

Minding Transitions

The Journey to Change

“It isn’t the changes that will do you in, it’s the transitions.” William Bridges’ book, *Managing Transitions*, starts with this short yet profound statement. Transition is a period when the old is no longer, but the new isn’t fully present or formed.

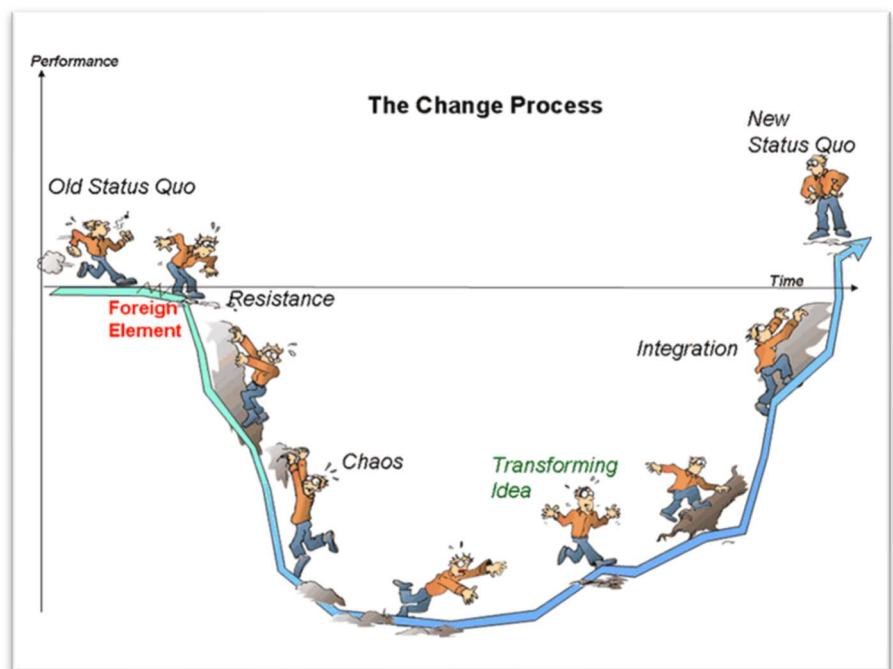
Perhaps you’ve experienced a short, uncomplicated transition like a smooth negotiation of a car deal, or maybe it was a more complicated, long and drawn-out transition, such as changing jobs, onboarding, and getting comfortable in your new role. Inevitable with any change there is a time that is uncertain, unclear – a “messy middle” – is the transition, and the part on the journey to change that can cause the most concern, confusion, and challenge. Leaders must acknowledge and plan for the transition. That is the opportunity leaders have to help support their people through the messiness and uncertainty and help show them a path to the change.

As we think about change in the context of schools, there are natural changes with a new school year but also unplanned changes for individuals and school communities. Regardless of how the change has come, we must be mindful

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Supporting during the change process: Many people need time and support to help fully adopt or adapt to change.



About the Author

Alison Westerlind is the Founder and Principal Consultant of [Ascent Consulting Group](#) which offers leadership coaching and development for individuals and teams. She has over 15 years of administration and counseling experience and was a Headmaster for Great Hearts Academies from 2014-2017. Alison brings energy, perspective, and engaging sessions to the teams and individuals she serves. Helping teams and leaders lead with clarity and care is the focus of Alison's work. Her workshops are lively, enriching, and teams leave with a greater understanding of each other and the work they are committed to doing.

of the journey to the change and how to help others navigate the transition. We must bring people along with us. A good leader doesn't stand on the other side calling others to the change but comes alongside and wades into and across the messy middle with others, encouraging them to keep going, and reminding them, of the path. Leaders must lead *through* change.

To help others through the transition period, Bridges offers a helpful framework to remember: Purpose, Picture, Plan, and Part (or, the 4 P's).

- **Purpose:** Leaders must communicate the “why.”
- **Picture:** Leaders must paint a picture of what the change will look like when fully implemented.
- **Plan:** Leaders must describe the steps that will be taken, and support offered along the way.
- **Part:** Leaders must help others understand what their role will be in the change.

Bridges also emphasizes the importance of offering Care and Concern (the 2 C's) during a change process. The ideas about Care and Concern encourage leaders to acknowledge the difficulty of the change, anticipate objections, and be sincere in the care of each other through the journey to change.

It isn't enough to simply communicate the 4 P's once; leaders must find ways to communicate through different means and do it often. Individuals navigate transitions at different paces. Some will fully trust the “new” readily and be the early adopters, while others will need to be reminded of the 4 P's, offered the 2 C's, and given space to express concerns and ask questions. Taking more time to navigate the transition does not mean it will fail, but rather, people will process the changes and deepen their trust in different ways and at different times. Additionally, for some, they may only need to understand the Purpose to be willing to journey to change, but others may need to understand the Plan or their Part to engage. Recognizing the diversity of needs for individuals to be on board helps transitions be more successful and ultimately allows the change to have the desired effect.

Change is going to continue to happen in all aspects of life and work but being mindful of what is needed to navigate a transition will help bring clarity to that messy middle. Let's commit to leading through the journey to change and not just calling others to the change by pushing or pulling them. In the end, you will find that you have more people beside you and more clarity around the change in front of you.