

Book Review: *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* by William Bridges (2nd Edition). Review by Junell Scheeres

William Bridges' *Managing Transitions* provides potential Change Agents with practical tools and a framework to help them guide their organization through the uncertain journey of change (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press). It has proved an invaluable tool to me as I consider the psychological, cognitive and emotional transitions that must take place for members of an organization or a process improvement team to change their behavior and navigate the transformation process. As a Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt, armed with a background in industrial engineering and organizational development, I felt quite competent in applying the right technical and logistical tools to make the business case for change.

I thoroughly enjoyed employing the so-called "hard sciences" of performance improvement. Taking the time to define processes, collect, quantify and analyze data and assess key drivers of performance seemed the surest way to demonstrate the need for change. Management-by-fact provides the most obvious and logical course of action to take...Right? Imagine my surprise, when people started to resist and reject this grasp of the obvious. My tendency was to pile on more data and statistics and lament if I could only explain it better, they too would "see the light" and accept the need to change. That's when I came across Bridges' book and it filled in a lot of "gaps" for me. I strongly recommend it to anyone asked to lead or support a major organizational change effort. I consider it a "must read" for leaders of performance improvement teams, at any level.

First, it helped me differentiate between change management and transition management. In Part One of his book he explains "The Problem", describing that it isn't the changes that "do you in" ...it's the ability to effectively transition from the old (comfortable) way of doing business to a new (unknown) way. He presents a test case and uses it to outline his core framework for managing transitions. He describes some specific leadership and change management actions that need to take place sooner than later and provide his recommendation for the order of events needing to take place to facilitate the transition process. I think this may have been where I had my "AHA!" moment. Once I internalized my understanding of change management versus transition management I was better able to examine his framework in more detail. I particularly appreciate his easy-to-understand writing style, extensive use of checklists as transition progress checks and the weaving of poignant quotes related to the business of change.

There are a number of good reference books on change management. For instance, *Leading Change* by John Kotter continues to be required reading in many undergraduate and graduate business programs for its integrated model of factors involved in effecting change. My main take-away from books like Kotter's has been primarily cerebral and contextual – offering a system view of transformation as a series of steps that (if followed) lead to success and sustainment. My primary take-away from Bridges' book has been a honing of those so-called "soft skills" so critical to successful Change Agents. In Part Two of this book, Bridges offers readers an easy-to-follow discussion (including progress checklists) suggesting "The Solutions for How to Get People to Let Go"; "Leading People through the Neutral Zone"; "Launching a New Beginning"; and finally, "Transition, Development and Renewal".

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His description of “the Neutral Zone” as that place between the way things are done now and the way they will be done in the future provided an excellent way for me to understand the bridge that must be built in order for people to undertake the transition with confidence rather than fear. The emotional basis of this book reminded me of the often overlooked level of compassion and trust it takes to ask people to give up what they know and go down an uncertain path. In Part Three of his book, Bridges offers some additional advice to those involved in those dynamic and volatile industries and environments (like healthcare) who would benefit from his section “Dealing with Nonstop Change in the Organization and Your Life: How to Deal With Nonstop Change”. The book concludes with a practice case to consider, along with a warning that not effectively managing transitions can lead to guilt, resentment, anxiety, self-absorption and stress (GRASS). Healthcare organizations cannot afford a discontented or anxious workforce where emotional capital is as much a part of the care plan as the talent, education and experience of the professionals involved. This book provides both practical and tangible means to make the most of the change effort by mitigating the emotional resistance to change.

In addition to the numerous tools provided throughout the course of this book, the five Appendices offer some additional tools, titled “Assessing Your Transition Readiness”; “Planning for Transition”; “Setting up a Transition Monitoring Team”; “Career Advice for Employees of Organizations in Transition”; and “The Leader’s Role in Times of Transition”. Performance improvement specialists in healthcare and other industries should consider adding this book to their library. Learning to guide people through the emotional and behavioral transitions necessary to reach desired organizational goals is a valuable and appreciated skill set. The Chinese proverb suggests that “the beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names.” William Bridges’ book, *Managing Transitions*, brings the right kinds of tools to bear on the psychological transition that accompanies any major change event.

Bridges, W. (2003). *Managing Transitions. Making the Most of Change*. (2nd Ed). Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.