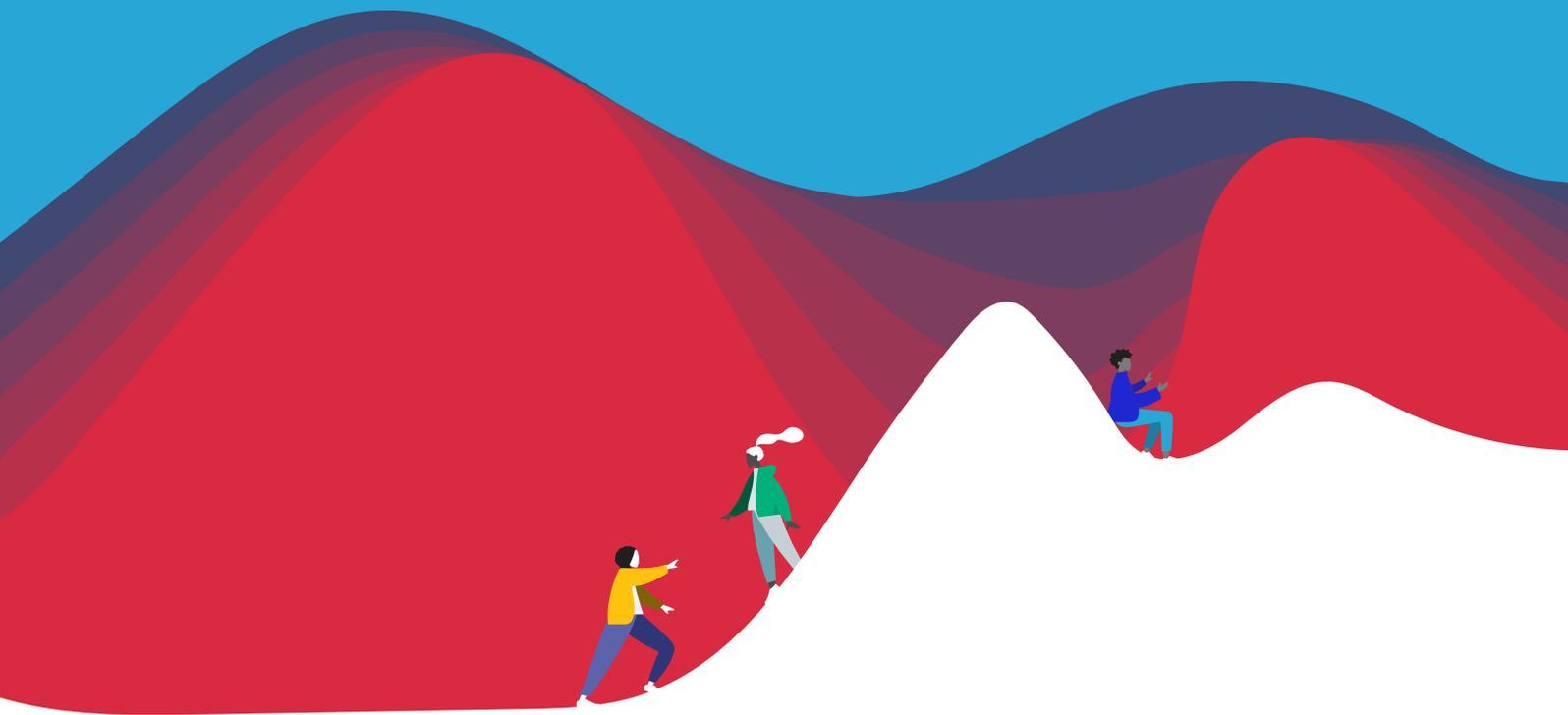


Change

is not

Transition



In our work life, we are experiencing a high rate of change as we adjust to the fluctuations in the business landscape. The stress of constantly having to adapt can be exhausting and sometimes frustrating. If you're feeling those symptoms, you're more than likely experiencing "change fatigue." Change fatigue¹ is a phenomenon characterised by physical and mental tiredness associated with frequent organisational change, and can become evident in absenteeism, reduced productivity, and curiosity. Its prevalence has elevated the need for leaders to become more skilled in managing change.

So, as leaders, how do we see our people through constant upheaval? How do we manage their resistance, allay their fears, and provide dynamic, clear direction?

Firstly, we need to recognise that the transition we experience requires as much attention as the mechanics of the change. While change

is external and situational, transition is our psychological response to that change. For a change to be successful, people need to make that transition *at their own pace*.

When change fails, it's usually due to either change fatigue or a change process that has employed communication without engagement. Either way, the state of our organisational culture will be critical to change success. Without the right cultural conditions, we will struggle to bring people along with us.

So, when looking to have an impact on culture, it is helpful to:

- Focus on the strengths – what can make us feel proud
- Recognise special forces – know who the influential members in the organisation are
- Be coherent – be consistent and coherent with communication

A Transition Model

With a receptive culture in place, we are better placed to meet change and transition successfully.

Change is focused on outcomes, such as understanding new logistics and how we will be affected by them. It is the external event that takes place, whether it be a new strategy, system, premises, or company merger, and it can happen rapidly.

Alongside change are the three phases² of psychological transition that accompany it:



Letting Go, Ending, and Losing – this includes relinquishing old ways and identities and is akin to a grief stage. Transition *starts with goodbye*. We need to identify the losses - what is over and what relationships, processes etc. do we keep. It can be helpful to speak honestly about the difficulties of letting go, and to hold an ending ceremony. As leaders, it's important to pay attention to the endings.



The Neutral Zone – is often *chaotic while our new patterns form*. We experience a grief period and also the potential for creativity. The neutral zone sits between new and old habits. It's not comfortable and is a place we can feel lost. During this time employees' emotions should be validated and given space to exist. Don't rush them through it. The neutral zone is the place of transformation, where energy purpose and commitment are renewed. Temporary new ways to hold things together can be activated, so that people can realign and feel productive. Guidance is needed through this phase.



The New Beginning – brings *a change of mindset* and a new identity and purpose. Watch out for the marathon effect though. Transition is a gradual process that unfolds slowly, and leaders are often further ahead in their journey than their teams.

Softening the Resistance to Change

Despite best intentions, though, change within organisations often goes awry. Studies show that 70 percent of change programs do not meet their goals³. Because of this, and as we aim to achieve employee buy-in and overcome their innate resistance to new ideas, it's important to understand what the obstacles might be.

There are three primary reasons⁴ people view change as difficult and thus oppose it.



The loss of self, power, influence, or perceived value



The fear or discomfort of having to learn something new



The lack of understanding around “why” they need to change

So how can we best circumvent or short cut these factors?

By creating a sense of positivity and excitement in the change, we don't just elevate the mood and sense of anticipation, but we can situate the change squarely with the employees, not just senior management. An effective way to achieve this is to identify the natural leaders and influencers in the organisation at all levels and support them with data driven evidence on the forecasted benefits of the change. This will help drive engagement in the swell of communication that is needed.

It's also important to introduce the changes in stages, understanding that employees will accomplish the transition at different rates.⁵ Resistance and uncertainty are normal responses to the psychological discomfort of change, but if we employ patient, people-centred strategies we can ensure smoother transitions.



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