense of identity, even "reality" itself.*

On paper it may have been a logical shift to self-managed teams, but it turned out to require that people no longer rely on a supervisor to make all decisions (and to be blamed when things go wrong). Or it looked like a simple effort to merge two work-groups, but in practice it meant that people no longer worked with their friends or reported to people whose priorities they understood.

Shifting into Neutral: *Even after people have let go of their old ways, they find themselves unable to start anew. They are entering the second difficult phase of transition. We call it the neutral zone, and that in-between state is so full of uncertainty and confusion that simply coping with it takes most of people's energy. The neutral zone is particularly difficult during mergers or acquisitions, when careers and policy decisions and the very "rules of the game" are left in limbo while the two leadership groups work out questions of power and decision making.*

The neutral zone is uncomfortable, so people are driven to get out of it. Some people try to rush ahead into some (often any) new situation, while others try to back-pedal and retreat into the past. Successful transition, however, requires that an organization and its people spend some time in the neutral zone. This time in the neutral zone is not wasted, for that is where the creativity and energy of transition are found and the real transformation takes place. It's like Moses in the wilderness: it was there, not in the Promised Land, that Moses was given the Ten Commandments; and it was there, and not in The Promised Land, that his people were transformed from slaves to a strong and free people.

Today, it won't take 40 years, but a shift to self-managed teams, for instance, is likely to leave people in the neutral zone for six months, and a major merger may take two years to emerge from the neutral zone. The change can continue forward on something close to its own schedule while the transition is being attended to, but if the transition is not dealt with, the change may collapse. People cannot do the new things that the new situation requires until they come to grips with what is being asked.

Moving Forward: *Some people fail to get through transition because they do not let go of the old ways and make an ending; others fail because they become frightened and confused by the neutral zone and don't stay in it long enough for it to do its work on them. Some, however, do get through these first two phases of transition, but then freeze when they face the third phase, the new beginning. For that third phase requires people to begin behaving in a new way, and that can be disconcerting -- it puts one's sense of competence and value at risk. Especially in organizations that have a history of punishing mistakes, people hang back during the final phase of transition, waiting to see how others are going to handle the new beginning.*
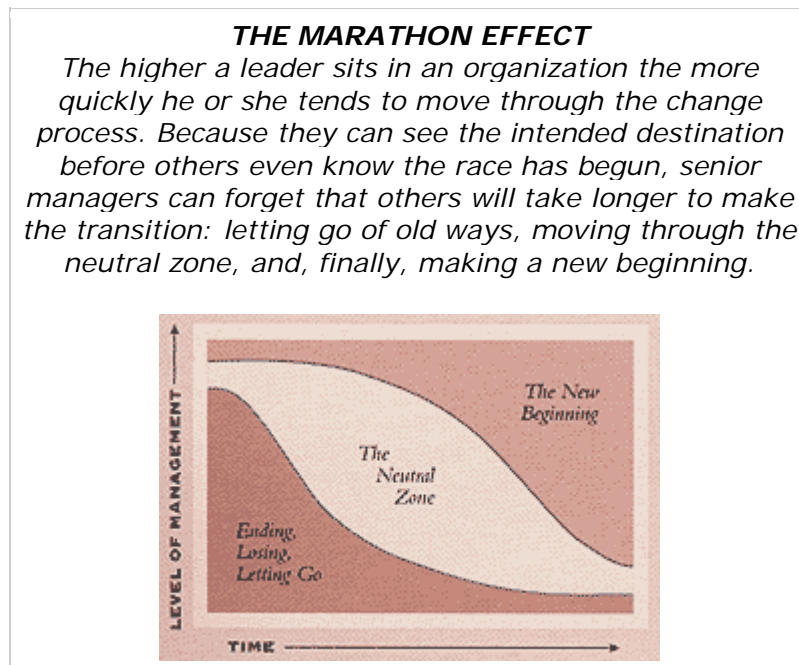

♦ *THREE*

Helping Others to Change

Understanding the transition process is a requirement for almost any senior executive. However, it is when the organization is in transition that leaders themselves often need help. They are so close to the changes that have been initiated that they fail to grasp the real essence of what must be done to help lead themselves and others through the process in an effective manner.

The following are some of the major failpoints to consider when attempting to help others to change:

- Remember that they themselves took some time to come to terms with the necessary change -- and that their followers will need at least as long to do so
- Understand why anyone would not embrace change, and, so believe that their followers are ignorant, rigid, or outright hostile to the new direction
- See that it is the transitions, not necessarily the changes themselves that are holding people back and thereby threatening to make their change unworkable.

THE MARATHON EFFECT
The higher a leader sits in an organization the more quickly he or she tends to move through the change process. Because they can see the intended destination before others even know the race has begun, senior managers can forget that others will take longer to make the transition: letting go of old ways, moving through the neutral zone, and, finally, making a new beginning.

Most leaders come from backgrounds where technical, financial, or operational skills were paramount, and those skills provide little help when it comes to leading people through transition. Such leaders may be pushing the limits of their understanding of the future, and they need perspective and advice. That is where a trusted colleague, confidant, coach, or consultant can offer valuable counsel to the leader. This person's background or professional affiliation can vary widely; what matters is that she or he understands how to help people through transition. It is a role that is far more interpersonal and collaborative than is played by most consultants or trainers accustomed to teaching a skill or prescribing a solution.

No training program can prepare a leader for managing a transition. Yet no leader can effectively lead change -- which is what leadership is all about -- without understanding and, ultimately, experiencing -- the transition process. What leaders need, instead, is individualized assistance whereby they learn to:

- Create plans to bring their followers through the particular transition that they face -- not through generic "change." A trainer can teach leaders a generalized approach ("The Ten Steps..."), but a good coach can help the leaders to discover their own best approaches.
- Work with their own goals, limitations, and concerns to create a development plan that prepares them for the future.

Times of transition are becoming the rule rather than the exception. Yet few leaders know how to prepare for the changes that lie ahead. Transition leadership skills must be congruent with, must capitalize and build on, the leader's own strengths and talents. They cannot be found in a set of theoretical leadership skills.

♦ FOUR

A Method to Managing Transition

The transition adviser works collaboratively with each leader to assess the leader's place in the three-part transition process, the strengths the leader brings and how to leverage them, and what the current situation demands. It is a personal and completely customized process.

Although the details of a transition management plan are unique to each situation, the advice to leaders involve the following essential steps:

1. *Learn to describe the change and why it must happen, and do so succinctly -- in one minute or less. It is amazing how many leaders cannot do that.*
2. *Be sure that the details of the change are planned carefully and that someone is responsible for each detail; that timelines for all the changes are established; and that a communications plan explaining the change is in place.*
3. *Understand (with the assistance of others closer to the change) just who is going to have to let go of what -- what is ending (and what is not) in people's work lives and careers -- and what people (including the leader) should let go of.*
4. *Make sure that steps are taken to help people respectfully let go of the past. These may include "boundary" actions (events that demonstrate that change has come), a constant stream of information, and understanding and acceptance of the symptoms of grieving, as well as efforts to protect people's interests while they are giving up the status quo.*
5. *Help people through the neutral zone with communication (rather than simple information) that emphasizes connections with (and concern for) the employees by reiterating the "4 P's" of transition communications:*

   The purpose: Why we have to do this

   The picture: What it will look and feel like when we reach our goal

   The plan: Step-by-step, how we will get there

The part: What you can (and need to) do to help us move forward.

6. *Create temporary solutions to the temporary problems and the high levels of uncertainty found in the neutral zone. For example, one high-tech manufacturer, when announcing the closing of a plant, made interim changes in its usual reassignment procedures, bonus compensation plans, and employee communications processes to make sure that displaced employees suffered as little as possible, both financially and psychologically. Such efforts should include transition monitoring teams that can alert the leader to unforeseen problems -- and disband when the process is done.*
7. *Help people launch the new beginning by articulating the new attitudes and behaviors needed to make the change work -- and then modeling, providing practice in, and rewarding those behaviors and attitudes. For example, rather than announcing the grandiose goal of building a "world-class workforce," leaders of transition must define the skills and attitudes that such a workforce must have, and provide the necessary training and resources to develop them.*

♦ FIVE

Coaching for Change

Since the ability to manage transition is tied to the realities of an actual leader in an actual situation, mutual trust between adviser and leader is essential. Only that way can leaders be honest enough to bring their fears and concerns to the surface quickly, hear what the situation is really "saying" rather than focusing on a program that a consultant is trying to sell, and gain the personal insight and awareness of the transition process that can be carried into the future.

Because this transition management relationship is a close and ongoing one, the adviser gets to know the leader's situation well and follows it as it changes. Understanding the dynamics of transition is far removed from the kind of leadership training most organizations provide. Traditional trainers and consultants seldom possess such intimate knowledge of their client. Whatever personal coaching they provide is usually subsumed to the teaching of a generic skill or body of knowledge. And because the relationship is time-limited, there is a natural pressure to produce quick, clear results.

However, because transition advisers work within the context of the situation at hand, their focus is not on how to "be a leader" or even how to "change an organization" but on how to provide the particular kind of leadership that an organization in transition demands. For that reason, the results of the relationship are very specific: the development of new skills and behaviors geared to the needs of the unique time and circumstances in which the person leads.

♦ SIX

New Models for Transitions Leadership

Once you understand transition, you begin to see it everywhere. You realize that many of the issues commonly addressed as leadership, learning, or organizational development challenges are really an inevitable part of transition. Indeed, in today's organizations, without experiencing and successfully managing a difficult transition, no leader can be effective for very long. That suggests reinventing most models of leadership development to include the some type of 'data-to-action' model.

The best leadership development programs implicitly address the challenge of understanding change -- they are experiential, tailored to the needs of the leader, and based on delivering real-world results. But most could be strengthened by explicit attention to transition management.

The final lesson that the process of transition holds for leadership development

Is that the relationship between adviser and leader is not much different from that between a leader and the people that she or he "leads." We treat that word ironically because the leadership that is appropriate to a modern, fast-moving organization -- where work is based on task and mission rather than job description, and is distributed among contributors inside and outside one's organization -- takes on a new meaning. It is not the drum-major-at-the-head-of-the-parade leadership appropriate to yesterday's organization; rather it is the give-and-take, person-centered leadership by which the sports coach gets the best effort out of each member of a team.

> *Without successfully managing a difficult transition, no leader can be effective for very long.*

The kind of leadership most effective today is similar to the kind of service that the best consultant gives a client: collaborative assistance that is both problem-solving and developmental. Its target is both the situation and the professional capability of the person. Today's leader, in a fundamental sense is a coach, and the leader can best learn that role by being coached and then taking action. Since the ability to deal with Transitions requires executives to operationalize and manage the change process with action, the Data-to-Action model developed by Sperduto is a useful model to follow.

The Data-to-Action model allows us to our focus on assessment and development at the individual, team, and organization level across time, with each cycle starting at ever-increasing levels of performance and competence. Once a client need has been

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identified or a problem diagnosed, it is often useful move into the Data-to-Action model, which is characterized by a repetitive cycle that moves through four phases to achieve continuous development and improvement. This model is similar to FOCUS-PDCA, with the starting point being Check Phase as in CAP-DO. The model starts with Measure (Phase 1), moves into Feedback (Phase 2), then through Planning (Phase 3), and completes its initial cycle with Action (Phase 4), as shown in the following Figure #3.
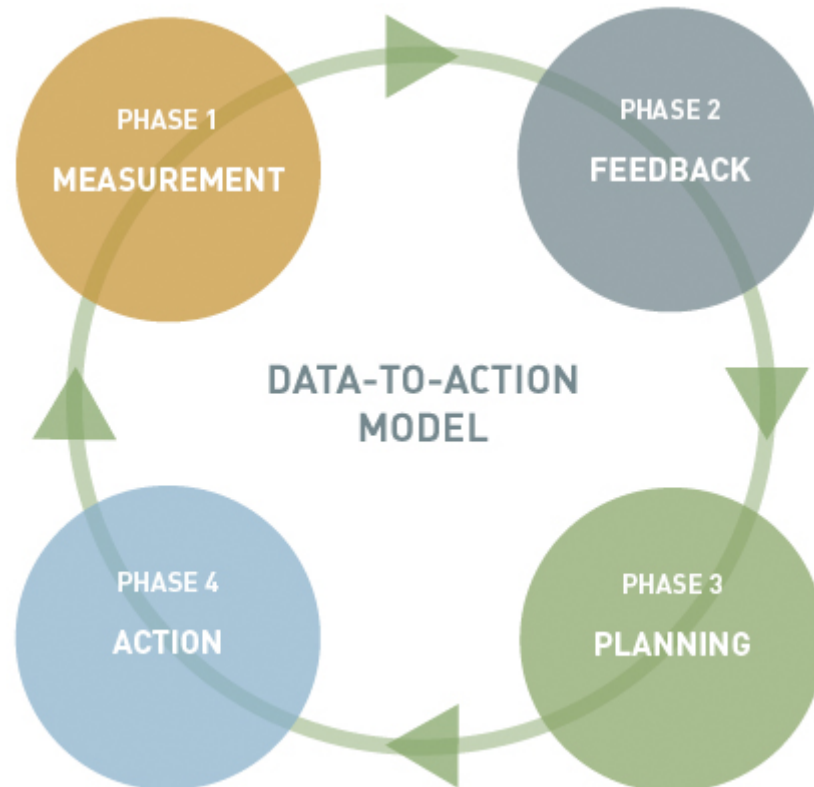

Figure #3

Phase 1: Measurement…the scientific methodology.

The initial phase in the Data-to-Action model is the measurement stage in which information is gathered that will inform the subsequent action. This corresponds to the Check (or Study Phase in the PDCA model. Coming from a consultant-practitioner approach, measurement is dedicated to the discipline of research in the applied arena: thoroughly gathering all relevant data and bringing it to bear on the issues at hand. The measurement methods used to gather data vary according to the specific situation and the level at which the work is being done, and can include both hard and soft measures, such as psychological assessment, personality instruments and cognitive measures, individual interviews, focus groups, process observation, surveys, and performance data.

Phase 2: Feedback…a joint discovery process.

One of the defining hallmarks of the Sperduto Data-to-Action model is the collaborative nature that must exist between the consultants and the client (i.e.,

the individual, team, or organization under study). The diagnostic data, gathered in Phase 1, are fed back to the client by the consultant, who then helps the client determine strengths and weaknesses of the client. The feedback begins the Action loop (as in PDCA), and is given in the spirit of being part of a joint discovery process where consultants partner with the client to develop a rich understanding of the client's current state of affairs.

Phase 3: Planning...clients know their business best.

Once the client is provided all relevant and useful data, we work with the client to analyze the data, looking for the most compelling patterns and trends, and determine ways to optimize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses. The collaborative nature of this joint diagnostic and planning process is a key ingredient in distinguishing our Data-to-Action model from the "doctor-patient" model in which a physician comes in and independently makes a diagnosis of the patient and prescribes a solution. We know our clients know their business better than anyone. The collaborative process, and the resulting relationship that develops between the consultant and the client, provides the context and shared frame of reference necessary to create buy-in and commitment on the part of the client for the action phase. At the end of the planning phase, the consultant and client have agreed on what actions need to be taken, and have put appropriate goals in place.

Phase 4: Action...it's the results that count

The action stage is where the hard work of implementing the plans developed in the previous stage takes place. This is the period of time when the client, with our assistance, takes steps to transition from the current state to the desired future state that has been conceptualized in the planning process. This is the step where we should see shifts in the behavior of the individual, team, or organization that will take the client to a higher level of performance.

Then, back to square one...

The cyclical nature of the Data-to-Action model instructs us to move from Phase 4 back to Phase 1 where, through the measurement process, we can gather information after the action has been taken to assess the impact of the action and improvement in performance. This is naturally followed by another feedback process which flows into further diagnosis and planning, and to the revision and/or resetting of goals along with the resulting new action and ever increasing levels of development and performance.

And from there to where it takes you...

Recently, a major fy2010 study demonstrated that little has changed since 2000 and that nearly **70%** of all transformation and change initiatives continue to fail. With all that is written and posted on Organizational Change Management, or OCM, a Google search still yields about 6.3 million hits, and change 'guidance' is still a large part of the $345 billion dollar management consulting market. The beat goes on!

♦ SEVEN

Lessons from Moses and the Wilderness

God knew that the Israelites needed visual evidence of His presence. When Moses went up to Mount Sinai for 40 days and the people did not see or hear from him, they grew impatient and gathered their gold to form a golden calf that they worshipped in place of God. God's provision of a tabernacle — itself a splendor to behold — not only allowed the people to sense His presence, but also to see their leader go in to meet with God in a concrete place and not disappear up a mountain. The tabernacle was more than just a dwelling place. All the components of the tabernacle were part of an intricate visual aid to illustrate God's relationship with His people. The tabernacle would be in the center of the camp, and the 12 tribes of Israel would set up their tents around it according to tribe. The instruction on how to build the tabernacle was first given to Moses in the wilderness, who then gave the orders to the Israelites.

Lessons from the Wilderness

The Leadership Lessons from the Wilderness are that, in spite of the presence of the visible Tabernacle, even a great leader like Moses faced a trying test of his leadership in the neutral zone. But he was up to the task, so let's examine some of his methods:

Magnify the plagues: *To make the old system (i.e., Pharaoh) "let go" of his people, Moses called down plagues -- and didn't stop until the old system gave way. At this stage, problems are your friend. Don't solve them, for they convince people that they need to let go of the old way.*

Mark the ending: *What a symbolic "boundary event" Moses had! After his people crossed the Red Sea, there was no turning back!*

Deal with the "murmuring": *Don't be surprised when people lose confidence in your leadership in the neutral zone: Where are we going? Does he know the way? What was ever wrong with Egypt, anyway? In periods of transition, look for opportunities to have contact with the individuals in transition; distance will be interpreted as abandonment. And show your concern for them by engaging them in conversation about the issues*

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that are most on their minds; you may think there are more important things to talk about, but they don't think so.

Give people access to the decision makers: *Moses (aided by his OD specialist, Jethro) appointed a new cadre of judges in the wilderness to narrow the gap between the people and the decision makers.*

Capitalize on the creative opportunity provided by the neutral zone: *It was in the wilderness, not in the Promised Land, that the big innovation took place: the Ten Commandments were handed down. It'll be in the neutral zone that many of your biggest breakthroughs occur.*

Resist the urge to rush ahead: *It seems as though little is happening in the neutral zone, but this is where the transformation is taking place. Don't jeopardize it by hurrying.*

Understand that neutral-zone leadership is special: *Moses did not enter the Promised Land. His kind of leadership fit the neutral zone, where things are confusing and fluid. But it was Joshua who could lead in the more settled state of the Promised Lane. A literal new leader isn't needed, though, just a new style of leadership. Establishment of a new beginning requires a much more logical approach with an appeal to the followers' understanding, while the fluidity and ambiguity of the neutral zone makes an emotional connection between the leader and the followers more critical.*

Follow a Process: *Moses followed a process even when he appeared to have lost control of the situation. The Ten Commandments were his process. Remember, it was there in the Neutral Zone, not in the Promised Land, that Moses was given the Ten Commandments; and it was there in the neutral zone, and not in The Promised Land, that his people were transformed from slaves to a strong and free people.*