The Change Curve

What is the Change Curve, and how will it help you?

The Change Curve graphically depicts how staff typically respond to a change initiative. Based on staff reactions, leaders can take specific actions to overcome resistance to change. Increased awareness of staff reactions can help leaders manage change effectively.

The Change Curve will help:

- Raise staff and manager awareness of emotional reactions to change
- Managers address staff reactions to change
- Staff constructively engage in change efforts
- Build change management skills

How to use this tool: *(refer to next page)*

1. **Convene staff** who will be impacted by your change initiative. Share the reasons and goals for the changes. Ensure staff are clear about their responsibilities.

2. **Discuss with staff their initial reactions to the planned changes.** Share copies of the **Change Curve** graphic (Figure 1). Review typical reactions to change, the potential effects on desired outcomes, as noted in the table on the following page, and any interventions needed to address initial staff reactions.
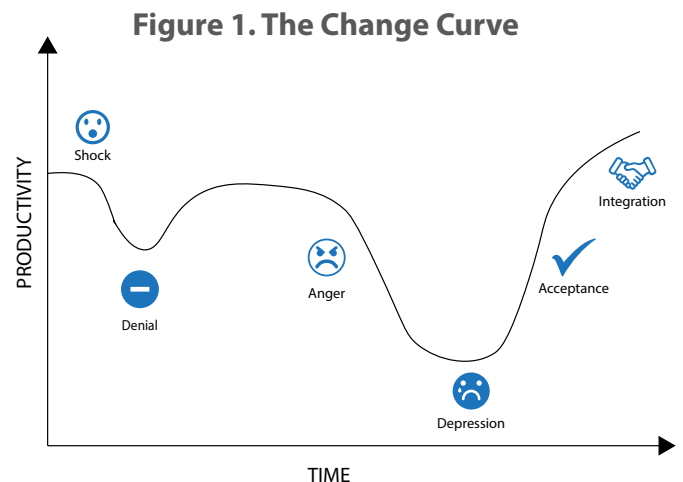
3. As you implement changes, **chart the progress** with the timeline for your planned change on the x-axis and the desired outcomes/productivity of planned changes on the y-axis.

   Example: You are introducing changes to your electronic health record (EHR). Monitor over the next six months (x-axis) the % of client visits entered correctly in the updated EHR (y-axis). See case study on page 2 for more on this example.

4. **Monitor staff reactions to change** in relation to your desired outcomes through supervisor interactions, periodic staff meetings, surveys or other feedback mechanisms, such as a Change Champions Network. Plot staff reactions on the **Change Curve**.

5. **Ensure communication** between managers and staff at all levels to quickly address negative and reinforce positive reactions to change.

6. **Identify the underlying reasons** for different emotional reactions to change, using the table on the following page. Implement the suggested change management interventions to address the underlying reasons for reactions to change.

Figure 1. The Change Curve

PRODUCTIVITY

Shock

Denial

Anger

Depression

Acceptance

Integration

TIME

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Emotional Reactions	Underlying Reasons	Change Management Interventions
Shock	• Disbelief • Fear of uncertainty • Unclear expectations	• Communicate reasons and goals for change • Clarify responsibilities and how to proceed • Involve those affected by the change in planning
Denial	• Fear of failure • Feeling threatened • Ignoring the change • Potentially insufficient support	• Assess if individuals are engaging or ignoring change • Use peer support networks to identify needs • Assess root causes of productivity declines • Identify what is and is not working well • Break down change into small steps
Anger	• Frustration • Mistrust	• Empathize with frustration • Channel frustration into constructive outlets • Modify change efforts in response to concerns, if feasible
Depression	• Apathy, loss of interest • Self-doubt • Anxiety	• Identify and address the root causes of low morale • Provide positive feedback on early wins • Recognize effort even though results haven't started to show • Provide information about resources to deal with reactions • Reassure individuals about their roles • Obtain external expertise to address implementation issues
Acceptance	• Relief • Excitement • Engagement in sharing what is working • Positive outlook	• Communicate about positive results • Recognize accomplishments and contributions • Share success stories and key outcomes • Scale up successful approaches
Integration	• Optimism and trust • Adjustment to new roles • Mastery	• Reflect on change efforts and communication • Reflect on hurdles, both emotional and technical • Document lessons learned

Case Study: Using the Change Curve to Support Implementation of a New Electronic Health Record (EHR) System

A Title X site needs to update its EHR system to facilitate reporting requirements. The organization recently made the transition from paper to an EHR system, and the program director knows that staff are not looking forward to more changes. The director shares the Change Curve graphic to help staff explain their reactions. After hearing concerns from staff about their varying familiarity with the existing EHR system, the organization agrees to activate a Change Champion Network.

Over the next few months, the director charts the percentage of client visits entered correctly, along with staff reactions, on the Change Curve. Change Champion Network members report that they have been able to respond quickly to peer requests and that staff morale is generally positive. When frustrated, staff have been able to identify potential solutions suggested in the Change Curve table. By monitoring and proactively addressing staff reactions to the required changes, the organization is able to fully integrate the updated EHR system a month ahead of schedule.

References:
Oreg, S., Vakola, M., & Armenakis, A. (2011). Change Recipients' Reactions to Organizational Change: A 60-Year Review of Quantitative Studies. The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 47(4), 461–524. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1177/0021886310396550

The Change Curve: Accelerating Change and Improving Its Likelihood of Success. Mindtools.com. https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_96.htm

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