



# A Change Perspective

## May 2020

Many of the trends identified in our paper [Global Trends and Change Predictions for the 2020s](#) late last year had been around for a while. But what we see now is an acceleration of activity such as the transition to a digital future and the infusion of data-enabled services into more aspects of our everyday life.

According to Bain & Company, global leaders are focused on three things - thinking about urgent actions (how to keep their people and customers safe while ensuring business continuity), recovery (how to restart normal operations when lockdowns are lifted), and retooling (how to adapt to a new reality).

The pandemic created a huge wave of disruption, and for most organisations doing more of the same is not an option. Some companies are battling for relevance, working to prove their value, whilst dealing with a sudden shock to their business model. Others have started to pivot, innovate and seize the opportunity to adapt and transform.

For most of us, the months ahead will likely be uncertain, volatile and dynamic as the crisis continues. As people we experience these changes in many ways, and the process of transition - the internal psychological process people go through when they internalise and come to terms with a new situation - will vary.

Of all of the change models available William Bridges' Transition Model remains relevant and easy to apply both personally and organisationally. It defines three phases of transition: Ending what currently is, the neutral zone, and the new beginning. This is a very personal view of change and speaks to the fact that organisations, nations and even families don't change; people do, one person at a time.

Whilst companies are trying to ensure business continuity, it is important to empathise and acknowledge the sudden loss of previous work and life norms. We need to help people understand why this change matters and acknowledge the losses associated with the old ways of working, connecting, living and the dramatic change in available life choices.

Change is deeply personal; anxiety and uncertainty is taking its toll on individuals. Some thrive and some survive and the need for support and self-care is greater than ever before. David Rock from the Neuroleadership Institute's research reveals that uncertainty is a stress stimulator which can lead to loss of productivity and irrational decisions. Those who are working, but in changed circumstances, may be feeling uncertain about their future, anxious about their families or isolated from friends and work colleagues.

Some suggestions to help leaders and individuals to remain clear-headed and maintain focus are:

- Raise certainty. For example, creating and maintaining a daily and weekly routine can help create a sense of normalcy and certainty.
- Set short term goals that are achievable to maintain a sense of contribution, achievement and progress forward.
- Acknowledge opportunities to make choices each day to raise people's sense of autonomy.
- Stay connected and encourage the sharing of experiences and goals with other humans. Virtual meetings, happy hours, and events (with the camera on) can help build relatedness and a sense of community.

Once the shock of the sudden end of day to day life as we knew it has been acknowledged and the losses have been accepted, we start to navigate our way through the neutral zone. This can be the most uncomfortable transition stage as it is the "in between time" when the old is gone but the new isn't fully understood or operational. This is where many of us find ourselves right now.

This phase can and will likely last for a while and it is important to recognise the ongoing uncertainty this brings. Not everything is known or will be perfect. Leaders

and Managers can help employees navigate through this phase in the following ways:

- Continue to check in on your people and see how they are feeling – ensure you actively listen.
- Identify short term goals that can be broken down into incremental, iterative changes.
- Reinforce what isn't changing and how contributions that were important previously are relevant still.
- As the transition evolves take the time to look for new opportunities and innovation.
- Involve people in planning their own transition – encourage teams to forward plan for the present and for increased flexibility as restrictions start to be eased.

Adults engage and learn best when their existing knowledge base is acknowledged and leveraged and asked to contribute to solving the problems in front of them. This eases the burden of organisations having to have all of the answers and empowers the workforce to contribute.

## Recovery – how to adapt to the new reality

For many of us the new beginnings will be marked by a gradual easing of restrictions when lockdowns are lifted.

Recovery will look different in different places and people will think, feel and respond differently. Some of the questions that apply to the personal and work recovery situation will be:

- Has the challenge of working in a changed environment been acknowledged and accepted?
- Do people feel safe to return to work? What transition arrangements are needed to provide actual safety and confidence of safety?
- Do you have to re-set your strategy to ensure it is fit for purpose?
- Which elements of the new world remain the same? How can this be co-created or made explicit, so expectations are clear?
- Which mindsets and expectations have changed, and what role does open dialogue play in reinstating trust with employees and customers?
- Which ways of working that were discovered during this crisis should be preserved and built upon? What do your workforce think will work better going forward? The best way to understand this is to ask them!

- What actions that you have taken during this period have had the most positive impact for your customers and team? Can you seek insights and learnings?
- What are your new sets of measures that will chart your progress towards your new beginnings?

We can look at this time as an opportunity to recentre, review and replan. Continuing to hold onto the new way of being and operating that has worked well during our neutral zone of uncertainty and looking to the future with renewed focus and clarity about the way forward for ourselves and our organisations.

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