

## The Kubler-Ross Change Curve Model

In 1969 Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross identified and analyzed the five stages of grief in her seminal book *On Death and Dying*. The five stages she observed and wrote about were: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. She argued that these stages represent the range of feelings and reactions people experience when responding to significant change in their lives. Kubler-Ross wrote that these stages are normal reactions or coping mechanisms that people must move through in order to manage change. She argued that people occupy different stages at different times, that stages last for indeterminate periods of time, and that they can occur concurrently. This model is now being used to understand how people react to change in other aspects of their lives, including in the workplace.

### The Five Stages

#### 1. Shock or Denial

Denial is the initial stage of numbness and shock; it is not wanting to believe that a change is happening. It's ideally a temporary phase that gives people the time they need to process the news of change before moving on to other stages.

#### 2. Anger

Denial often turns to anger, which can manifest in many different ways. People often try to blame someone or something else for negative events; in a work environment, this could mean blaming colleagues, management, or an organizational lack of resources.

#### 3. Bargaining

Bargaining is an attempt to postpone the inevitable, to try to delay the change or find a way out of the situation. In an employment setting, people might work harder and put in lots of overtime to try to prove their value and thereby improve their bargaining position.

#### 4. Depression

Depression sets in when the realization hits that the bargaining didn't work. At this point people become aware of the losses associated with the change and what they have to leave behind. In the workplace, this stage might manifest as staff feeling unmotivated to meet goals or deadlines, and could lead to an increase in absenteeism.

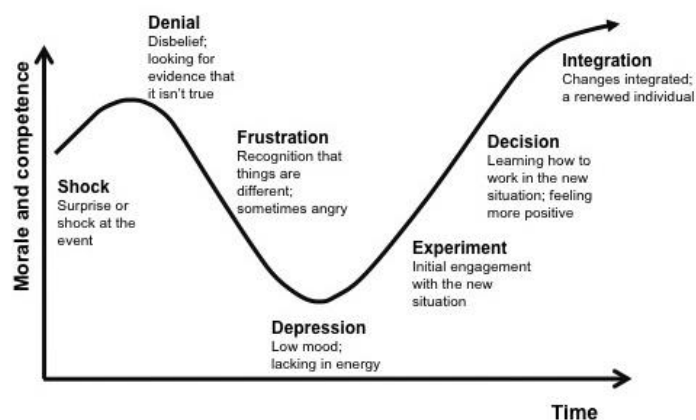
#### 5. Acceptance

When people realize that fighting change won't make it go away, they move into acceptance, where they are resigned to the change and decide to stop fighting it. In the workplace, this stage can motivate people to expand their skills and look for new possibilities.

## The Change Curve

The stages of change are usually represented as a change curve diagram. However, it is important to remember that the process of change is not linear. It's easy to assume that the change process begins with "Shock" or "Denial," moves smoothly through each stage, and ends with "Acceptance." But Kubler-Ross emphasized that it is normal for people to traverse back and forth between stages and to even get stuck in a stage temporarily.

## The Kübler-Ross change curve



## The Value of the Kubler-Ross Model in Workplace Change

The Kubler-Ross model can help leaders understand how employees process change. When changes in the workplace require that individuals adjust to new roles or environments, they may experience some of these emotions and reactions.

To prepare for a major change, leaders need to ask themselves how staff might react, particularly if employees perceive the change as affecting them negatively. Leaders need to empathize with how staff may be feeling and the stages of grief they may experience, and learn how to support staff through changes. Understanding people's emotions during the stages of change and employing techniques for effective communication, empathy, and respect is key for effective leadership during periods of change.

Adapted from Kubler-Ross Five Stage Model, Change Management Coach, Mark Connelly (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.change-management-coach.com/kubler-ross.html>

