

# Managing the Complexity of Organizational Transformation

*KAREN WILHELM BUCKLEY*

*DANI MONROE PERKINS*

## Comments on the Second Edition

The intervening years since *Transforming Work* was first published have been filled with grand efforts of self- and organizational transformation. We have learned a tremendous amount, including a profound humility about the unforeseen consequences of non-linear, not staying in the same endless spiral, truly jumping into a new pattern, *transformative* change. There is still much to learn, not only about the dynamics of guiding an organizational transformation but, perhaps most difficult, to develop in ourselves and those we serve the mindfulness and compassion sufficient to intelligently respond to the accompanying disruptions in people's work and home lives.

Change is necessary. Differentiating between minor, major, and transformative level changes, whether these are within an individual, non-profit institution, midsize company or multinational corporation, is critical to planning a successful transition. The dynamics and stages of transition articulated in this chapter have been applied countless times to all manner of changes. Hopefully this work can continue to remind us to be more sensitive to others and ourselves as we guide or undergo further experiments in organizational change.

The time of *unconsciousness* is the prelude: a readiness to accept change is building. The *awakening*, whether by internal or external catalysts, can be shocking, taking many folks by surprise. The key analysts, intuitive listeners, and synthesizers help by articulating possible benefits and predicting future instabilities. Intelligent planners provide for the internalizing process needed by both the formal and informal leaders. Once they understand the implications and potential advantages of the needed changes they become the arks, capable of riding the waters of change.

Soon the *reordering* begins – like our childhood playing with “tinker toys,” the structure of our lives or organizations is dismantled, leaving a pile of parts and pieces. This is for some the scariest time; for others, the most exciting. The possibilities are endless, the boundaries insubstantial, and each step is without guideposts into an unknown land. Quicksand and solid ground rotate in a kaleidoscope of challenges. Grabbing for the seemingly secure past hijacks the change. Leaping too early for a potential ledge of safety can return us to the fertile ground of unconscious denials and attachments.

The transition team's task is to ride the storms of change, grounding lightning and diffusing thunder cells, while bringing the healing balms of information, courage, careful listening, reason and meaning. A coherent vision begins to form in a period of *translation*, providing momentum for those ready to jump on board. For those still unconscious or just awakening, this formulation of the future can provoke an “I will not!” stance, having less to do with the content of the vision and more to do with an as yet undeveloped internal capacity to accept the change.

Widespread *commitment* to the vision brings a solidity, a runway for launching. This is the time to bring everyone up to speed, because a full *embodiment* requires completed shifts in the three dimensions of *behavior, structure, and consciousness*. This *Triangle of Embodiment* has proven

to be a useful tool in planning, diagnosing incongruities, and assessing progress during organization-wide changes. Emphasis on all three points culminates in a fuller change and the focused action of *integration*.

Transformational change is work – scary, exhilarating, and necessary work. We will not solve the world’s problems without it. Yet the ethical ramifications of catalyzing such profound changes in organizations, in other people’s lives, are vast and deserve careful consideration. Hopefully, through conscious reflection we will expand our own capacities for compassion, trust, and true caring.

- Karen Wilhelm Buckley
- Dani Monroe Perkins

*Managing the complexities of Organizational Transformation is one of the major challenges confronting organizations in the 1980s: how to successfully maintain high-level performance while experiencing transformative change. The authors have developed a seven-stage model that describes the transition cycle, which they use to diagnose and facilitate transformative processes. The model points out dilemmas and opportunities encountered by individuals and organizations experiencing transformation. The authors are finding that responsive organizations are realizing more of their potential as they understand the particular dynamics of transformative change.*

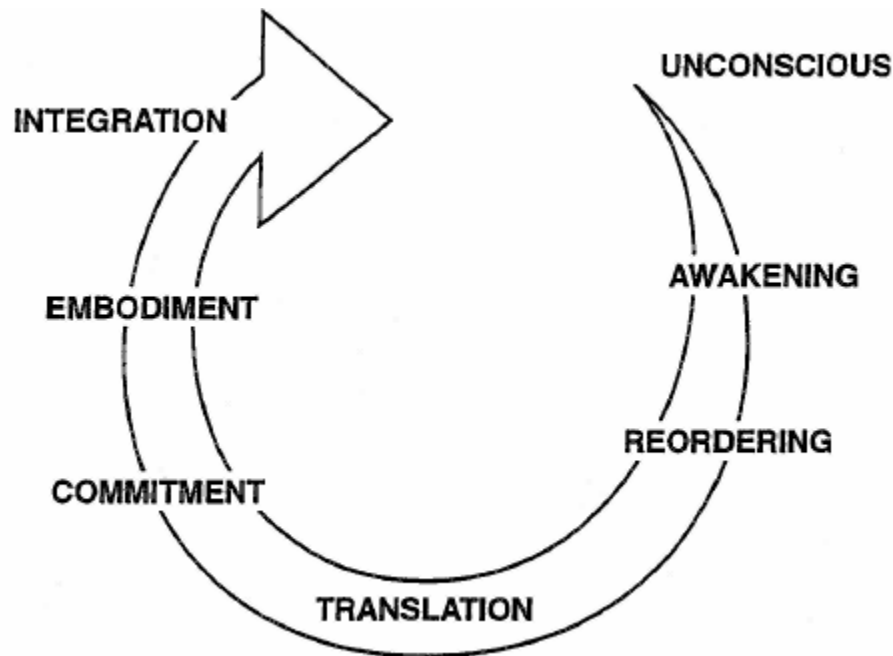
The changes affecting our world today are causing societal shifts as dramatic as those that occurred in the Renaissance and during the Industrial Revolution. During times of massive change, profound modifications of most forms of organizations, social relationships, and individual lifestyle accompany societal shifts. These changes challenge the major premises and underlying patterns of current society, and result in a transformation. Faced with depletion of natural resources, introduction of new technology, and changing consumer values, individuals and organizations are undergoing major overhauls of their basic assumptions and operating policies. This type of complex restructuring is viewed as transformative change.

In transformation, a transition occurs from the present state to an altered future state. During this transition, modification of structure, behavior, and consciousness occurs. In their work on organizational transitions, Beckhard and Harris<sup>1</sup> traditionally defined transition as “the period of time and state of affairs that exist between an identification of need and the achievement of a desired future state.” However, within transformation a future state can not be predicted or designed. Therefore, *transition* is used here to identify a cycle contained within the transformation process.

This chapter presents a seven-stage transition cycle that an individual or an organization experiences in making a transformative change. In this transition cycle the stages are Unconsciousness, Awakening, Reordering, Translation, Commitment, Embodiment, and Integration. The authors developed these stages from their personal and professional experiences.

This seven-stage cycle of transition is described both for an organization in a

transformation process, and for the individual affected by the organization's transformation. A fully integrated process requires movement through all seven stages of the transition cycle. The tempo and direction vary as the organization moves in a random manner, jumping backward and forward. Rhythm and timing are determined by the rate the transition can be managed. Progression through the cycle can be instantaneous or ponderously slow. Often a micro-cycle of the seven stages is encompassed within each stage.



(Buckley & Perkins, January 1983 © VISION/ACTION)

During a transition, great potential exists for innovation, growth, and positive development. This time can also be very confusing and filled with turmoil, pain, and destructive chaos. Whether the transition is initiated internally or imposed externally, individuals and organizations may find themselves experiencing the same type of turmoil.

The seven-stage transition cycle may provide a better understanding of the experience of individuals and organizations in transformation. Our intention is that this transition cycle provide individuals and organizations with a context in which to view themselves in the midst of today's transforming world. It is often difficult to grasp the multiplicity of factors involved in transformative changes. For the purposes of this chapter, the authors have found it helpful to delineate three levels of change: minor, major, and transformative.

A **minor change** entails the modification of mental attitudes and behaviors without a shift in perception. This type of change addresses the surface issues, and avoids threats to deep-seated beliefs. The individual or organization tries various options, while remaining stable and relatively unchanged.

A **major change** occurs when an individual or an organization develops a new perspective and truly begins acting in new ways. A high degree of ambiguity, turmoil, and chaos accompany this radical change. As old habits are discarded, new patterns are developed. This level of change involves a search for underlying causes in order to reorganize the whole system, rather than just

some parts. Within a major change, a transformation may or may not occur, depending on the readiness and willingness of the individual or the organization.

**Transformative change** is accompanied by a fundamental shift in consciousness, values, or perceptions. This level of change entails a profound transmutation of the prevailing vision of reality. This shift in consciousness alters the basic ways an organization or individual responds to the environment. A transformation has occurred when new meaning is successfully established in relation to the organization's environment.

In a rapidly changing world, the limitations of minor and major change become obvious to individuals and organizations as they strive to survive and grow. For example, the surface alterations of minor and major change often will not meet the challenges of automation, or the desire for greater meaning in the workplace. New technological and social innovations bring with them a need to shift the basic ways of responding. A transformative shift in perception allows us to find workable alternatives and to deepen the connection to "right purpose" when organization life feels empty.

Evidence of transformative change is all around us. For instance, to compete with foreign manufacturers, the American automotive industry has had to redesign not only the product but also the process of production. Not just surface changes, but all aspects of the system have been affected. In 1983 *Leading Edge Bulletin* reported that a General Motors plant near Detroit "has made a major overhaul of its basic operating philosophy and has undergone a complete renewal of every procedure as it affects that philosophy... from quality control to who eats in which cafeteria."<sup>iii</sup> The complexity of their problems required a transformation to an entirely new way of viewing work and business.

Fritjof Capra, a well-known physicist, offered a perceptual way of organizing or viewing the current experience of societal, organizational, or individual transformation. Capra pointed out, "The world is approaching a turning point. A massive shift in the perception of reality is underway, with thinkers in many disciplines beginning to move away from the traditional reductionist, mechanical world view to a holistic, ecological, systems paradigm."<sup>iii</sup> Capra characterized the traditional worldview as the classical mechanistic-Cartesian paradigm that developed throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. This paradigm includes belief in the scientific method as the only valid approach to knowledge, and the notion of the universe as a mechanical system composed of elementary material building blocks. The mechanistic view presents units as having closed boundaries. Change is seen as the replacement of a defective unit by a new unit, with the change having little impact on the larger machine or system. In the restructuring of one division, the impact on another division is not considered.

A new perspective is emerging to deal adequately with the complexities of technological and social innovations. In acquiring a new perspective, one experiences a paradigm shift: a profound change that occurs in the thoughts, perceptions, and values that form a particular vision of reality. Capra viewed the emerging new paradigm as a holistic-ecological systems perspective, in which the universe "appears as a harmonious indivisible whole." This perspective "emphasizes the fundamental interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena, and the intrinsically dynamic nature of physical reality."<sup>iv</sup>

The organic perspective, as we shall characterize it here, views change as a continuum of dynamic interactions, and not as a single event. When viewed from the organic perspective, transformation is a natural part of evolution – the inner urge to grow. B.M. Hubbard pointed out:

The balance of nature is continuous, progressive change with a recurrent pattern in the

process: the creation of a new whole form out of the old through synthesis of separate parts. There is no point where the process remains static. The tendency in nature to form ever-greater whole systems, which are different from and greater than the sum of their parts, is intrinsic – or we would not be here.<sup>v</sup>

This organic perspective is altering the orientation of corporations, public service agencies, educational institutions, and individuals. Change is no longer seen as a compartmentalized, simple process. The analysis, comprehension, and orchestration of organizational transformation is complicated as the various subsystems experience change at different rates, and affect each other in converging patterns of cyclical waves. The individual employees, departments, divisions, and subsidiaries are all involved in a dynamic interaction of different rhythms and tempos of change.

As organizations undergo major transformations necessary for survival and growth, individual lives are also transformed. The success of an organizational change largely depends on the employees' ability to integrate the changes. The individual experiencing transformation in an organizational context will discover that a cycle of transition begins with the unconscious stage.

## THE SEVEN STAGE TRANSITION CYCLE

### **Unconscious Stage**

Organization transition begins gradually with an unconscious period. Basically a passive time, the period of organization unconscious builds a readiness for change. During this gestation, the organization develops the capacity to acknowledge that something is wrong. Certain clues in the informal networks – unconnected bits of random information, sporadic symptoms, and tentative new ideas – indicate that an organization is experiencing the unconscious stage. Messengers within the organization could include someone in a powerful position with an inspiration or vision; an old-timer with an intuitive sense that something needs to be changed; or an employee identifying surface symptoms of a failure in the system. Other catalysts might include growing internal dissatisfaction, or changes in the external environment (*i.e.*, new competitors, national economic trends, or international disturbances).

An organization's cultural or owned values can support or hinder its ability to respond to internal or external signals of the need for change. If the corporation bases its values only on stability and security, dissident voices or innovative ideas may seldom be heard. The employee responds to this suppression by withholding valuable information, becoming apathetic, or withdrawing personal responsibility from the success or failure of the organization.

An organization that values new information as critical to continued success will experience less lag between the time individuals or departments become aware of new information and the time it becomes a part of the organization's awareness. This shortened response time increases the organization's ability to manage proactively and to facilitate a transformative change.

Many corporations are benefiting from employee suggestions. As reported in *Leading Edge Journal*, executives at Control Data Corporation in Minneapolis confirmed this:

Suggestions for changes in policy and structure have been so useful and specific that management is now committed to work on any issue raised by employees. Some 2,000 employees in engineering services are now redefining their own organization. They are

creating a climate of self-reliance, therefore changing the destiny of the organization.<sup>vi</sup>

Once new information becomes part of the organization consciousness, it becomes apparent that changes are necessary. The organization begins to identify, and finally to confront, the existing situation. Awakening to the need for change, the organization enters the next stage of transformation.

### **Awakening Stage**

Suddenly, the organization awakens to possibilities and problems present in the current situation. The unconnected pieces of information from the unconscious stage are synthesized into a message of needed change. The awakening has occurred as the organization is jolted to confront the existing environment.

The need for transformative change may be identified by several different sources. Often it is a new CEO with innovative plans and a fresh perspective. The articulator could be a “natural” leader<sup>vii</sup> with an ability to perceive the truth, and with enough passion and insight to be heard. A pocket or division also may point to a new direction. A failure in the system, a crisis, an articulated new vision, or a natural inclination to grow may also trigger the awakening.

Awakening to needed changes introduces instability into the system, and disrupts the harmony of the previous plateau. Because little information is available, management’s anxiety, and that of their subordinates, begins to grow. Organizational members sense an impending change, and wonder what the impact will be. The rate of awakening will vary depending on the receptivity to change. Those who first perceived the needed changes provide an impetus for the rest of the organization to awaken as they move through the stages of reordering and translation to commitment. If the articulators try to move too fast, presuming that others share their new understanding, resistance may build rapidly in the organization.

An example of awakening, from the consulting practice of one of the authors, occurred at a prestigious university when the president and the dean realized that the quality of education in America was declining, and that curricula did not respond to rapid technological advances. The president realized he could use the university’s reputation to bring attention to the problems in education. Simultaneously, the dean decided that the school of education needed to move out of its ivory tower and improve the quality of education. Sharing an intention to align education with technology, the president and the dean decided to use the university as a catalyst. Already committed, they moved through the transition cycle to embodiment. Spreading the awakening in ever-widening circles, they brought together the faculty of the school of education to express perceptions, ideas and concerns. Once a shared reality was established, they formed task forces to gather data and analyze the present state of education and technology. Acceptance spread further throughout the institution as task force members sought input from different departments, other universities, computer consultants, and corporations.

The awakening stage has included informal data collection through exploration of potential dilemmas and identification of possible opportunities. With significant numbers awakened to the message of needed change, the organization is ready to enter the stage of *reordering*.

### **Reordering Stage**

Reordering is a process of analyzing the existing situation and challenging underlying patterns. The questioning of reordering produces a creative chaos and turmoil necessary for a full grasp of

the issues and implications.

This reordering probing process affects the stability of the organization and the equilibrium of individuals. Evidence of instability exists in undefined roles, increased workloads, and unfocused directions. Organizational members begin to ask questions:

- What is happening or not happening in the environment?
- When is it happening or not happening in the environment?
- Where is it happening or not happening in the environment?
- How much is it happening or not happening in the environment?
- Why is it happening or not happening in the environment?

These basic questions identify the substance, time, location, frequency, and cause of the problem. With this data collected, the organization can decide whether to make a minor change, or embark on a major one. In their 1982 work *In Search of Excellence*, Tom Peters and R.H. Waterman state,

When we reorganize we usually stop at reorganizing the boxes on the chart. The odds are high that nothing much will change. We will have chaos, even useful chaos for a while, but eventually the old culture will prevail. Old habit patterns persist.<sup>viii</sup>

Keeping security and stability as top priorities, the organization has, in this instance, chosen a minor change, affecting individuals and the organization with minimum discomfort.

The organization may choose instead to institute major changes leading to a possible transformation. This choice may direct the organization to a new level of growth and excellence. As the organization chooses a deeper level of transformative change, it must recognize the magnitude of the impact on the individual. Traditional change efforts have been primarily oriented to the modification of organization structure, and not to the internal changes of the employee. As the old organizational culture transforms, the individual employee is asked to undergo a profound change in personal thoughts, perceptions, and values. This internal alteration causes emotional insecurity, as individuals let go of the old and adopt new attitudes, behavior, and consciousness.

Until the employee accepts that what *was* no longer *is*, he or she will be unable to move forward with the organization. The organization can reduce individuals' resistance by providing adequate opportunity for early and comprehensive participation. If the level of participation is high, people's perceptions of upcoming changes shift. The organization strengthens the focus of the transformation by the inclusion of those still in the unconscious and awakening stages.

The orientation of transition now shifts from the present to the future. With the introspective questioning of reordering ended, the organization begins to move toward the new vision. The sense of potential and benefit inherent in the new vision provides a driving force for change. Final clarification of the future vision and development of strategies for implementation occur next in the *translation* stage.

### **Translation Stage**

Translation is the process of formulating a vision from the integration of information, metaphorical images, personal visions, and feelings collected in the unconscious, awakening, and reordering stages. The vision evolves into a clear image of what the organization wants to

achieve, which then organizes and instructs every step toward the desired future. Specific long-range goals and strategies for implementation emerge from the vision, enabling individuals to move forward in a concerted effort.

As John Naisbitt has pointed out,

The extraordinarily successful strategic vision for NASA was ‘to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade.’ That strategic vision gave magnetic direction to the entire organization. Nobody had to be told or reminded of where the organization was going.<sup>ix</sup>

Individuals can discover their personal “fit” when the vision has been successfully translated. Effective packaging of the vision generates excitement, and unifies the organization. Employees who previously resisted change may find themselves joining the team. As a stone dropped in a pond sends ripples to a farthest shore, so an articulated new direction ripples out to affect the health and vitality of the organization. In an organization with a cohesive, clear vision, reflective of the “right” purpose, a resonance field develops. Resonance occurs in organizational life when the individual and organization are in alignment with the vision. A.H. Maiden explained resonance as:

a rich concept used in many fields. For an electrical engineer, it is the state of adjustment of an electric circuit which permits maximum flow of current when impressed by an electromotive force of particular frequency. In physics, resonance occurs when the vibration of the created force equals that of the natural vibration of the system to which the force is applied, as with a tuning fork. When the vibratory qualities of the various parts and processes of the group are consciously brought into resonance, the actual effect of group work is magnified many [times].<sup>x</sup>

From the excitement and support generated around the vision, the organization develops ways to make it work. The organization must be wary of replacing or altering the ideas of the vision that have evolved through the transition, simply because of perceived difficulties in making it work. An attempt to adopt alternative visions may disillusion some individuals, resulting in a withdrawal of widespread support and participation. A reactive stance of resistance or a “things will not change, it has been this way for years” stance of indifference may develop.

The translation stage establishes a cohesive, focused direction that will provide the foundation for total commitment of the organization. In the next stage, *commitment*, all of the forces in the organization pull together toward the single goal.

### **Commitment Stage**

Commitment is when the organization takes responsibility for implementation of the new vision. Commitment has evolved throughout the transition cycle, as greater numbers of individuals commit to the new direction. A few key players may have made the commitment in the beginning, while others committed during the questioning of reordering, or the public articulation of the vision in translation. Let us refer to the education example, in which the president and the dean simultaneously committed to improving the quality of education. By presenting their intention to the faculty, they rapidly advanced to embodiment. The faculty awakened to the need, experienced their own cycles of reordering and translation, and eventually committed to participation in the project. Once committed, they embodied the intention by

developing task forces to study specific areas of concern. Commitment happened in the early part of the transition for the president and dean, and in later stages for the faculty. Still later, the university at large and the public school system made the commitment to participate.

The commitment stage is a pivotal point in the transition cycle. So far, the organization and individuals have only been considering the possibility of transformation. This is the time when the level of ability and readiness to “travel the distance” become key factors in transformative change. An organization’s readiness can be assessed on attitudes, behaviors, and actions: Do the prevalent attitudes show willingness to change, high levels of trust, and a sense of agreement? Are exhibited behaviors focusing on the future, teamwork, and establishment of informal new boundaries? Are the stakeholders allocating resources, signing contracts, holding special meetings, and interacting with the community and the news media? Individuals become ready to commit when they can see personal benefits inherent in the proposed plan.

For both the organization and individuals, the commitment stage is a time of being torn between the potential of the new direction and the security of the old. The tension between these two forces can cause an imbalance that creates internal disequilibrium and external strife. Moving forward and yet holding back, the individual experiences attachments to the past and fear of the unknown future. If the organization does not prepare the individual to handle these stresses, the transition may revert to earlier stages, stagnate, or die. Through adequate preparation, the full commitment of individuals strengthens the organization.

Based on an assessment of organization values, attitudes, and behaviors, key leaders can decide whether to proceed with the next stage, *embodiment*, or to return to the previous stages of awakening, reordering, and/or translation for further development.

### **Embodiment State**

In embodiment, the organization has reached the point where its task is to bring the transformed vision into its day-to-day operations. The challenge is to manage the interaction of three elements: 1) consciousness shifts that provide the new paradigm for the organization; 2) structural changes that provide a framework for the transformed organization; and 3) behavioral changes that bring employee actions into alignment with the transformed structure. The alignment of these three elements is achieved through an embodiment cycle of four steps:

- Identification
- Experimentation
- Practice
- Internalization

This cycle requires a start/stop tempo with modification and reorganization of the system. The organization synthesizes old data and beliefs into a new paradigm, in order to affect a shift in consciousness. Alternate structural changes are experimented with until the organization discovers the right fit to the new vision. Employees discard old beliefs and norms as they develop behavior patterns congruent with the new directions.

This is a dynamic process. As Peters and Waterman describe it, “The organization acts, and then learns from what it has done. It experiments. It makes mistakes; it finds unanticipated success.”<sup>x1</sup> Without permission for this trial and error period, embodiment results in short-term, superficial change. The organization must express unequivocally its commitment to experimentation, with statements like “Let’s just try it out for the next two months,” and “Let’s

give it a chance, and then we'll modify as needed.”

The embodiment of the desired future happens more easily for some than for others. For some people, it is a tug-of-war between the past and the future. One day, an employee may feel very clear and excited about his or her new role, relocation in the organization, or the new direction. The next day, as the time approaches to abandon security, he or she may experience confusion, sadness, or anxiety. To manage the tension that emerges from either holding on, or letting go and moving on, employees often need emotional support from the organization. If personal support is not provided, individual resistance may block or delay forward progress. In order to successfully undergo embodiment, the individual must have the opportunity and support to develop an inner motivation to change. With the inner motivation to change, the individual can direct his or her own behavioral changes. Self-motivated behavioral changes tend to be long lasting and to improve the effectiveness of organizational change.

A participant in a session facilitated by one of the authors illustrates the impact of embodiment. This woman, in wire transfer for a major bank, had been promoted from systems to operations. She reported:

In one day I went from moving linear pieces of data [numbers] on a copper wire from one place to another, to managing a staff of people and the resources needed to transfer millions of dollars around the world. Previously, if data was delayed, I didn't worry and just got it moving again. Now, if the funds are delayed, I am calculating compensation [late fees] and working to get the data moving again as soon as possible. I was bewildered, and realized that I was not prepared for the psychological impact of the promotion. I had received no training to better understand the complexity of my new job or to handle the stress.

In order to succeed, the woman's consciousness had to shift from a mechanistic viewpoint, to a systems viewpoint that encompassed a variety of factors dynamically influencing each other. It would be some time before she completed the behavioral and consciousness changes necessary for congruence with the simple structural change in position. Eventually, the embodiment is complete, and the organization and individuals reach a state of *integration*, drawing the transition to an end. The behavioral changes are internalized, and consciousness and structural and behavioral alignment deepen in the integration stage.

### **Integration Stage**

As the embodiment of the desired change becomes widespread, the organization reaches a stage of integration. The necessary changes, both structural and behavioral, are instituted and operating. Consciousness has been altered so the organization and individual are functioning from a new paradigm. People feel that the changes are real and are going to stay.

The anticipated future state is now in place in the stage of integration, as the organization reaches a plateau of balanced wholeness. The informal and formal systems align to reach the goals of the organization. A supportive environment of trust, cooperation, and openness develops.

Integration is the stage in a transition where the organization experiences a solid foundation for peak performance. In our experience, an organization's ability to remain solid, yet permeable to new information, determines the degree to which it experiences its “personal

power.” In a graduate course on organizational behavior, Sabina Spencer, an organization development consultant in Europe, defined organization personal power as

...the ability to be unique, to be recognized as something that is dynamic, and has integrity. It [the organization] is in touch with its very essence or source of being. It has the ability to be regenerative and examine itself. It integrates its history in a change process, so it no longer holds on, but lets go and moves on. It [the organization] is a positive force that leads and creates.

When the organization experiences personal power, individual energy becomes aligned rather than diffused. In the transition cycle, energy had been diverted to the chaotic process of designing strategy, practicing new behavior, gaining commitment, managing emotions, and transforming consciousness. In integration, the individual experiences increased amounts of physical energy, emotional depth and mental concentration. The organizational environment is stable enough to support its employees. Innovative solutions and creative ideas result from the stability in the organization, increased availability of natural resources, and refined mental clarity. The shared commitment of integration is to work together as one, and is increasingly evident as management extends the energy to get everyone “on the team.” The integration stage is made up of varying degrees of completion. Appropriate adjustments are made to compensate for people who have resisted the transition, and who continue to deny what is needed. For instance, the CEO and top management teams may be in integration, the line manager in translation, and workers on the shop floor in awakening. Affirmation of the change process and commemoration of individual contributions strengthen the shared commitment. Through celebrations and rituals, the community is solidified and the emotional, psychological, and physical ups and downs of the change process are healed.

The organization faces the double-edged sword of stability in integration. Organizations, like individuals, should not prolong stabilization, nor move too quickly into a new change process. Prolonged stabilization can close an open system for lack of stimulus. Too-brief periods of stabilization can cause the organization to become reactive or dysfunctional from the anxiety created by constant change. In integration, a stable foundation has been built to enable the organization and individual to move into the next change cycle in a timely fashion. A strategy for assessment keeps the system responsive to feedback and open to emerging ideas. This passage through the transition cycle is now complete, and the organization once again enters the unconsciousness stage, developing readiness for the next cycle.

## SUMMARY

A major challenge for large organizations is to maintain high productivity while experiencing transformative change. Successful institutions are realizing that change is a natural part of the organization’s life cycle, and are beginning to prepare for and manage the complexities of organizational transformation.

Progressive managers and consultants understand that successful passage through the transition cycle is contingent upon the readiness and willingness of individuals and the organization to align with the new direction. These organizations are using the stages of unconsciousness, awakening, reordering, translation, commitment, embodiment, and integration to build a corporate context for an upcoming period of rapid change. The stages provide a

common language to facilitate cross-level communication. Used as a diagnostic tool, they also become a method to anticipate future needs. In the celebration of a completed transition cycle, the seven stages build a foundation for future change.

As we have seen, the process of transformation is essentially a death-and-rebirth process. In our traditional mechanistic bias, we have imagined that transformation comes through fixing something defective, or supplying something that is missing. The transition cycle demonstrates that transformative change is a cyclical process from disintegration to reformation. Organizations and individuals choosing to transform will be stronger in their response to societal shifts and changing values affecting business in today's rapidly changing world.

## Notes

---

<sup>i</sup> R. Beckhard and R. Harris, *Organizational Transitions: Managing Complex Change* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1977)

<sup>ii</sup> "Auto Plant's Operations Revised to Fit New Outlook," *Leading Edge Bulletin*, Vol. III; 8 (1983), pp. 1-2.

<sup>iii</sup> F. Capra, *The Turning Point* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 53.

<sup>iv</sup> F. Capra, "The Turning Point: A New Vision of Reality," *The Futurist*, Vol. XVI; 6 (1982), p. 19.

<sup>v</sup> ~B.M. Hubbard, *The Evolutionary Journey* (San Francisco: Evolutionary Press, 1982).

<sup>vi</sup> "Management Committed to Work on Issues Raised by Workers," *Leading Edge Bulletin*, Vol. III; 11(1983), p. 1.

<sup>vii</sup> See Beckhard and Hams.

<sup>viii</sup> Thomas J. Peters and R.H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 3.

<sup>ix</sup> John Naisbitt, *Megatrends* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982)

<sup>x</sup> °A.H. Maiden, "Resonance," *Gaia* [quarterly publication of the Institute for the Study of Conscious Evolution], Vol. II; 2 (1980), p. 3

<sup>xi</sup> Peters and Waterman