



## Bridges' Transition Model Guiding People Through Change

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People are often quite uncomfortable with change, for all sorts of understandable reasons. This can lead them to resist it and oppose it.

This is why it's important to understand how people are feeling as change proceeds, so that you can guide them through it and so that – in the end – they can accept it and support it.

Bridges' Transition Model helps you do this. We'll explore the model in this article.

### About the Model

The Transition Model was created by change consultant, William Bridges, and was published in his 1991 book "Managing Transitions."

The main strength of the model is that it focuses on transition, not change. The difference between these is subtle but important. Change is something that happens to people, even if they don't agree with it. Transition, on the other hand, is internal: it's what happens in people's minds as they go through change. Change can happen very quickly, while transition usually occurs more slowly.

The model highlights three stages of transition that people go through when they experience change. These are:

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

Bridges says that people will go through each stage at their own pace. For example, those who are comfortable with the change will likely move ahead to stage three quickly, while others will linger at stages one or two.

Let's examine each stage in greater detail.

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

People enter this initial stage of transition when you first present them with change. This stage is often marked with resistance and emotional upheaval, because people are being forced to let go of something that they are comfortable with.

At this stage, people may experience these emotions:

- Fear.
- Denial.

- Anger.
- Sadness.
- Disorientation.
- Frustration.
- Uncertainty.
- A sense of loss.

People have to accept that something is ending before they can begin to accept the new idea. If you don't acknowledge the emotions that people are going through, you'll likely encounter resistance throughout the entire change process.

### **Guiding People Through Stage One**

It's important to accept people's resistance, and understand their emotions. Allow them time to accept the change and let go, and try to get everyone to talk about what they're feeling. In these conversations, make sure that you **listen empathically** and **communicate openly** about what's going to happen.

Emphasize how people will be able to apply their skills, experience, and knowledge once you've implemented the change. Explain how you'll give them what they need (for instance, training and resources) to work effectively in the new environment.

People often fear what they don't understand, so the more you can educate them about a positive future, and communicate how their knowledge and skills are an essential part of getting there, the likelier they are to move on to the next stage.

### **Stage 2: The Neutral Zone**

In this stage, people affected by the change are often confused, uncertain, and impatient. Depending on how well you're managing the change, they may also experience a higher workload as they get used to new systems and new ways of working.

Think of this phase as the bridge between the old and the new; in some ways, people will still be attached to the old, while they are also trying to adapt to the new.

Here, people might experience:

- Resentment towards the change initiative.
- Low morale and low productivity.
- Anxiety about their role, status or identity.
- Skepticism about the change initiative.

Despite these, this stage can also be one of great creativity, innovation, and renewal. This is a great time to encourage people to try new ways of thinking or working.

## Guiding People Through Stage Two

Your guidance is incredibly important as people go through this neutral period. This can be an uncomfortable time, because it can seem unproductive, and it can seem that little progress is being made.

Because people might feel a bit lost, provide them with a solid sense of direction. Remind them of team goals, and encourage them to talk about what they're feeling.

Meet with your people frequently to **give feedback** on how they're performing, especially with regard to change. It's also important to set short-term goals during this stage, so that people can experience some **quick wins**; this will help to improve motivation as well as giving everyone a positive perception of the change effort.

Also, do what you can to **boost morale** and continue to remind people of how they can contribute to the success of the change. If required, you may also want to help people manage their workloads, either by deprioritizing some types of work, or by bringing in extra resources.

## Stage 3: The New Beginning

The last transition stage is a time of acceptance and energy. People have begun to embrace the change initiative. They're building the skills they need to work successfully in the new way, and they're starting to see early wins from their efforts.

At this stage, people are likely to experience:

- High energy.
- Openness to learning.
- Renewed commitment to the group or their role.

## Guiding People Through Stage Three

As people begin to adopt the change, it's essential that you help them sustain it. Use techniques like **Management by Objectives** to link people's personal goals to the long-term objectives of the organization, and regularly highlight stories of success brought about by the change.

Take time to celebrate the change you've all gone through, and **reward your team** for all their hard work. However, don't become too complacent – remember that not everyone will reach this stage at the same time, and also remember that people can slip back to previous stages if they think that the change isn't working.

### Tip 1:

Don't get impatient or try to push people through to stage three; instead, do what you can to guide them positively and sensitively through the change process.

### Tip 2:

Bridges' Transition Model is similar to the **Change Curve** in that it highlights the feelings that people go through during change. Both models are useful in helping you guide people through change, and they fit together well.

### Tip 3:

While the model can help you guide people through change more effectively, it's not a substitute for **change management** tools such as **Kotter's 8-Step Model** and **Lewin's Change Management Model**. Use Bridges' model alongside these tools.

### Key Points

Change consultant William Bridges developed and published the Transition Model in his 1991 book "Managing Transitions."

The model highlights the difference between change and transition. Change happens to people. Transition, on the other hand, is internal: it's what happens inside people's minds when they're presented with change.

You can use the model to understand how people feel as you guide them through change. It has three distinct stages:

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

While the model is useful for implementing change, it's not a substitute for other change management approaches. Use it alongside these in your change projects.

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