

How to manage culture through change - Culture Amp

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the challenge of maintaining organizational culture during periods of change. The author, CEO of change agency NOBL, argues that people resist loss rather than change itself, identifying six types of loss employees experience: control, pride, narrative, time, competence, and familiarity. Drawing on William Bridges' transition model from the 1980s, the piece distinguishes between change (instantaneous events) and transition (behavioral processes requiring three phases: ending, adjustment, and new beginning). The author presents field observations from client work, illustrating how leaders commonly skip the 'ending' phase and jump to promoting new initiatives. The article concludes that effective change management requires acknowledging loss, addressing each component during adjustment, and celebrating only after proper transition work is complete.

Key Insights

1. People resist loss rather than change itself, with six primary types of loss identified: control, pride, narrative, time, competence, and familiarity
2. Change happens instantly but transition is a three-phase behavioral process requiring sequential attention to endings, adjustment, and new beginnings
3. Most leaders erroneously focus on promoting new initiatives while failing to acknowledge what employees are losing in the transition

Practical Takeaways

- Identify what each stakeholder group stands to lose during organizational changes and directly address these losses
- Create ceremonies or memorials to honor past achievements before introducing new practices

Frameworks Mentioned

William Bridges transition model — Three-phase process distinguishing change from transition: ending, adjustment, and new beginning

Critical Analysis

Strengths include practical field experience from a specialized change agency and clear categorization of employee loss types. The Bridges framework provides actionable structure. Limitations include reliance on

anecdotal client examples without systematic data, lack of empirical validation for the six loss categories, and potential selection bias from consulting engagements. The article reflects practitioner perspective rather than rigorous research methodology.

Organizational Practice

NOBL conducts spectrum exercises with clients to identify change comfort levels across different scenarios. Organizations use ceremonies and memorials to honor past achievements during transitions, such as framing discontinued print campaigns or creating product graveyards.

Strategic Implications

The findings suggest that change management approaches focusing primarily on future benefits may be counterproductive without first addressing employee losses. The three-phase transition model indicates that successful organizational change requires sequential attention to endings before promoting new initiatives.

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