

# Managing Transition

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# Managing Transition - “Slow down to speed up”

As mergers and acquisitions increase and organisations constantly realign to meet changing business needs, the cost of transition can be too high a price for businesses, teams and individuals.

As we know the dangers from a major reorganisation include:

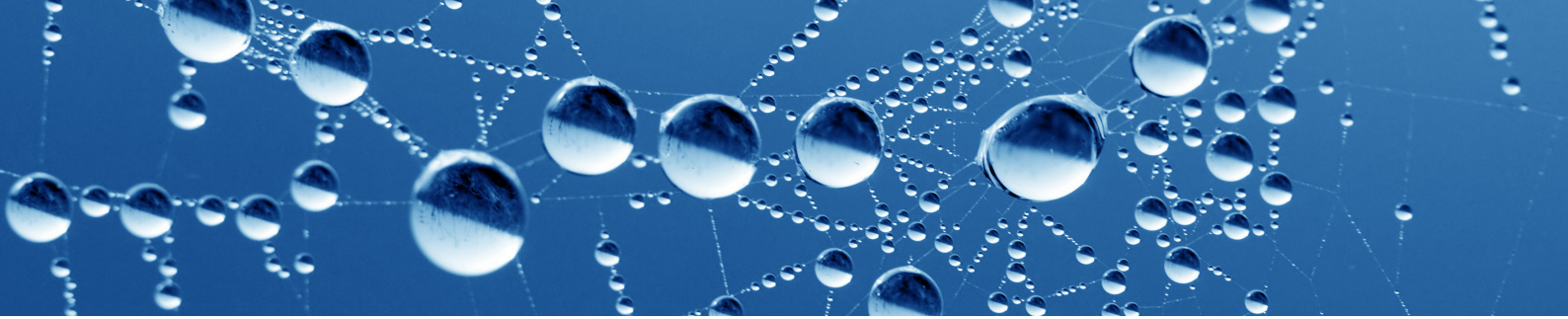
- Disruption to business flow
- Potential loss of productivity
- Focusing internally instead of externally
- Ignoring the fact that uncertainty affects everyone at some level
- Moving fast without any time to reflect/stop/feel

## What’s needed?

In our work with organisations we are constantly reminded of an old adage: *“Slow down to speed up.”*

When major organisational change occurs, leaders are often consumed with the details of the changing structure, the appointment of people and keeping the focus on the market and the business at the same time. All too often we find in large complex global organisations time, which is at a premium, is not spent on acknowledging the effect of the transition on individuals and teams.

Through our work we have learnt that people and teams need some time and space to connect at a human level – this will ultimately speed up the process not delay it.



## Unlearning

Major changes are often driven by a need to do things differently – for instance the shift from a product to a service focus, or from existing to developing markets. But, how often do we take the opportunity to do things differently and to unlearn some old habits?

‘Letting go of the old’ is also an important phase, especially if the transition results in the ending of an existing team. We have helped organisations and teams celebrate and mark these endings through ceremonies, Oscar-style celebrations of achievements, reviewing the lifeline of the team and even holding a wake or procession – whatever is appropriate to mark the ending. What’s important is that the ‘wake’ needs to build a bridge to what is being lost and to tap into the new state.

## Working with Teams

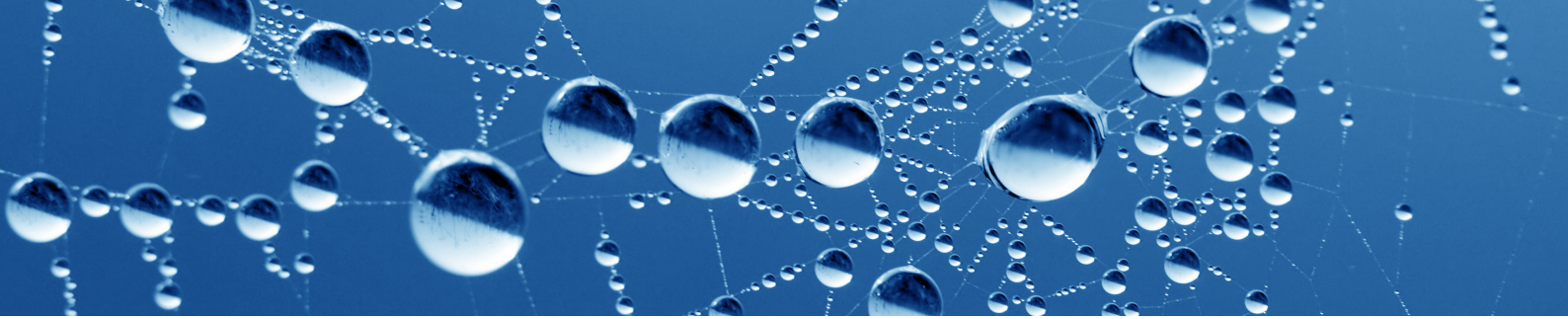
It is important in transition to new roles to have a number of activities specially designed to get the team moving quickly. Part of the initial work is raising issues that the team has experienced in the past during transition. This provides a bedrock for addressing what needs to be done differently and, importantly, what needs to be unlearned.

As the organisation is in a state of flux, transition presents an ideal opportunity to jointly create and agree a new purpose and vision. This will help set an agenda for change and the implementation process. By including the team it will also enable people to quickly build new relationships.

Transition is never going to be easy and throughout the process there will be a need to create a space to share feelings and listen. By having regular events, issues can be addressed in the room and if time has been invested in building personal relationships it will become easier to support difficult conversations.

At times, work is required across a network within an organisation or for those who have come together as part of the change process. Whatever the size or location of the group, holding an event for them and those who support them can be very beneficial and deliver the following:

- Sharing of experiences
- Avoiding cliques by building joint endeavour
- Using the new business agendas to drive discussion
- Understanding patterns between groups
- Providing pace and focus to avoid ‘group chat’ and idea paralysis
- Facilitating agreement avoiding either/or positions
- Reaching decisions more quickly



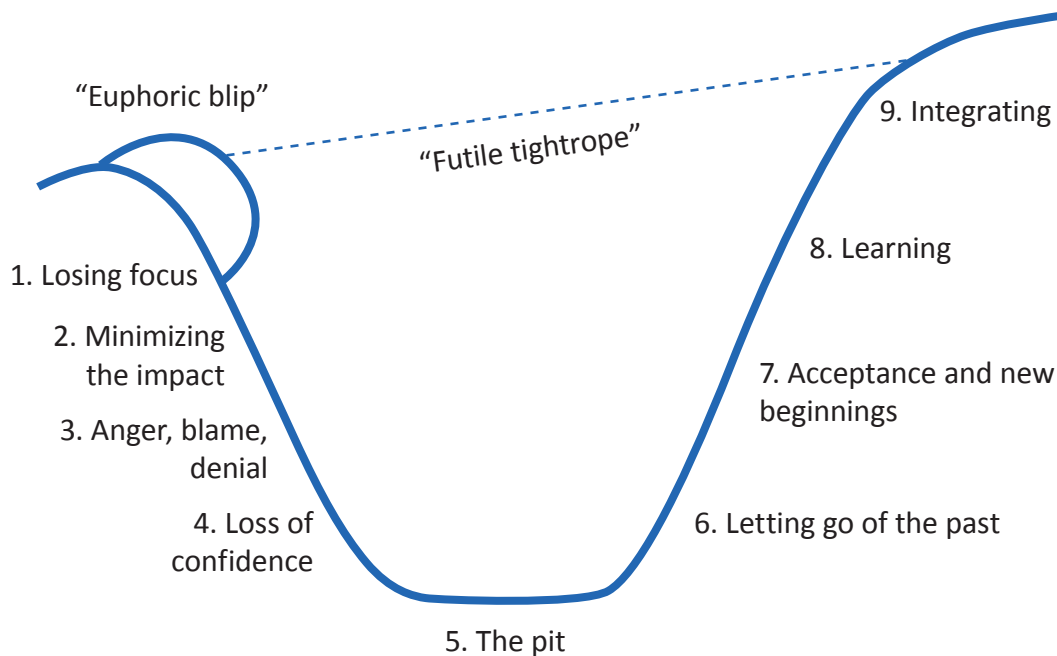
## Leadership from the top

It is common that leaders can sometimes be too far ahead in the transition process to realise others in their organisation are not alongside. The transition curve in its many forms (as developed from Kubler Ross, Bridges) shows how there can be a futile tightrope that leaders, having initiated a change and moved through the process, invite others to cross.

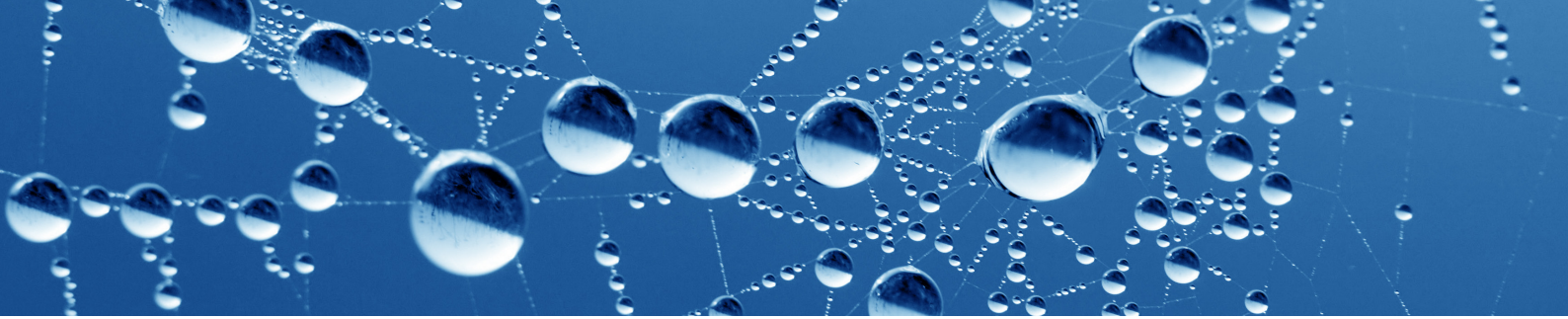
Leadership teams need to pay attention to how teams are interacting within new structures e.g. across competitive business lines, between R&D and product development, or from sales to production.

It's also a truism but that does not diminish its importance that during a complex change the leadership needs to maintain direction to hold the vision of the future constantly in everyone's awareness.

## The Stages of Transition for Individuals



This model has been adapted from Sabina A Spencer and John D Adams.



## Individuals

We have found that supporting role transition for executives has a big impact on the change for significant parts of the business. We have developed our Transition Support workbooks, currently being used in two global organisations, to help leaders in transition as well as new executives joining the business.

In one organisation a reorganisation of the pan-African Sales approach meant that Sales VPs had new demanding roles and needed support. We trained HR professionals as coaches and supported them in being transition coaches to the individuals. This not only added great value to the business it also created a new positive relationship between HR and business leaders.

Within internal HR, this approach is described as *“How do we best manage transformation/change so we as a business deliver on our promises?”*

Leaders using this approach describe the benefits as:

- Time out to plan ahead
- Save time in future
- Get things right in new team start up phase
- Pay attention to change process
- Send signals about values/priorities
- Opportunity to unlearn
- Emotional resilience

## Role of HR

The role HR professionals play in transition is extremely valuable but they are often going through transition themselves, potentially not knowing what their future roles are as they support others through change. Having some support to focus on the bigger picture can be very valuable to a team or a leader immersed in the day to day.

A challenge to a recent group of HR professionals from their own leader was, *“Are we as HR creating enough time with leaders to stop and focus on the key issues?”*

Focusing on the details of a reorganisation can become a case of not seeing the wood for the trees. During this period HR can assert themselves as a major player by helping leaders, teams and individuals focus on how the actual transition is managed. HR can hold up the mirror, call a ‘time out’ and help the whole organisation to slow down to speed up.