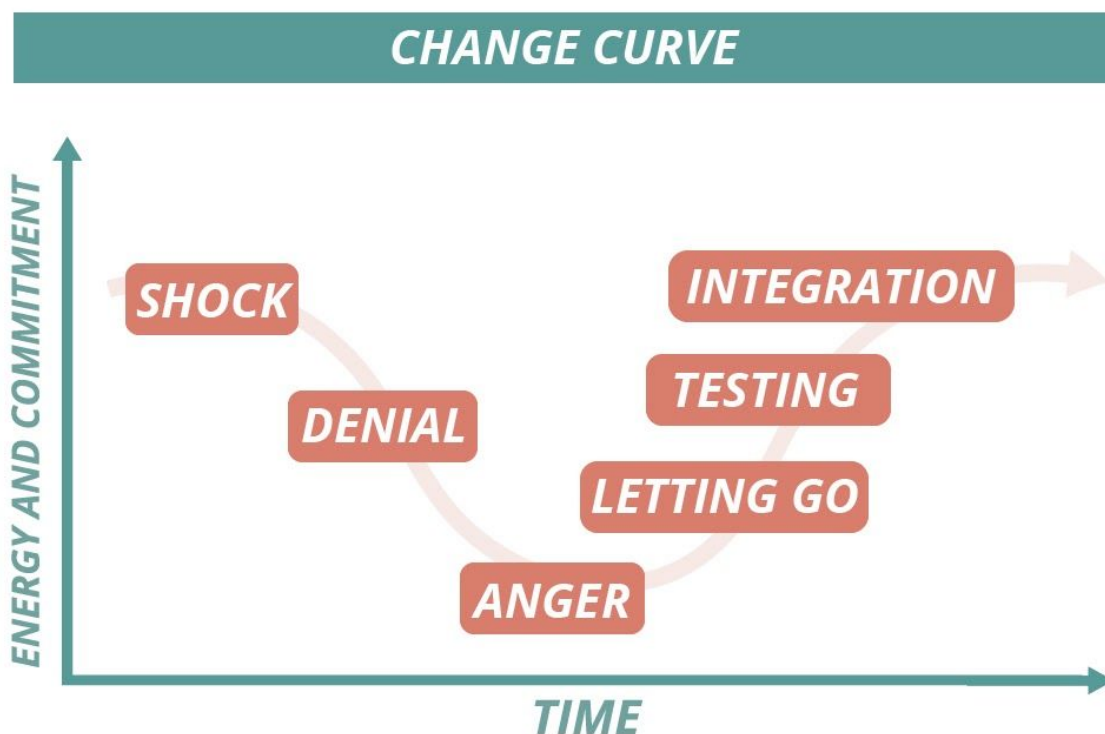


The Kubler-Ross Change Curve

Organisational change is not always straightforward - and there will always be individuals within a business who might resist change or find it difficult to adapt to new circumstances.

One key model that can help you understand and manage people's reactions to change is the **Kubler-Ross Change Curve**. First devised by the Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in 1969, the Curve was conceived as a model of how people with a terminal illness cope with the experience of dying. It originally comprised five distinct stages - denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance - that these patients tend to move through. Over the years, the model has been adapted for use in the corporate world, with various stages added and removed by different academics.

This handout looks at a version that was adapted by the respected business coach Carol Wilson in 2008. It plots how people's energy, commitment and performance levels change over time following the announcement of a major organisational change.



Wilson's model comprises six stages:

First, comes **shock**. As Wilson puts it: "people's faces may turn white on hearing the news that large-scale redundancies will include them". At this stage, people won't be able to concentrate on work - it is best to let them go away and take the news in.

Next, comes **denial**. People will still be reeling from the news of the change at this point, and it will take up most of their focus and energy. Conversations in the organisation will tend to focus on the change and there is likely to be a sharp drop in motivation levels. Very little can be achieved during this time.

Third, comes **anger**. At this point, people's energy and commitment hit their lowest point, as they get angry about losing their jobs. This anger might be directed at the organisation amid a sense of unfairness and questions of 'why me?'.

As people begin to realise that the proposed change is inevitable, there is a stage of **letting go**. At this point, people begin to accept the change and start to consider how they will adapt to it.

This stage is followed by a period of **testing**, in which people start to consider if there may be any advantages to the new situation and try to make the best of it.

The final stage in Wilson's version of the Curve is **integration**, when the change has been completely accepted by the workforce. Now, the old situation no longer exists and people do not even think about it very much. Their performance and energy levels are back to normal.

Not everyone will go through these stages of course - and they won't always happen in this order. But the model can provide a useful framework for understanding people's behaviours when confronted by change.

References

Kubler-Ross, E. (1969) *On Death and Dying*, Scribner, New York.

Wilson, C. (2008) Tools of the Trade, *Training Journal*, March 2008, p.56-57.