

# People's Reactions to Change

## What is this guide for?

A number of writers and researchers exploring the human dimension of change have identified clear phases that people appear to generally move through as they face and come to terms with change. As a manager it's important to have an awareness of your own reaction to change and an understanding of how other people might react.

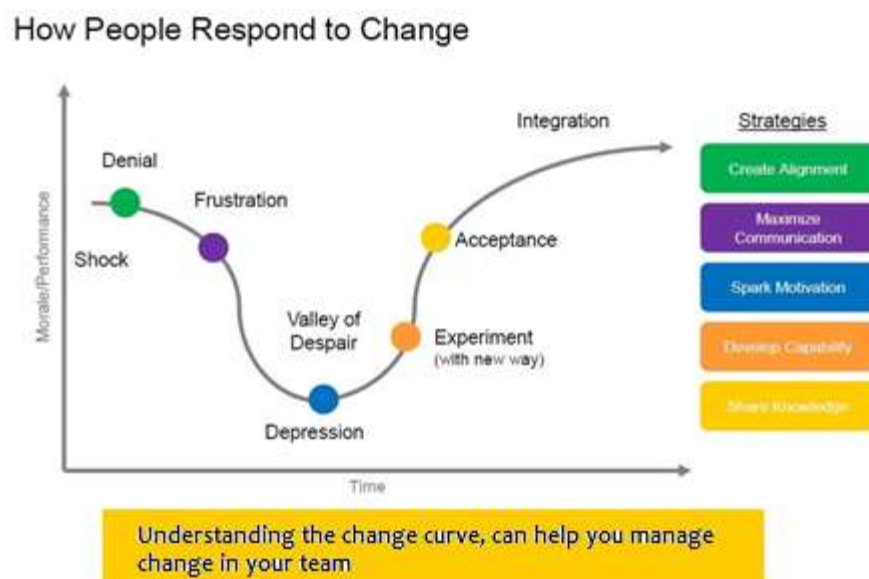
This eResource outlines two key models which will provide a useful way to look at how change affects individuals and give insight into what support could usefully be offered.

**The first model** is an adaptation of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' work on grief, referred to as the 'The Change Curve'. This curve describes people's reactions to change and the stages they may experience when faced with a change. This is helpful for showing change as a journey and the human reactions as a normal part of the process.

**The second model** is the Concerns based Adoption Model (CBAM) developed by Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin & Hall (1987) explains how people will have concerns about new innovations and change and describes how to deal effectively with those concerns.

## Elizabeth Kubler Ross - 'The Change Curve'

The work of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who initially researched and wrote about bereavement and the process of grief that people typically experience, has relevance to change management. People dealing with personal loss and bereavement often experience a cycle ranging from initial shock, denial, anger and anxiety, ultimately moving through to acceptance.



When major change is involved, it is not unusual for people to experience a similar 'journey'. The speed and duration of the cycle will vary depending on the degree of change and its

impact on people. As individuals we will all vary in our responses and the speed at which we adapt. Nor is it a one-way journey. People may feel they have come to terms with a change, only to have something unexpectedly throw them off course, and they find themselves back in worry or anger. This sort of 'flip-flopping' is quite commonly observed and experienced.

While there are many change curves, the common trait among them is resistance and a dip, which is commonly referred to as the "Valley of Despair". A change curve essentially goes through the following main phases:

- 1. Denial (Information):** We are introduced to a big change with excitement and overly positive expectations. There's little acknowledgement of the impact and implications of the change
- 2. Frustration (Fear):** Reality sets in when we realise what the change actually means to us.
- 3. Depression (The Dip):** Everyone goes through a panic-filled "valley of despair" as we consider worst case scenarios.
- 4. Experiment (Commitment):** Help is required to support those who are impacted to "get it", "get over it" and "get on with it" as the change is eventually adopted. Tentative steps are taken to check out what the change means and will look like going forward.
- 5. Acceptance (Future State):** Once we have accepted the change, we become more productive, the organisation reaps the benefits and the new way of work is embedded as how we do business as usual.

*Depression and resistance  
Based on the work of Elizabeth Kübler Ross).*

## The Change Curve in the Workplace

Watch [Bob McCulloch](#) as he describes a modified version of Kubler Ross' grief cycle as it relates to change.

## Strategies to help people through the change curve

### Shock & Denial - Create Alignment

- Get everything out in the open - as much information as possible - repeat it
- Be realistic with promises - tell the truth - even if it means saying 'I don't know!! Have to get back to you'
- Be alert to how people are reacting
- Be patient
- Be non-defensive - don't argue too much
- Be available

- Accept there will be strong emotions, good and bad feelings - don't tell people how they 'should' feel
- Allow time for people to absorb

#### Denial & Frustration - Maximising Communication

- Offer instructions and steps clearly, and not too fast
- Check for understanding - challenge assumptions - deal with concerns and rumours
- Be specific with what is required
- Establish shorter time frames
- Follow up - keep check with people
- Empathise

#### Depression (Worry & Confusion) - Spark Motivation

- Accept emotional display
- Provide opportunities to sound off
- Listen and be supportive
- Build success experiences
- Motivate
- Continue direct control - clear expectations
- Keep people involved
- Tolerate mistakes/some inefficiency
- Communicate

#### Experimenting & Acceptance - Develop Capacity

- Expect some setbacks - people will flip back at times
- Allow for differences in recovery time
- Reinforce hopefulness/be optimistic
- Continue team building efforts
- Continue to manage closely
- Provide feedback - especially positive

#### Acceptance (embedding as business as usual) - Share Knowledge

- Reward
- Emphasise achievements
- Highlight benefits and positives
- Capture success stories
- Share best practice
- Highlight

## Concerns-based adoption model (CBAM)

The concerns-based adoption model helps us understand individual's concerns and how to address them when implementing change. It is based upon the implementation of innovations in colleges and school settings. It is particularly useful to managers who meet a high resistance to change within their teams.

### CBAM Model Assertions & Assumptions

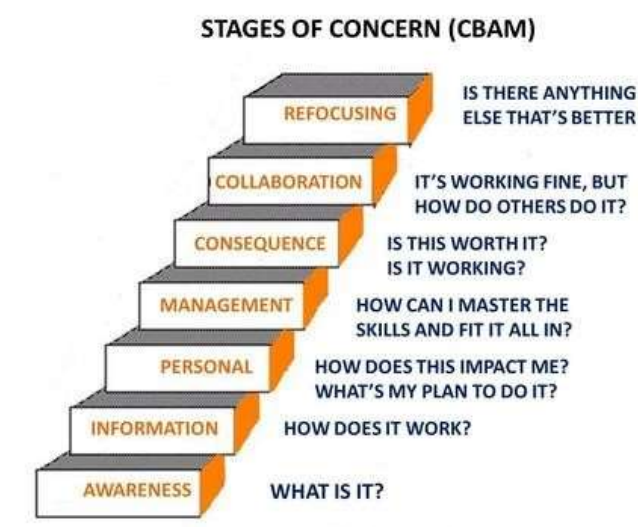
- Change is a process, **not an event**, and it takes time to introduce change;
- Individuals must be the focus if change is to be embedded and change will not be successful until the people change;
- The change process is an extremely personal experience and how it is perceived by the individual will strongly influence the outcome;
- Individuals progress through various stages regarding their emotions and capabilities relating to the innovation & improvement;
- The availability of a client-centred diagnostic/prescriptive model can enhance the individual's facilitation during staff development; and
- People responsible for the change process must work in an adaptive and systematic way where progress needs to be monitored constantly.

CBAM addresses each one of these assumptions: the individual's concerns about the change, the particular manner in which it is delivered or implemented, and the adaptation of the change to the individual.

Hord and Hall theorize that when confronted with change individuals generally fall into one of seven stages, each one reflecting a higher level of interest or engagement with the change. Below are the levels and suggestions on how to work with individuals at each stage.

### 7 Stages of Concern

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model outlines seven Stages of Concern that offer a way to understand and then address common concerns about change.



## Identifying and Address Individual Concerns

To help bring about change, you must first be able to spot an individual's concerns, and then address them. While there are no set formulas, here are some suggestions for addressing each stage of concern.

<b>Stage 0: Awareness</b> <b>Aware that an innovation is being introduced but not really interested or concerned with it.</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I am not concerned about this innovation"</li> <li>• "I don't really know what this innovation involves"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If possible, involve people in discussions and decision about the innovation and its implementations.</li> <li>• Share enough information to arouse interest, but not so much it overwhelms.</li> <li>• Acknowledge that a lack of awareness is expected and reasonable and that there are no foolish questions.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 1: Informational</b> <b>Interested in some information about the change</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I want to know more about this innovation."</li> <li>• "There is a lot I don't know about this but I'm reading and asking questions"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear and accurate information about the innovation.</li> <li>• Use several ways to share information – verbally in writing, and through available media. Communicate with large and small groups and individuals.</li> <li>• Help people see how the innovation relates to their current practices – the similarities and the differences.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 2: Personal</b> <b>Wants to know the personal impact of the change</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "How is this going to affect me?"</li> <li>• "I'm concerned about whether I can do this."</li> <li>• "How much control will I have over the way I use this?"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legitimise the existence and expression of personal concerns.</li> <li>• Use personal notes and conversations to provide encouragement and reinforce personal adequacy.</li> <li>• Connect people with others whose personal concerns have diminished and who will be supportive.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 3: Management</b> <b>Concerned about how the change will be managed in practice.</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I seem to be spending all of my time getting materials ready"</li> <li>• "I'm concerned that we'll be spending more time in meetings"</li> <li>• "Where will I find the time to plan my work or take care of the record keeping"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify the steps and components of the innovation.</li> <li>• Provide answers that address the small specific "how-to" issues.</li> <li>• Demonstrate exact and practical solutions to the logistical problems that</li> </ul>

required to do this well?"	contribute to these concerns.
<b>Stage 4: Consequences</b>	
<b>Interested in the impact on individuals or the Organisation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "How is using this going to affect students?"</li> <li>• "I'm concerned about whether I can change this in order to ensure that students will learn better as a result of introducing this idea?"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide individuals with opportunities to visit other settings where the innovation is in use and to attend sessions to learn more.</li> <li>• Make sure people are not overlooked. Give positive feedback and needed support.</li> <li>• Find opportunities for people to share their skills with others.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 5 Collaboration</b>	
<b>Interested in working with colleagues to make the change effective</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I'm concerned about relating what I'm doing to what others are doing"</li> <li>• "I want to see more cooperation among colleagues as we work with this innovation"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities to develop skills for working collaboratively.</li> <li>• Bring together, from inside and outside the organisation, those who are interested in working collaboratively.</li> <li>• Use people to assist others.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 6: Refocusing</b>	
<b>Begin refining the innovation to improve teaching and research results</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I have some ideas about something that would work even better than this"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect and encourage the interest individuals have for finding a better way</li> <li>• Help people channel their ideas and energies productively.</li> <li>• Help people access the resources they need to refine their ideas and put them into practice</li> </ul>

## Seeing the CBAM model in action

- ⊕ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REXsFOC63Yg>
- ⊕ <https://eucaps.wsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/731/2015/07/CBAM-explanation.pdf>