

Managing personal and organizational change in tough times

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Life is but a series of transitions, made up of endings, and new beginnings. Change is a natural and necessary part of the human experience. One of the main sources of stress and anxiety for individuals dealing with change comes from the confusion that accompanies uncertainty. Feelings of loss and gain accompany all change. Change can result from internal and external sources, it can be self initiated or imposed by others. Some examples in a work setting include, occupation change, job change, promotion, demotion, downsizing, and reassignment to name a few. In these trying fiscal times many organizations are faced with externally imposed change.

Different individuals react differently to change. Nevertheless, some of the typical physical and emotional symptoms of stress and anxiety are given below. You may find yourself more susceptible to colds, headaches, gastrointestinal problems, insomnia, and various other bodily aches and pains. Typical psychological reactions include but are not limited to anger, frustration, confusion, dejection, irritability, sadness, sense of loss and grief, pessimism, apathy, anxiety, and even depression. Some individuals feel excited, stimulated, and energized by the thought of a significant life change if they were not particularly happy with their current situation. An externally imposed change may serve as motivation to make the life changes necessary to feel happier. It may force you to look at yourself critically, analyze your life and your level of satisfaction with it. Regardless of what your reactions are to change it is important to recognize your reactions and learn some useful strategies to deal with change.

People may go through the following stages as they deal with change. The following model was adapted from Fossum, L., & Crisp, M. (1989) Understanding Organizational Change.

1. **Denial:** This is not happening, everything will be all right, etc.
2. **Resistance:** I don't want to have this happen, I won't deal with change; I want things to be the way they are.
3. **Confusion:** Oh my, what am I to do? What will I do? What will become of me?
4. **Release:** Well I better deal with this because it is happening.
5. **Envisioning:** What can I do to deal with this change? Let me find some solutions.
6. **Enactment:** Now that I have developed a plan, let me put it in action.
7. **Commitment:** I will do my best to succeed given the new reality of life.