

MASTERING THE CHANGE CURVE


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Every individual, team, and organization today faces a constant variety of major and minor changes. *Mastering the Change Curve* will help you to understand your own reactions to these changes so that you can move more quickly, completely, and effectively through the change process.

Your responses to this assessment will be based on your experience of a specific change in your organization. Begin by writing in the space below the specific change that you are experiencing right now. (Please remove pressure sensitive Scoring Form before writing in the space below.)

The change I am facing right now is . . .

On page 2, you will find 24 statements that describe responses to change. As you read them, think about your own reactions to *the change you identified* and indicate how true each statement is of your current reaction. Respond as you are actually thinking and feeling in relation to the change, not as you would like to (or believe you should) think or feel.

The assessment begins on page 2.

ASSESSMENT

Directions: Below are 24 statements describing reactions to the change you identified. Please read each statement carefully. Using the Response Key, decide how true each statement is of your current reaction to the change. Record your responses by circling the appropriate group of letters on the Response Form.

Response Key:

ATT = Almost Totally True
MT = Mostly True
ST = Somewhat True
MU = Mostly Untrue
ATU = Almost Totally Untrue

1. This change doesn't really affect me.
2. I prefer the way things were before.
3. I'm excited about all the new possibilities the change allows.
4. I've really come a long way with this change.
5. The reality of the change hasn't set in yet.
6. I don't know if I can do what is expected of me in this change.
7. Everything is up in the air, but we're dealing with the real issues.
8. I would not go back to the way things were before.
9. I'm not wasting my time worrying about the change.
10. I think this change is bad for the organization.
11. I keep thinking of new ways to do things.
12. I have mastered what needs to be done to be effective with this change.
13. I'm sure this whole thing will blow over soon.
14. I feel angry about the change.
15. Recently I've had a lot more energy to deal with the change.
16. I am comfortable in the new work environment.
17. I don't have any feelings about the change.
18. I can't concentrate on my work.
19. I'm amazed at how many new things I'm learning because of this change.
20. I feel good about myself and what I have accomplished to meet the demands of the change.
21. I just try to do what I have to do to get through the day.
22. I'm upset about the way this whole thing has been carried out.
23. I feel like the worst part of the change is over.
24. I've learned things in this change that will help me deal with the next change.

THE EXPERIENCE OF CHANGE

In recent years we have experienced an almost daily dose of change in every aspect of our work. Organizations have downsized, re-engineered, reorganized, merged, spun off, and changed their products and services more times and more quickly than anyone had ever expected.

As our organizations are forced to change, we are asked to change as well. The kind of changes we are asked to make include learning new skills, taking on more responsibilities, and working in different ways. *Many of these changes we do not want and would not have chosen ourselves.* Often we view change as something out of our control, something that is happening to us rather than something that we have chosen to do ourselves. In addition, we may feel unprepared, unwilling, or unable to make the changes asked of us.

But eventually we do need to change, to learn and do new things, if we are to stay competitive. A large part of mastering change involves dealing with the effects of change on our lives. As your organization undergoes a change, you will have to move through the transition yourself. Transition is the period after the change is announced — the time when you respond, adjust, and take up the change. The length of the transition varies depending on the nature of the change, the resources and support provided by the organization, and your own skills and experience in moving yourself through such changes.

While each person's journey is different, there are two features in common to most change transitions in which the person did not initiate the change: shifting one's focus from 1) past to future, and 2) self to environment.

Shifting from Past to Future

Every change involves letting go of internal attachments to the past and shifting to a focus on what you want to do differently in the future. When there is a change around you, you yourself have to change. Your first reaction is likely to include feeling threatened. You may be inclined to hold onto your past, to all that you find comfortable. Only after you unhook from the past, however, can you move on to adjust to the new ways of the future.

Shifting from an Internal Focus on Self to an External Focus on the Environment

Before you were asked to change, you were probably focused on your work. Your attention was toward the external — on the organization and doing your job. When the change was announced, however, the focus suddenly shifted to you. The first question that everybody asks during change is, "What will happen to me?" Until you have some sense of what will happen to you, you cannot easily focus on the needs of the organization and on the environment.

These shifts in your focus happen over time. The challenge in mastering change is to understand how and when these shifts happen so that you can move more quickly and easily through future changes. *Mastering the Change Curve* offers a model for helping you to understand this change transition process and how your own focus is shifting at this time.

SCORING AND CHARTING MASTERING THE CHANGE CURVE

To score *Mastering the Change Curve*, first separate the Response Form from the Scoring Form at the perforation by running a finger or pencil between the pages. You will notice that the items have been arranged in columns. These columns are labeled with the four phases of the Change Curve.

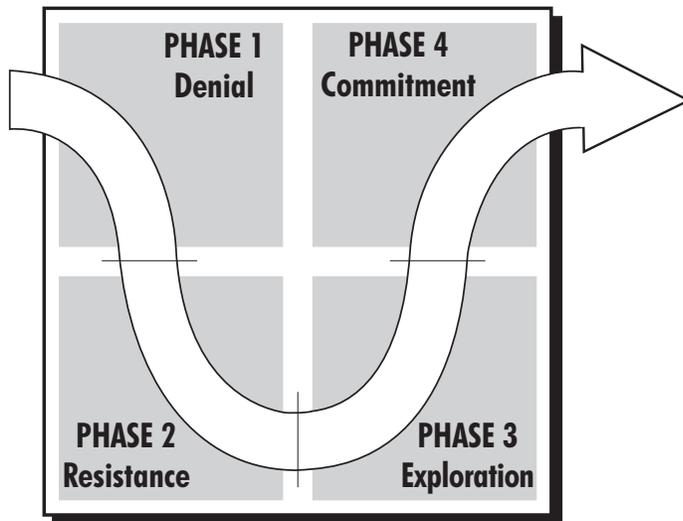
Add the circled numbers down in each column and place the resulting Subtotals in the boxes below the columns. You will have four scores representing the four phases. Each score indicates the degree to which your current experience matches that phase of transition. At a single point in time, you can think of yourself as primarily experiencing one transition phase (indicated by your highest score). You will have lower scores in other phases, which indicate where you are coming from and the degree to which you have entered the next phase.

Creating a Picture of Your Change Transition

You can create a picture of where you are in terms of the change phases by reviewing your scores for each phase. Start by copying your score for each phase into the corresponding box below.

DENIAL _____	RESISTANCE _____	EXPLORATION _____	COMMITMENT _____
High Range = OVER 17	High Range = OVER 18	High Range = OVER 23	High Range = OVER 24

For each phase in which your score is in the high range, color in the curve for that phase on the chart below. Then read about each of the phases in the following section, keeping in mind your scores on each of the phases.



THE CHANGE CURVE

Change does not occur in a straight line. It is a journey that flows through a series of phases as you come to terms with the change. The phases signal a process of renewal, a passageway from the old to the new.

We can think of change as following the Change Curve, which is shown in figure 1. It starts with business as usual at the top left. When the change begins, there is a turn downward into a trough that consists of heightened stress, uncertainty, upheaval, and diminished productivity. As acceptance of the change takes place there is a climb up the other side of the curve as we regain our sense of direction, learn new skills and roles, and begin to work in a new way.

The Change Curve consists of four phases, which usually happen in sequence. While you may move more slowly or more quickly through change, complete mastery of the change involves transition through each of the four phases, especially if you yourself did not initiate the change. This does not mean that every individual will move through each phase in order. Sometimes people move back to a previous phase or get stuck in one phase. Despite these different patterns, however, one must eventually reach Commitment in order to perform effectively within the changed organization.

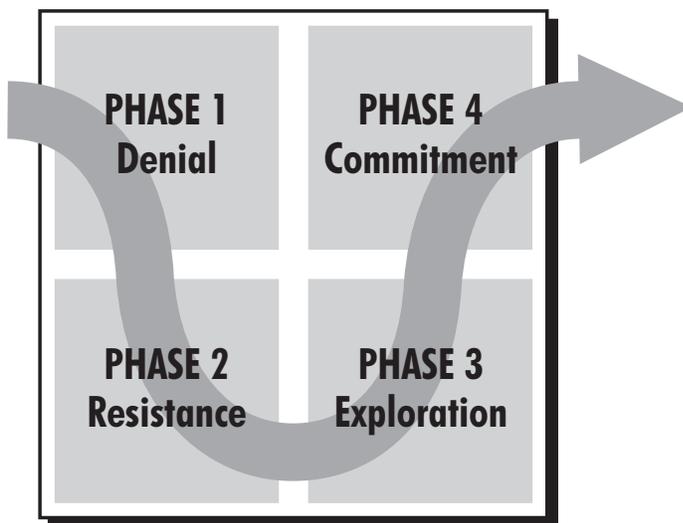


Figure 1. The Change Curve Model.

The Four Phases of Change

Phase 1: Denial

In Denial the reality of the change does not sink in, and you do not believe the change is real. In effect, you are in shock and may act as if you are not going to change. You may continue business as usual and avoid thinking about or acting on the impending change. In Denial you remain focused on what is happening outside yourself, ignoring your own reactions as you hold onto the past.

Phase 2: Resistance

You reach the Resistance phase when you wake up from your Denial and discover that the change will happen. You may feel afraid, angry, upset, or anxious about what is happening, and experience uncertainty, self-doubt, and difficulty as you struggle to respond to the change. When you are in Resistance, you may feel unable and unwilling to change. You may still remain attached to the past and the old comfortable ways, but you will also look inside and discover a whole range of upsetting feelings and reactions to the threat of change. At the end of the Resistance phase, you reach the point of acceptance. You begin to let go of the past and consider how you will make the change work for you personally.

Phase 3: Exploration

In the Exploration phase, you begin to take action, to learn new ways, and to decide how you will respond to the change. It is the phase in which you stop arguing with the change, and begin to ask how you can make it work. It is a period of “constructive commotion,” planning and rethinking as you consider, learn, and take up new ways. In the Exploration phase you remain focused on yourself, but you shift your attention to the future. You begin to regain interest in the organization and think about what you can do to make the change work.

Phase 4: Commitment

When you reach the phase of Commitment, you have reached the point of deciding what actions to take to master the new ways. You recover your productivity and sense of mastery. You probably also feel that you have “made it through” the change — that the change is finished. However, since change is continual, you must also prepare to experience the next change. In this phase, you are firmly connected to the future. You have shifted your attention back to the organization and away from yourself.

MOVING THROUGH CHANGE OR GETTING STUCK IN IT

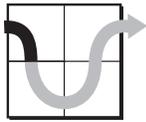
Different people move through change at different speeds. You can increase your ability to move through change by developing the skills to manage the change phases. As you develop more experience and familiarity in managing change, you will become more change-able.

Individuals, work groups, and organizations can become stuck in any phase of change, unable to marshal the resources to move ahead. They may not take the necessary steps to move on, which include trying new behaviors and examining both their feelings and their ideas about change. But however difficult it may be for your organization to accept the difficult struggle of the initial phases, you must do what you can to move smoothly through those phases.

While you will most often go through the four phases of transition in response to a major change you did not initiate, over time, and with practice and hard work, you can learn to master these phases with reasonable speed. Your scores on *Mastering the Change Curve* will allow you to see where you are in the change and give you the information you need to move forward.

MOVING THROUGH THE PHASES OF CHANGE

In this section, you will learn more about each phase of change and how to move successfully from Denial to Commitment.



Denial

Denial is probably the most common response to change but also the most difficult. Denial is a psychological term that refers to a defense against change. It takes the form of ignoring or not responding to information that demands a change. Denial is an attempt to preserve the success and the comfort of the past by ignoring signs that the past is over.

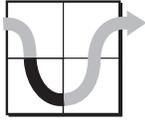
A paradox of Denial is that it is difficult to identify it in yourself. People usually are not aware that they are denying change and therefore need to be confronted and informed by others about their denial behavior.

When groups of employees experience Denial at the same time, the organization as a whole can go through Denial. When this happens people are discouraged from bringing up problems. Downturns or slowdowns are dismissed as just slight irregularities and organizations fail to notice major shifts or problems, whether internal or external. When people are asked to think of new ideas, they reply that they do not have time because they are so busy.

If you scored above 17 on Denial, you probably take comfort in the way things were and are not acknowledging the extent of the change. Although you may be aware of the change, the full impact of what it means for you personally has not yet set in. You may view the change as temporary and see others' reactions to the change as overblown.

The statements that relate to Denial are:

1. This change doesn't really affect me.
5. The reality of the change hasn't set in yet.
9. I'm not wasting my time worrying about the change.
13. I'm sure this whole thing will blow over soon.
17. I don't have any feelings about the change.
21. I just try to do what I have to do to get through the day.



Resistance

Everybody resists change. It is natural to want things to remain as they are, to hold onto what is comfortable. No matter how exciting a change may be, you also will feel some trepidation and anxiety about the uncertain future.

Resistance is normal because people are being asked to give up their comfortable and familiar ways. People in Resistance need acceptance of their feelings and validation of themselves as employees. Only then can they handle difficulties themselves and move on.

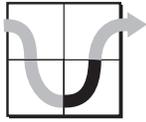
If you scored above 18, you are probably experiencing a good bit of resistance. It is likely that you have negative thoughts and feelings about the change. Nothing about the change seems good or even satisfactory. You may openly criticize the change and doubt your willingness or ability to do what is needed to make the change a success.

You may resist change for several reasons:

- ◆ Your expectations are disrupted and therefore your sense of security. All of a sudden you aren't sure where you stand.
- ◆ You are reminded that your power is limited. Experiencing that sense of powerlessness sometimes causes anxiety.
- ◆ You secretly doubt your ability to make it through the change.
- ◆ Changes can make you look and feel awkward, like a child learning to ride a bike. You may feel embarrassed to say that you don't know something.
- ◆ You may feel that the change was not a good idea.

The statements that relate to Resistance are:

2. I prefer the way things were before.
6. I don't know if I can do what is expected of me in this change.
10. I think this change is bad for the organization.
14. I feel angry about the change.
18. I can't concentrate on my work.
22. I'm upset about the way this whole thing has been carried out.



Exploration

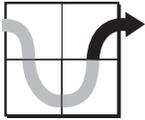
Exploration is the fun phase, full of new energy and willingness to learn, experiment and try new ways. This is a very exciting time. At this point people finally have accepted the change and are ready to assess where they are with the change, clarify goals, and explore alternatives.

As you are coming off the low point in the Change Curve, you begin to accept the change and to feel as if you can make it. The best thing you can do now is to get a vision of what you want your new future to look like and work with the other people involved to make it happen. It is common to zig-zag between Resistance and Exploration as you come to terms with the change.

If you scored above 23 on Exploration you probably are beginning to find some excitement in the change. You may have accepted the change as real and are now beginning to think about the future, about what you and others can do to make it work. You begin to learn and practice new tasks and to plan for the future. You feel a positive anxiety about the future that spurs you to action rather than making you want to pull back and hide.

The statements that relate to Exploration are:

3. I'm excited about all the new possibilities the change allows.
7. Everything is up in the air, but we're dealing with the real issues.
11. I keep thinking of new ways to do things.
15. Recently I've had a lot more energy to deal with the change.
19. I'm amazed at how many new things I'm learning because of this change.
23. I feel like the worst part of the change is over.



Commitment

Individuals who are in the Commitment phase have learned to work effectively in the changed environment. The change has become for them the new “business as usual.” The new way of working seems natural now, not something different. In fact, as this phase continues, commitment becomes deeper and deeper. This is not a phase of particular excitement but rather one of comfort. The Commitment phase is also a time for reflection on what has been learned. It is important for those who reach Commitment to reward themselves for success and prepare for the next change.

If you scored above 24, the change is now a regular way of life for you in your organization. You have learned to be effective in your job. You are probably committed to continuing to make the change work, and would not go back to the way things were before. You may still think things could be better, but you probably take comfort in the way things are now and you are willing and able to help others through the change. Your next task is to be ready to take on whatever changes may come in the future.

The statements that relate to Commitment are:

- 4. I've really come a long way with this change.
- 8. I would not go back to the way things were before.
- 12. I have mastered what needs to be done to be effective with this change.
- 16. I am comfortable in the new work environment.
- 20. I feel good about myself and what I have accomplished to meet the demands of the change.
- 24. I've learned things in this change that will help me deal with the next change.

QUICK REVIEW

The following chart summarizes the key things you need to do to move your way through each phase of change.



MASTERING THE CHANGE CURVE

Change represents both a challenge and an opportunity for growth. Taking advantage of the opportunities will help you not only to adjust to and survive a change but to master the inevitable challenges that come with every change. You can master the Change Curve by understanding the phases you will go through with each change, then using that knowledge to move more quickly, easily, happily, and productively through future changes in your life.

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About Changeworks Global

Changeworks Global (www.changeworksglobal.com) is a San Francisco-based consulting firm with a national reputation for thought leadership and leading-edge capabilities in change management and organizational development. Changeworks Global works with companies to create and sustain large-scale change efforts. This involves assisting with all phases of change including assessing organizational and individual capability; building awareness of the need for change; dealing with the effects of change on individuals; developing and implementing new structures and work processes; and developing the ability to sustain and implement continual change. Changeworks Global can be reached at 415-546-4488.

About This Product

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