

The Change Curve

A Personal Reflection on Change

To what extent do you like the familiarity of things being constant?

- At work

- At home

How would you describe your relationship with and attitude toward change in your life?

When you experience change in your life, where is it initiated? Is it generally initiated by you, or by others?

If you initiate the change, what enables you to do so? What do you value about yourself in terms of your ability to initiate change?

If the change is initiated by others, how do you respond – to these people and the change itself?

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What are your preferences / needs in terms of how change is managed?

- At work

- At home

If they differ, why is that?

What support do you look for or need during times of change?

What support do you look for or need after the change itself has been completed?

What have you learned from change that you have experienced in your life – what works for you and what doesn't work when dealing with change?

The Change Curve

Let's take what you have identified for yourself and provide some structure for understanding what happens psychologically for human beings during times of change.

To do this we will use that is known as The Change Curve. The genesis of which was the result of the work of a Swiss-American psychiatric doctor Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a pioneer in near death studies. Considered one of the top 100 most influential thinkers of the 20th century, she led the way in the understanding of the process of death and dying, the provision of palliative care, hospice care and working with the terminally ill and their families, which became her life's work.

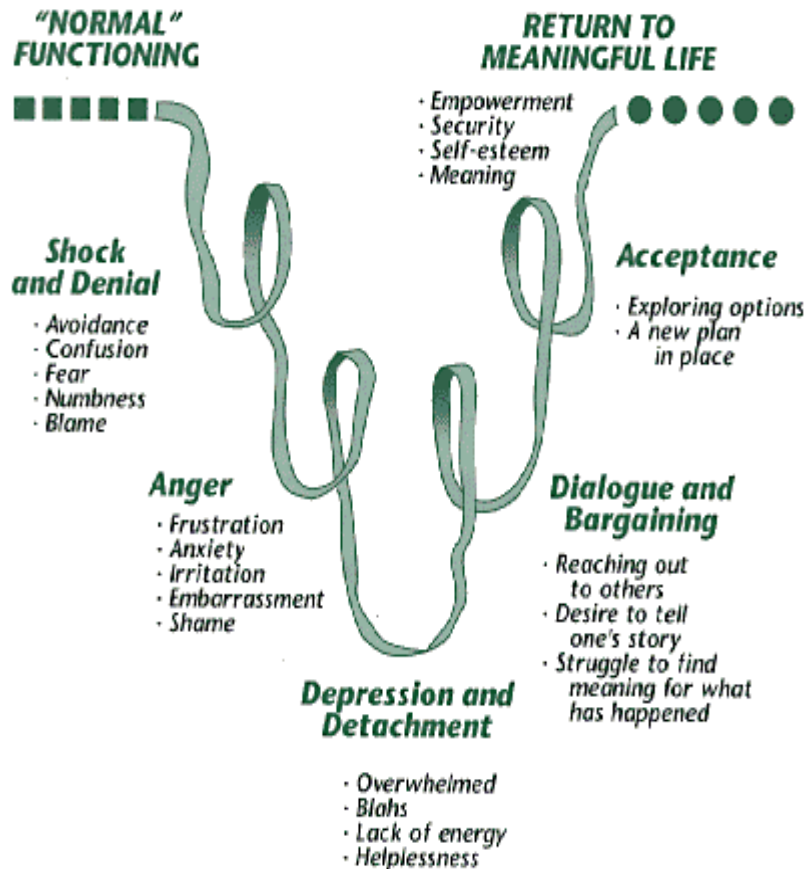
For many years, people with terminal illnesses were considered an embarrassment for doctors, to the extent that they were referred to as the 'hopeless patient'. Someone who could not be cured was considered to be evidence of the doctors' fallibility, and as a result the doctors regularly shunned the dying with the excuse that there was nothing more that could be done (and that there was plenty of other demand on the doctors' time). Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a doctor in Switzerland railed against this unkindness. She undertook to overturn this situation and chose to spend a lot of time with dying people, both comforting and studying them. In her book, 'On Death and Dying' (what the dying have to teach doctors, nurses, clergy and their own families) she first publishes her findings about what she referred to as 'The Grief Cycle' or 'The 5 Stages of Grief' which described the cycle of emotional states she observed in those dying patients. And this was part of her mission to educate people (doctors and nurses in particular) to treat the dying with dignity.

In the ensuing years, it was noticed that this emotional cycle was not exclusive just to the terminally ill, but also other people who were affected by other changes, like changing career or losing a colleague through organisational events perceived as traumatic (such as a corporate restructure). The important factor is not the nature of the event, rather than an individual's perception of the event being negative. This cycle acknowledges that there is an individual pattern of reactive emotional responses which people feel when coming to terms with death, bereavement, loss or trauma – which, after the event enables the ultimate acceptance of reality, which means the person is able to cope.

From the 2000's onward many organisations took this model to help them explain their employee's reactions to change and loss. And though originally it was linked purely with change that was considered negative, it has been shown to also apply to positive change, whereby the individual goes through a period of emotional turmoil and adjustment.

The Change Curve, like the Grief Cycle is seen to have 5 distinct stages. They are plotted sequentially, however in practice individual's may loop back to earlier stages, or may get stuck at a particular stage, or flip flop backward and forward between two or more stages – even though they look discrete, emotionally we may experience different stages concurrently. Some stages may pass faster than others as each person's response will be unique to themselves. That said – even if some stages are fleeting, all stages are experienced. Let's now have a look firstly The Grief Cycle as developed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, before moving onto it's application to change as it is used in The Change Curve.

The 5 Stages of Grief : source of The Change Curve



Stage 1: Shock and Denial The first stage is shock and denial. In this stage, people are numb and often deny that a change has even occurred. They blame others and do not recognize the need to make decisions.

Stage 2: Anger Once shock wears off, people enter a stage of heightened emotions - anger, frustration, blame and anxiety. So much energy is placed in negative emotions at this stage that there is no energy, and the mind is too distressed to make critical decisions.

Stage 3: Depression and Detachment The next stage is depression. At this stage, individuals experience an overwhelming sense of "the blues" and a lack of energy. Because of the energy spent in negative emotion in the previous stage, there is no energy at this time to make decisions for oneself. This is a stage where individuals need the help of family and friends.

Stage 4: Dialogue and Bargaining Once individuals enter the dialogue and bargaining stage of the grief cycle, they are more open to exploring alternatives. Currently, they need to gather information and consider options. Frequently, individuals feel a need to tell their story in order to make sense of what has occurred.

Stage 5: Acceptance The final stage is the acceptance stage. Entering the acceptance stage doesn't mean individuals necessarily like the change, but rather they are beginning to accept that it has happened and are willing to work it into their lives. At this time, they feel more empowered and in control of their life, but things will never be the same. The change has occurred.

The important thing here is to recognize the stages of the grief process as normal and to be aware and prepared for what each stage has in store. The danger lies in "getting stuck" in any one phase, especially the anger or depression phases. If this happens, individuals may need to seek professional help in order to shift out of it.

The Change Curve

Here is the format of The Change Curve as it is now used for exploring personal and organisational change and its impact. The individual can plot themselves on the curve, and with the help of a Mentor, explore where they are and what it needed to move forward. Sometimes the tracking of movement backward and forward in the curve can assist in identifying where the conversation needs to be targeted for expression in order to support moving forward.

“Normal "Functioning

Observing from the side
Not aware/engaged



Shock&Denial

Avoidance
Confusion
Fear
Numbness
Blame



Anger

Frustration
Anxiety
Irritation
Embarrassment
Shame



Depression& Detachment

Overwhelmed
Blahs
Lack of energy
Helplessness



Dialogue & Bargaining

Reaching out to others
Desire to tell one's own story
Struggle to find meaning for what has happened



Return to Meaningful Life

Empowerment
Security
Self-esteem
Meaning



Acceptance

Acknowledgment
Exploring options
A new plan in place



The Human Response to Change : An Assessment

The purpose of this 35 question self-assessment is to stimulate self-awareness and inquiry for individuals going through significant change at work. It is not intended as a research instrument and has not been validated as such.

Describe the Change being faced or experienced (Major points only):

Section A: Please place a tick (✓) next to the statements with which you agree.

Add an additional tick (✓✓) to those statements with which you agree strongly.

1. I feel angry that I am expected to go along with this change
2. I am worried about the negative impact this change will potentially have on my career
3. No one really cares about what I think or feel – they're just going ahead anyway
4. I can see several ways that we can benefit from this change
5. I accept that the changes are now part of business as usual
6. It seems from the outset that the cost of this change will outweigh the benefits
7. This change doesn't really impact me and is more of an issue for others
8. Those who initiated this change have no idea what they are doing – its infuriating
9. I am feeling lost as it seems they have overpromised and underdelivered
10. If they want me to comply with this change, they need to comply with my requests
11. I am excited about the possibilities that I see can lie ahead
12. I am doing things in a new way, and I am enjoying it
13. I am not sure what this change entails and or if it will impact me
14. This is not new; we have done this before so many times
15. They clearly haven't thought this through properly, what a mess
16. I'm not sure what I am supposed to be doing - I'll just wait it out
17. So it seems I have to go along with this as there is nothing, I can do about it

18. I have already learned something new and am interested in learning more
19. I can see the benefit of these changes being maintained into the future
20. I have too much on my plate and can't afford to pay attention to this right now
21. I wish things would go back to the way they were before
22. They should choose whether I do my job or comply with this change – as I can't do both!
23. I just don't have the energy, skills or ability to do what they are asking of me
24. I wish they'd just get on with it as I've totally had enough of change
25. We are in this together and there is always someone to ask if you get stuck
26. The changes have been worth the effort
27. I am shocked that the Leadership thinks we must change – yet again
28. Things were much better in the past than they are now
29. To be honest, I couldn't care less if this thing works out or not
30. Previous changes efforts didn't work – why will this time will be any different?
31. I have lost more than I gained during this process
32. I am practicing this new way of doing things and feel confident that I will master it
33. I am more effective than I was before this change
34. When thinking about this change – I have no clue
35. Things would be better if everything just stayed the way they are

The Human Response to Change : An Assessment

Scoring:

	34	35	1	2	3	4	5
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	27	28	29	30	31	32	33
TOTALS	A:	B:	C:	D:	E:	F:	G:

15							
14							
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4							
3							
2							
1							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G

A = “Normal Functioning” / Dis-engaged

B = Denial

C = Anger

D = Depression, Helplessness, Detachment, Worry

E = Dialogue and Bargaining

F = Acceptance

G = Return to Meaningful Life

Color or shade the area for each stage in order to get an image of where on the change curve the individual is at. The next step is to invite the Mentee to discuss the results, and you may use the OSCAR Coaching approach to assist them to find meaning and solutions. If there is a lot of emotion, then allowing them to ‘vent’ without judgment is a useful approach. However, if the scores are very high in either Anger or Depression – they may need to consult a professional counsellor.