

BELBIN[®] AND THE...
CHANGE CURVE

The change curve describes six stages that most people go through in responding to change. At each stage in the curve, they will experience different emotions. These are: shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, and are based on the 5 stages of grief in the book 'On Death and Dying' by Elisabeth Kübler Ross.

When coaching individuals through the change curve, it's important to remember that people will be at different stages of the curve at any given time. They might not go through the stages in the 'right' order, or even sequentially, and they may return to an earlier stage if something was not properly addressed.

The objective in coaching others through the curve is not to force everyone through at the same rate, but to minimise the negative impact of the change overall by making the curve shallower and narrower.

For each of the six stages of the change curve, here's some more detail on which Team Roles to look out for, and how to deal with common difficulties arising.

Shock/Denial

Explain the change as clearly as possible, identifying the benefits and the rationale. Acknowledge that it's a lot to process and that people might struggle with it at first. Be patient and listen. Be ready to answer questions but try not to bombard people with information.

If you're a **Specialist** manager, you need to be especially careful not to overload others with information. You might feel most comfortable when you understand the subject in depth, but for others, it can be overwhelming and alienating.

Monitor Evaluators especially will need to be persuaded of the merits of change. Once they are, they are likely to provide reassurance to others in the team, because they are seldom wrong and are likely to be known for their sound judgement. Their curve may be shallower than others, because they don't tend to respond as emotionally as do others.

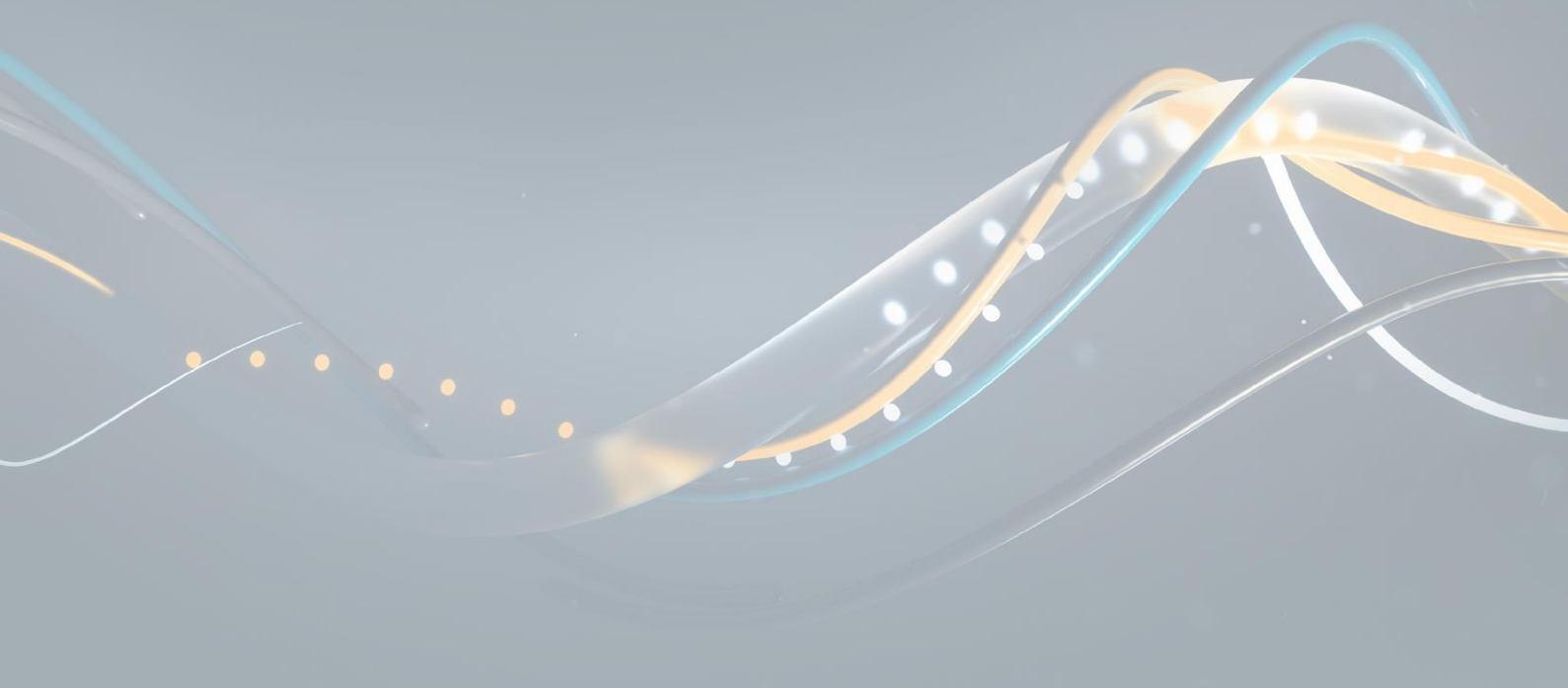
Completer Finishers may ask questions about minor details. Rather than dismissing these as 'niggles', it is important to address these concerns, since they stem from the Completer Finisher's need to know that all bases have been covered and that no detail has been allowed to slip through the net. If all details are not yet finalised, it's important to be upfront about this and maybe enlist the Completer Finisher's help for this stage of the change.

Anger

Listen to the anger and keep calm. Be candid in acknowledging it, even though it may be uncomfortable.

Shapers who are not on board with the change might lash out most vocally at this point. A strong Shaper will always remedy this with apology and good humour, but depending on where they and others are within the change curve, this may not be timely, or may not undo the damage.

There is a delicate balance to be struck between allowing people to vent and defining which behaviour is and isn't acceptable within the team.



Bargaining

It's important to address suggestions whilst holding firm to the tenets of the change. If you have **Plants** in your team who weren't directly responsible for the idea, they may try to side-track progress by throwing in an alternative suggestion of their own.

Don't forget that some rejections of progress may be silent ones. **Implementers**, who are the most likely to be resistant to change in general, might simply continue with the old, familiar processes until someone notices. Similarly, **Teamworkers** might follow the path of least resistance in order to avoid upsetting others.

Completer Finishers and **Teamworkers** are likely to internalise anxiety. **Teamworkers** are likely to be concerned about the impact of the change on relationships within the team, whilst **Completer Finishers** might focus more on how the change will impact standards and how much time will be devoted to ensuring that quality does not suffer as a result.

Depression

Again, this stage is likely to manifest differently in each Team Role. For **Completer Finishers**, anxiety is likely to be internalised. They might simply avoid work which is affected by the change, which may not become apparent until a deadline is missed.

As a manager, you might be most likely to spot a difficulty in focusing amongst **Completer Finishers** and **Specialists**, whose working style is usually characterised by close focus. For **Resource Investigators**, on the other hand, who are used to flitting from one piece of work to another, it might be harder to identify the shift. It could be that they become distracted or lose some enthusiasm for their work.

Where needed, offer clarity as to how the change will affect the individual's role. If certain elements of someone's functional role are to be affected, it is worth spending time looking at the person's strengths, to reassure them that they still have a valid contribution to make to the team, and that even if the specifics of a process change, their working style and approach is still valued and important, both to you as leader and to the team at large.

It's important to note again that people don't always progress through the curve in order, and might return to stages that they have passed. Resource Investigators, for example, might initially be enthusiastic about the change and might progress through the stages quickly, only to return to confusion later, when the ramifications sink in. It is important to support them by harnessing the enthusiasm and giving them some grounding in the specifics to allow them to progress through the curve again, without providing information overload.

Acceptance/Problem-Solving

Once people begin to move towards acceptance, it's an ideal time to begin brainstorming new solutions to problems arising. It's important to consider how each person can contribute to moving things forward, and Co-ordinators are well-placed to advise on what each person can offer. You might want to consider project stages, bringing in each Team Role at the right stage to avoid confusion and distraction. For example, **Plants** and **Resource Investigators** can be included at the ideas phase, **Monitor Evaluators** for assessing the viability of potential solutions, and Implementers to come up with practical plans for executing the changes.

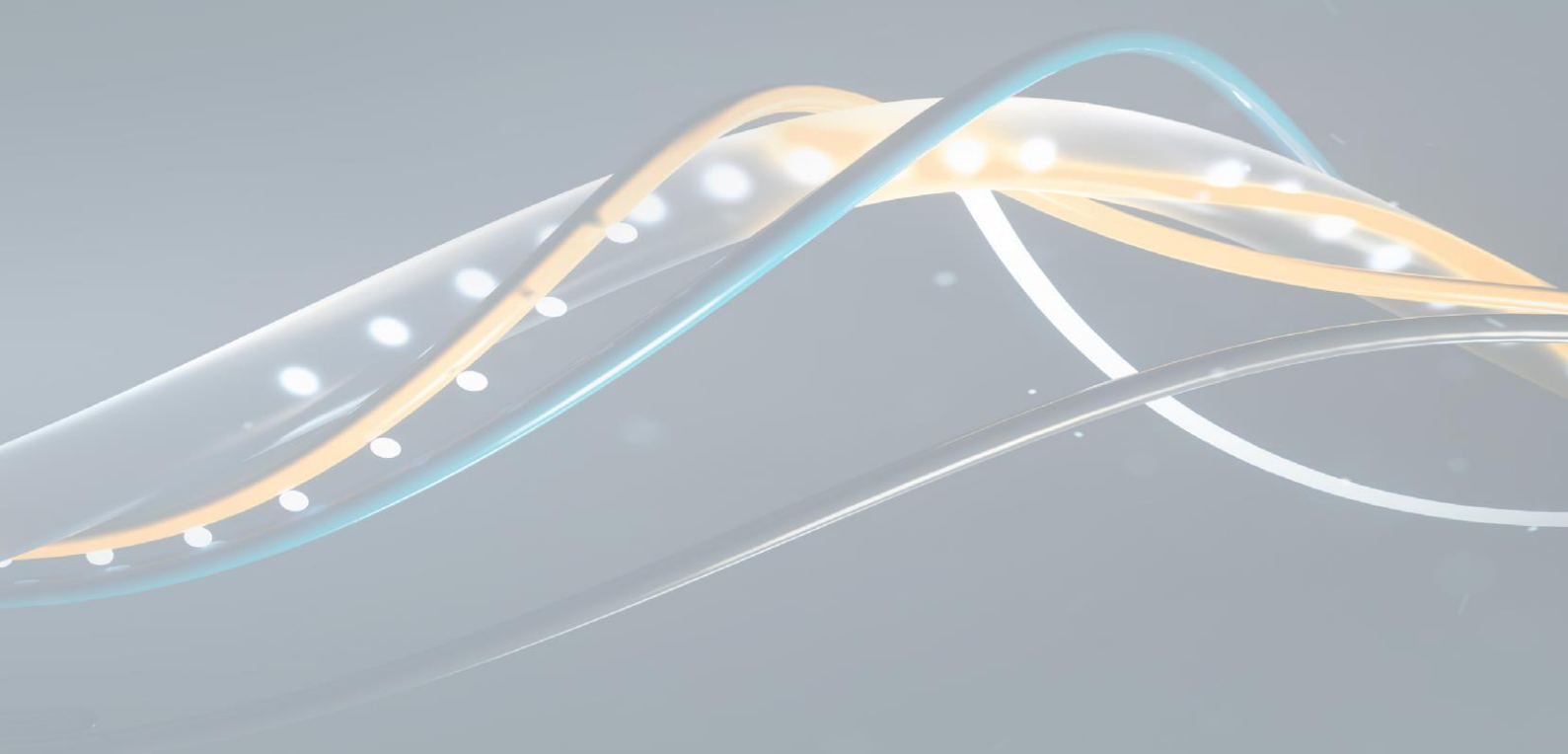
Reflection

Once the team has settled into the change, it's important to celebrate successes and allow the team time to stop and take stock. The change may have caused some seismic shifts in the way a team operates. Functional roles may have changed or people may have discovered new styles and talents in response to the change.

At this point, it's time to revisit Belbin. You can ask individuals to complete an Individual Report to compare to an earlier assessment. Have their working styles changed? Are there any manageable roles (latent talents) that have come to the fore? If so, how might you harness these new skills?

Next, it's time to put all the individual jigsaw pieces together, to produce a Team Report. This gives a picture of the team as a whole, including any Team Role gaps or overlaps which might have arisen as a result of the changes. It's a great discussion starter and an opportunity for the team to debrief on their individual experiences of the change curve and how these affected the team as a whole.

This helps to ensure that when the next change comes around, the team is more experienced in the peaks and troughs of the change curve and more prepared to embrace change.





The only sanctioned way of finding out your Belbin® Team Role strengths and weaknesses is by completing the official Belbin® Self-Perception Inventory online, and receiving a Belbin® Individual Report.

Over 3 million Belbin® Reports have been generated worldwide for individuals, managers, teams and organisations. We can help you every step of the way.

Get in touch

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Let's get you started on your Belbin® journey!