



**MEDLINE  
UNIVERSITY**

# **LEADERSHIP: IMPLEMENTING CHANGE**



## Implementing Change

"Effective leaders help others to understand the necessity of change and to accept a common vision of the desired outcome." - John Kotter

One of the most difficult tasks management faces is implementing change. Change is frequent in the healthcare industry. Management is always seeking ways to improve care while also reducing costs. What are some of the steps to successfully implement change? Models differ on the approach, but one common denominator is the need to obtain a buy-in from those directly affected by the change.

### How do you obtain buy-in to change?

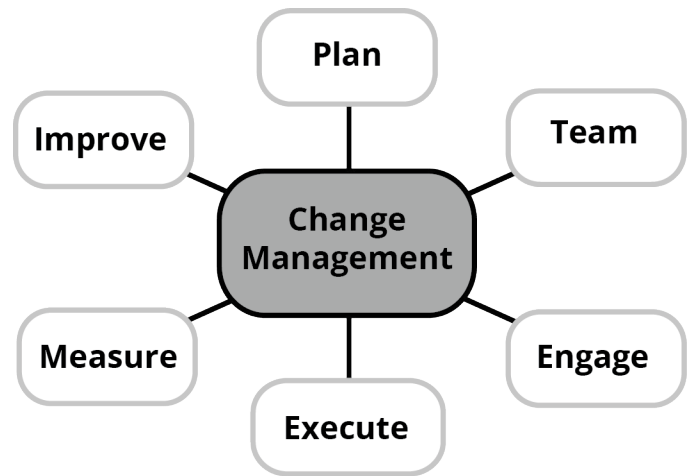
Once those directly affected by the change are identified, the next step is to educate them why change is necessary. The person delivering the message should be a clear leader and well respected by those that will implement the change. That leader should provide detailed information why the change has become necessary and demonstrate how it will improve upon the current process. They should not simply state "if we do this, then this will be the result." Physical proof should be shared that demonstrates improved results. That proof may come in various forms: statistical data, analysis, or studies are a few examples. When available, share success stories showing how the proposed change has made a difference at other similar organizations.

### Open and ongoing communication is critical.

Once information about the change is shared, make sure the details are fully understood. Ask if anyone still has issues or concerns in implementing the change. Ask for specifics on why they don't feel the change is good or will work. An oversight may come to light from the discussion that management needs to address. Let people voice their concerns and then directly address those concerns. Understand it is human nature for some people to ask: "what's in this for me?", "will this make my job more difficult?", "does this affect how my role fits into the company moving forward?" If these questions aren't asked, expect others may be thinking them and plan to share answers to these questions either way.

### Encourage those resistant to change to participate in planning meetings.

This will allow their voice to continually be heard and roadblocks to be addressed along the way.



**Involve all levels of the organization in the planning.** Make sure all levels of the workforce are involved in the ongoing planning and evaluation of the change process. Everyone within the organization should feel they are represented in the ongoing discussions and evaluations of the process. This will strengthen the buy-in throughout the process.

### Choose strong leaders to direct the implementation process.

These individuals should be persuasive supporters of the need for change and the new process being implemented. They need to be respected as a leader and exhibit strong listening and communication skills. Evaluation of the process should be ongoing. It is realistic to expect the process may need to be changed along the way. Any need for change should quickly be shared with the planning and implementation teams and solutions promptly implemented.

### Evaluation of the process should be ongoing.

It is realistic to expect the process may need to be changed along the way. Any need for change should quickly be shared with the planning and implementation teams and solutions promptly implemented.

### Once the change is implemented, continue to share the ongoing success of the new process.

### Measurement and monitoring is critical.

This will help to insure target results are maintained and the process remains fully implemented.

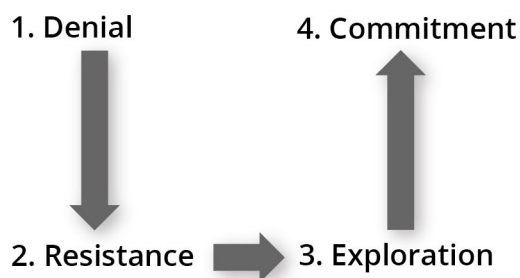
**Acknowledge the entire team** for making the change and success possible.



## Dealing with Change: The Four Step Change Model

Change is never easy and is often met with a wall of resistance. Fear can be powerful fuel against change. Your best defense is to understand your staff's reactions before they occur and be ready to listen, understand, and counteract negative reactions. How you approach each phase of change can mean the difference between failure and success.

### Change Management Model



#### 1. Denial

A typical first response to big change is shock. A person may refuse to recognize the information and use denial as a coping mechanism to avoid becoming overwhelmed. Responses may include:

- Denying: "This can't be happening."
- Ignoring: "Wait till it blows over."
- Minimizing: "It just needs a few minor adjustments."

Denial can only go on for so long; eventually the individual will have to respond to the change.

#### Management Approach

Open communication is key. Tell your staff about the coming changes, and acknowledge that you understand the fears and concerns they express. Taking the time to fully explain what will happen and the steps that will help them adjust to the change will make the transition seem less daunting. Once your staff has had time to process this information, conduct a follow-up planning meeting to discuss their thoughts.

#### 2. Resistance

The next backward-looking step may feel like a set-back as staff members venerate the past and ignore the future. Staff may begin resisting the change, which can

manifest as rampant complaints or finger-pointing and blame, or possibly reverting back to denial. If distress elevates too much, it can actually cause individuals to experience physical illness or other emotional and/or mental symptoms. This is a key time to help your staff identify their feelings so that progress can be made.

#### Management Approach

Your challenge here is to resist the urge to dismiss people's feelings. It may seem easy to simply demand they change, but that will have disastrous negative effects. At this critical moment, listen closely to your staff's feelings, ask plenty of questions about their concerns, and acknowledge the legitimacy of their feelings. Doing this will encourage trust that they can tell you how they feel, giving you the opportunity to address their concerns.

#### 3. Exploration

Eventually, individuals will move past the negativity and into a more future-focused phase. This happens at different times for everyone, but generally includes a renewed energy to explore the new changes, goals, resources and possibilities. This new excitement may take on a life of its own, committed more to swift action than what may be the best action. Carefully guide this phase to channel your staff's energy into producing the best possible outcomes, not just the quickest.

#### Management Approach

Your biggest challenge at this point is to help harness and direct your staff's energy. Direct this phase by setting short-term goals for staff to measure progress and help keep tabs on the continuing process. Allowing staff to express their thoughts and incorporate ideas into the process as a whole will continue to help your staff move past their fear of change.

#### 4. Commitment

From a successfully directed growth and adaptation process comes an effective commitment phase. At this point, staff have grown beyond the problems and fears of the past, tested and adopted new tactics and processes, and mainstreamed changes into regular practice.

#### Management Approach

Be sure to celebrate this phase as well by recognizing not only the final goal but also the individuals who responded to the changes. This is the time to set



long-term goals for the effects of the new changes and prepare for the next set of changes on the horizon.<sup>1</sup>

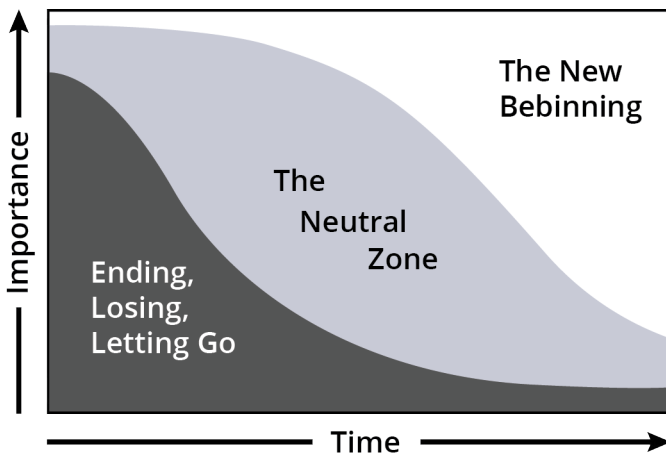
## Guiding through Change: Bridges' Transition Model

Another way of guiding staff through change is to use the Transition Model. Developed by William Bridges in 1991, the strength of this model lies in the focus on transition rather than change. There is subtle but significant difference between transition and change. Change is something that happens to people, even if they don't agree with it. Transition, however, is internal: It is what happens in people's minds as they go through change.<sup>2</sup> Transition also occurs more slowly, while change can be quick.

The Transition Model divides transition into three stages:

1. Ending, Losing, and Letting Go
2. The Neutral Zone
3. The New Beginning

Individuals will progress through the stages at different paces relevant to their acceptance of the impending change.



### Stage 1: Ending, Losing, and Letting Go

This first stage is characterized by resistance and emotional upheaval due to the presentation of change forcing them to let go of something they are already familiar with. Some emotions may include fear, denial, anger, sadness, frustration, and a sense of loss.

People fear what they do not understand. of loss. People fear what they do not understand. Therefore, at

this stage, it is important to not only openly communicate the change and how they will be able to positively influence it and apply their skills and experience after implementation, but also listen emphatically to their resistance and emotions. The more staff realize they are an essential part of accomplishing this change for the better, the more likely they will be to move to the next stage of transition.

### Stage 2: The Neutral Zone

This stage acts as the bridge between the old and the new and can sometimes seem unproductive or boast little progress as staff may still be letting go of the old while also trying to adjust to the new. Frequent meetings to give feedback on performance and progress will help staff feel a sense of direction. Setting short-term goals can help staff maintain a sense of progress throughout the transition period. Encourage staff to continually share their feelings and observations during these meetings as well. It is possible that they will be experiencing a higher workload during this time; therefore, it may be necessary to bring in extra resources or assist in deprioritizing work so that the workload is manageable.

### Stage 3: The New Beginning

This final stage is marked by acceptance and energy as staff begins to see results from their efforts and embrace the change. Important at this time is helping staff sustain the change. Link personal goals to the long-term objectives, being sure to recognize successes and celebrate the change. Consider rewarding the team for its hard work, as those who think the change is not working may regress to Stages 1 or 2.

Do note that while the Transition Model is effective for implementing change, it is not a substitute for change management methods, and experiences the most sustainable success when used alongside change management.

### References

1. Learning and change management models. Available at: <http://www.leopard-learning.com/changemanagementmodels.html>. Accessed April 28, 2014.
2. Bridges' Transition Model. Available at: <http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/bridges-transition-model.htm>. Accessed May 7, 2014.