

Stages of the Change Curve

Communicating to Promote Understanding & Engagement

STAGE	Mental State	Reaction	Approach	Communications
	(of those affected by change)		(for those leading change)	
DENIAL	Looking for Evidence of Status Quo	Disbelief; Fear	Information; Support	Face-to-Face; Create Alignment
RESISTANCE	Recognizes Things are Not in Their Control; Survival Mode	Anger, Depression	Reassurance; Validate Past, Explain Improvements	Maximize Communication; Spark Motivation
EXPERIMENT	Exploration; Fight or Flight	Acceptance; Curiosity	Guidance and Direction; Time and Support to Explore	Develop Capability
ACCEPTANCE	Learning How to Work/Be in a New Situation	Feeling Positive	Personal Support; Engagement in Teamwork	Share Knowledge; Status Updates
INTEGRATION	Rebuilding; Commitment	Renewal; Forward Action	Encouragement; Support Activities	Acknowledge Progress; Key Messages and Celebrations

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DENIAL	<p><i>"This can't be happening." "Not to me!" "Not again!"</i></p> <p>Denial is an initial stage of numbness and shock. If we can pretend that the change is not happening, if we keep it at a distance, then maybe it will all go away. It's a temporary defense that gives us time to absorb the newness of the change before moving on to other stages.</p> <p>Before moving forward, denial can reduce your performance, and you may stick to your comfort zone by doing mundane tasks and ignoring new tasks or processes. As reality slowly hits, denial decreases and feelings of uncertainty can appear.</p> <p>Approach: Leaders can help stakeholders and partners understand why the change is being made and what's in it for them. Face-to-face communication and listening to your colleagues concerns will help ease concerns and avoid group think. Release information gradually (over multiple conversations) to those who are already feeling overwhelmed.</p>
RESISTANCE	<p><i>"I can't accept this!" "What's the point of trying?"</i></p> <p>When you realize that the change is happening and will affect you, denial can turn to anger and/or depression. You might become aware of the losses associated with the change, what will end and what will be left behind. You don't want to see the benefits of change or adopt new behaviors. People dealing with changes in the workplace may feel demotivated and uncertain about their future. Your morale and performance might be very low in this stage.</p> <p>Approach: This is a vulnerable time where stakeholders may get stuck in the low points of the change curve and need strong direction to move forward. If this stage is badly managed, an organization may descend into crisis or chaos. Development of new project or processes can be derailed. As someone responsible for change, you should prepare for this stage by carefully considering the impacts and objections that people may have. Listen and watch carefully during this stage so you can respond to the unexpected. Also understand that resistance is a natural reaction and with time, it shall pass and make way for experimenting and acceptance.</p>

<p>EXPERIMENT</p>	<p><i>"I don't trust it but I'll give it a try." "Let's give the old way one more chance before ending it."</i></p> <p>Also known as bargaining, this stage can be an attempt to postpone what is inevitable. It can also be a time to test out changes or new ideas and behaviors. This is a creative stage where you can explore and look for new possibilities. Take the opportunity to learn about yourself and reveal new perspectives about your organization and work processes. By exploring and engaging with new ways of acting and working, you will develop confidence in your abilities and in the new processes, which will increase your morale and performance and that of your stakeholders.</p> <p>This is also an uneasy, fragile stage. You might feel confused as you replace familiar information and processes with new ideas. Seek guidance from change leaders, ask questions and share your experiences as you implement changes.</p> <p>Approach: Stakeholders in this stage are likely to have a lot of questions. Be open to suggestions from those experiencing change as a way for them to gain some control, clarify information and move closer to acceptance. However, they may still resist change by trying to learn only what they think is important. Make sure you set clear timelines and expectations. Hold workshops and trainings to ensure the change incorporated can run successfully. Productivity cannot be expected to be 100% but allowing extra time in this stage can pay off later.</p>
<p>ACCEPTANCE</p>	<p><i>"It's going to be OK." "I can't fight it, I may as well prepare for it."</i></p> <p>Acceptance can be either a stage of peace and contemplation, or a resigned attitude towards the change. This is when you are focused on the future, potentially with growing hope and trust in new things.</p> <p>Acknowledge the bravery that it take for you and your stakeholders to accept changes and move forward. You can also participate in information sharing and help others who are still in the beginning stages of change to move forward.</p> <p>Approach: Understand what drove stakeholders to acceptance. Reassure and encourage them as they proceed. Share status and metrics about the changes to keep them informed. Stakeholders in this stage can be recruited as champions to be peer mentors for others in beginning stages.</p>

INTEGRATION

"I can see how things have improved." "This is the new normal."

Look at the change curve model. Notice that Integration is higher than the starting point of Denial, illustrating the positive improvement process you have gone through. You start to see the tangible benefits and positive effects of the change you have worked so hard for. Where there is a robust and positive change, future performance and morale will be high.

You are ready to become independently responsible for the change. Now that you have personally experienced the stages of change, you can recognize the signs and symptoms of your stakeholders. You can identify approaches and communication techniques to employ to help stakeholders successfully navigate through the stages.

Approach: This is the stage that change leaders have hopes and worked for. This is where stakeholders embrace the change and positively advocate to integrate new processes and actions in the culture of the organization. Help stakeholders to set realistic expectations for immediate and future plans. Repeat and reinforce objectives and strategies. Share successes with the team and take time to celebrate and move towards a brighter future.

Sources:

- Change Management coach: Kubler-Ross Five Stage Model <https://www.change-management-coach.com/kubler-ross.html>
- Growing Edge: Stages of Change <https://growingedgelimited.com/stages-of-change/>
- How to Coach Your Team Through 5 Stages of Grief <https://medium.com/taskworld-blog/how-to-coach-your-team-through-5-stages-of-grief-14807a16e48b>