CSCE

Centre for
Strategic
Communication
Excellence

MANAGING CHANGE COMMUNICATION

A Centre for Strategic Communication Excellence toolkit

CHANGE IS A MAJOR
CHALLENGE FOR ORGANISATIONS

Research suggests an alarmingly high number of business change initiatives fail to sustain the change they sought to introduce - despite an investment of time, money and resources.

This is not good news for business. Changing business structures, modifying ways of working and introducing new technologies are key factors in sustaining and growing organisations. Implementing change smoothly and quickly is highly desirable.

However, most people do not like change and uncertainty. They often react negatively or angrily. They may even go into denial. All of this slows down and may actually derail change. While there is no magic formula for minimising the impact of these feelings, open and honest communication can go a long way to reducing the impact. In fact, consistent, regular and targeted communication to those who are impacted by change has been shown to significantly improve the success rate of change.

Using this toolkit

This toolkit explains how people are impacted by change and the emotional journey they undergo. It illustrates how communication can make a difference. It presents key tools to assist you to execute successful change communication and provides models and templates to help you with your planning.

AN EMOTIONAL JOURNEY

While communication is vital during times of change, it can be made even more challenging by the emotional backdrop which occurs during such times.
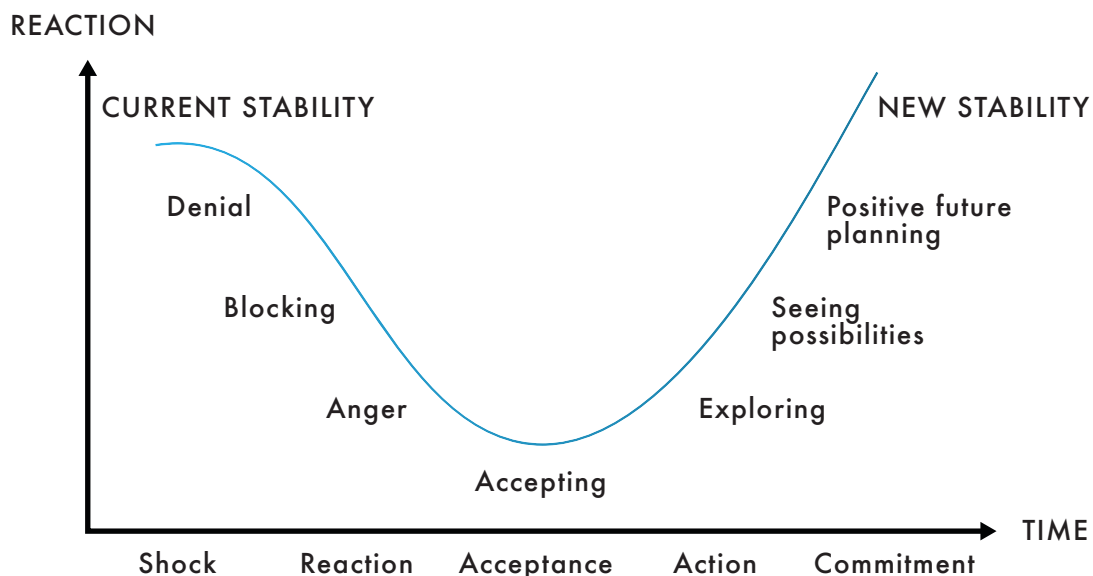
Most people don't enjoy change. In fact they often actively resist it mainly because:

▸ They perceive change as a threat
▸ They are comfortable in the current reality
▸ Poor rationale for the change
▸ Unclear vision of the change
▸ No What's In It for Me (WIIFM)
▸ The change goes against their values
▸ There is a lack of trust

▸ There has been negative past experience of change
▸ The next steps seem unclear
▸ It looks painful
▸ They feel they have no control or involvement

The **Reaction over Time Model** outlines some of the major emotions people feel during change. Everyone experiencing change will have these reactions to a greater or lesser extent and they may go through them at different times. Plus - this is not a linear journey; it is not uncommon to 'fall back down the curve' before moving on again.

Communication can only impact on the Time component in the Reaction model; in other words, strategic communication activities can move people through the inevitable reactions more quickly but they do not eliminate those reactions.
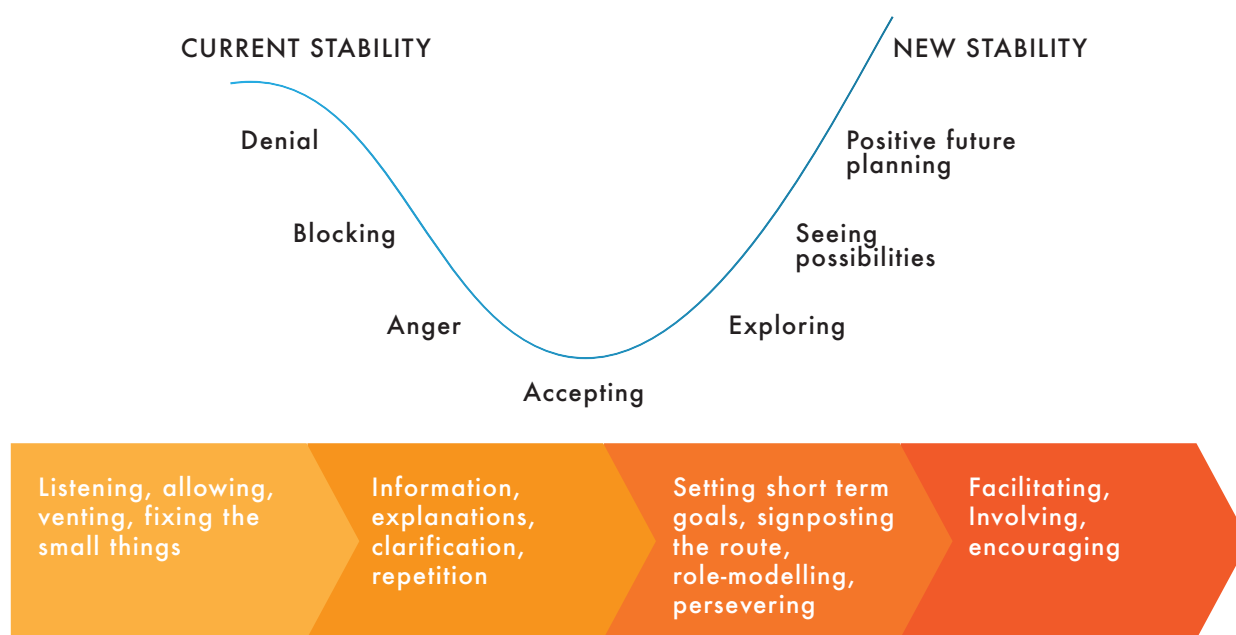
FIGURE 1: REACTION OVER TIME MODEL

REACTION

CURRENT STABILITY   NEW STABILITY

Denial   Positive future
                                              planning

Blocking   Seeing
                                              possibilities

Anger   Exploring

Accepting

                                                    TIME

Shock   Reaction   Acceptance   Action   Commitment

Adapted from Elizaabeth Kubler-Ross

Strategic change communication activities don't seek to prevent people experiencing emotions; rather they add most value when they enable people to move through their emotional journey as quickly as possible taking the fewest backward steps.

FIGURE 2: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION INTERVENTIONS DURING CHANGE

CURRENT STABILITY

Denial

Blocking

Anger

Accepting

NEW STABILITY

Positive future planning

Seeing possibilities

Exploring

| Listening, allowing, venting, fixing the small things | Information, explanations, clarification, repetition | Setting short term goals, signposting the route, role-modelling, persevering | Facilitating, Involving, encouraging |

For more information on how to use strategic communication interventions, see Appendix 1: Stakeholder Strategies During Change

CHANGE OR TRANSITION?

"Beginnings depend on endings. The problem is, people don't like endings"

William Bridges 1986

In his book **"Managing transitions – making the most of change"**, William Bridges distinguishes between 'CHANGE' and 'TRANSITION'. According to Bridges:

▸**'CHANGE'** is the situation that's changing – a new structure, closing an office, etc
▸**'TRANSITION'** is the psychological process people need to experience to make the change internally. Often when change doesn't go as planned, organisations make the CHANGE but not the TRANSITION. The 'thing' might have changed, but the people haven't gone with it.

Bridges identifies three phases to change – **ENDING, MIDDLE** and **NEW BEGINNING.** He identifies a concentration on the new beginning while ignoring the need to let go of current practice as one of the biggest mistakes organisations make. His insights illuminate change behaviours and are useful when crafting a strategic approach to change communication.

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