

Meyer's Management Models

71. Five Phases of Change

Which stages do I need to go through to realize lasting organizational change?

Key Definitions

As outlined in the Mind the Gap Model (*Meyer's Management Models #1*), organizational change is the process of transitioning an organization (or parts thereof) from a current state to an intended future state. Some organizational changes are *incremental* (small and gradual), others *transformational* (large and rapid), while most are somewhere in between.

Few organizational changes take place in a fixed number of orderly steps. Most processes are like rivers – messy streams of activities, occasionally speeding up and slowing down, flowing forward, but also curling back. Therefore, it is better to speak of generic *phases* or *stages* in a change journey, instead of thinking in terms of distinct change steps.

Conceptual Model

The *Five Phases of Change* model outlines the five general stages recognizable in any change journey, as the organization moves from the current state through mountainous ups and downs to the desired future state. The five phases overlap along the time-axis, visually conveying the message that a change journey doesn't take place in neat sequential steps, but that change activities belonging to different phases can sometimes take place simultaneously and that the journey can occasionally even loop back to an earlier phase. The model is intended to be a simple map to plot complex change processes and to help recognize what type of interventions might be required given the phase that the organizational change is in.



Key Elements

The five generic phases of organizational change are the following:

1. **Formulation: Strategy for Change.** The first phase of any change journey is to determine where the voyage is going (*change destination*), who the voyagers will be (*change stakeholders*) and how the voyage will take place (*change approach*). The key challenge

is to avoid the *ambiguity hazard* – the danger of not making clear choices. For a change journey to be successful, the definition of the future state must give a concrete sense of direction, while a viable path for getting there must be set. “We’ll see” is not a strategy.

2. **Preparation: Readiness for Change.** The second phase is to ensure that the organization is ready to embark upon the selected path, by taking away barriers to change (securing *change ability*) and resistance to change (securing *change willingness*). The key challenge is to avoid the *contracting hazard* – the danger of accepting a change strategy for which the organization is not ready. If the organization can’t be made willing and able to follow the selected change path, it might be necessary to loop back and reformulate the strategy.
3. **Mobilization: Initiation of Change.** The third phase is to get the ball rolling, by creating a virtuous cycle of engaging sufficient stakeholders to realize visible changes, thereby building confidence and commitment, that in turn will convince more stakeholders to jump on the bandwagon. The key challenge is to avoid the *momentum hazard* – the danger of not reaching take-off speed. If too many stakeholders are reluctant to commit themselves to the change journey, tangible results will be lacking, triggering a vicious downward spiral.
4. **Realization: Dynamics of Change.** The fourth phase encompasses all of the actual work of carrying out the required changes. In this, often long, leg of the change journey, the ball needs to keep rolling and a constant stream of activities needs to be completed, while results need to be achieved. The key challenge is to avoid the *setback hazard* – the danger of suffering a reversal of fortunes, leading people to question the feasibility of the changes. To be successful, organizations need to overcome such blows and carry on.
5. **Consolidation: Securing of Change.** The fifth phase is concerned with making sure that all of the changes are completed, even if resources are running low, people are getting tired and new change projects present themselves as even more urgent. The key challenge is to avoid the *anchoring hazard* – the danger of not securing all of the realized changes, with people backsliding into old systems and behaviors. Successfully finishing the change journey requires the diligent discipline of tightening up the last nuts and bolts.

Key Insights

- **Change journeys are all different.** Organizational changes come in many shapes and sizes. They can be broad or narrow in *scope* (breadth), large or small in *scale* (height), and rapid or slow in *speed* (length). Moreover, *what* is changed and *who* is involved can vary widely. Therefore, any model of change will necessarily be big picture and generic.
- **Change journeys have phases, not steps.** Almost all change journeys do not follow orderly steps but are messy, complex processes in which only general phases can be recognized. Yet even these phases can overlap, and looping back can take place.
- **Change journeys have five phases.** Each organizational change will pass through five phases: *Formulation* (determining the change strategy); *preparation* (getting ready to change); *mobilization* (initiating the change); *realization* (implementing the various changes); and *consolidation* (wrapping up and securing the changes).
- **Change journeys are hazardous, not straightforward.** Change is not only messy but also full of ups and downs, due to the difficulties that must be dealt with along the way.
- **Change journeys have five hazards.** Each phase has its own key danger that needs to be handled: The *ambiguity hazard* is the threat of a vaguely formulated change direction; the *contracting hazard* is taking on a change for which the organization is not ready; the *momentum hazard* is not reaching take-off speed; the *setback hazard* of giving up after a disappointment; and the *anchoring hazard* is not securing the almost completed change.

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Insightful Tools to Kickstart Your Thinking

Publication Schedule

<i>July 2019</i>	<i>Mind the Gap Model</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2019</i>	<i>Digital Platform Map</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>September 2019</i>	<i>Interaction Pressure Gauge</i>	<i>Interpersonal Interaction</i>
<i>October 2019</i>	<i>Revenue Model Framework</i>	<i>Revenue Model Typology</i>
<i>November 2019</i>	<i>House of Engagement</i>	<i>Organizational Engagement</i>
<i>December 2019</i>	<i>Confidence Quotient</i>	<i>Trust Building</i>
<i>January 2020</i>	<i>Competition Tornado</i>	<i>Competitive Strategy</i>
<i>February 2020</i>	<i>11C Synergy Model</i>	<i>Corporate Synergy Management</i>
<i>March 2020</i>	<i>Leadership Fairness Model</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>April 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Agility Model</i>	<i>Strategy Process Approach</i>
<i>May 2020</i>	<i>Control Panel</i>	<i>Corporate Control Dimensions</i>
<i>June 2020</i>	<i>Rising Star Framework</i>	<i>Talent Management</i>
<i>July 2020</i>	<i>Strategy Development Cycle</i>	<i>Strategy Process Steps</i>
<i>August 2020</i>	<i>7I Corporate Center Model</i>	<i>Corporate Organization</i>
<i>September 2020</i>	<i>Storytelling Scripts</i>	<i>Leadership Communication</i>
<i>October 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Bets Framework</i>	<i>Strategic Decision-Making</i>
<i>November 2020</i>	<i>Rebound Model of Resilience</i>	<i>Organizational Resilience</i>
<i>December 2020</i>	<i>4C Leadership Capabilities</i>	<i>Leadership Competences</i>
<i>January 2021</i>	<i>Digital Product Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>February 2021</i>	<i>Digital Distribution Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>March 2021</i>	<i>Empowerment Cycle</i>	<i>Employee Empowerment</i>
<i>April 2021</i>	<i>Innovation Box</i>	<i>Innovation Approaches</i>
<i>May 2021</i>	<i>Knowledge Sharing Bridges</i>	<i>Best Practice Sharing</i>
<i>June 2021</i>	<i>Followership Cycle</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>July 2021</i>	<i>Everest Model of Change</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2021</i>	<i>Fruits & Nuts Matrix</i>	<i>Priority-Setting</i>
<i>September 2021</i>	<i>Powerhouse Framework</i>	<i>People & Organization Strategy</i>
<i>October 2021</i>	<i>Strategy Hourglass</i>	<i>Strategy-Making Steps</i>
<i>November 2021</i>	<i>Disciplined Dialogue Model</i>	<i>Interpersonal Communication</i>
<i>December 2021</i>	<i>Team Building Cycle</i>	<i>Team Building Process</i>
<i>January 2022</i>	<i>Market System Map</i>	<i>External Analysis Framework</i>
<i>February 2022</i>	<i>Strategic Alignment Model</i>	<i>Business Level Strategy</i>
<i>March 2022</i>	<i>Creativity X-Factor</i>	<i>Creativity Enhancement</i>
<i>April 2022</i>	<i>Organizational System Map</i>	<i>Organizational Analysis</i>
<i>May 2022</i>	<i>Corporate Value Creation Model</i>	<i>Corporate Level Strategy</i>
<i>June 2022</i>	<i>Change Manager's Toolbox</i>	<i>Change Methodologies</i>

July 2022	Sustainable You Model	Personal Sustainability
August 2022	Value Proposition Dial	Business Level Strategy
September 2022	The Tree of Power	Organizational Power
October 2022	Psychological Safety Compass	Team Dynamics
November 2022	Strategic Action Modes	Strategy Process
December 2022	Corporate Management Styles	HQ Management
January 2023	Thinking Directions Framework	Reasoning Skills
February 2023	5I Innovation Pipeline	Innovation Process
March 2023	Resistance to Change Typology	Change Management
April 2023	Ambition Radar Screen	Motivation Analysis
May 2023	Corporate Strategy Framework	Corporate Strategy
June 2023	Cultural Fabric Model	Organizational Culture
July 2023	New Pyramid Principle	Presentation Approaches
August 2023	Activity System Dial	Value Creation Analysis
September 2023	Customer-Centricity Circle	Organizational Design
October 2023	Status Snakes & Ladders	Leadership Branding
November 2023	Stakeholder Stance Map	Stakeholder Management
December 2023	Best Practice Sharing Modes	Sharing Methods
January 2024	Duty of Care Feedback Model	Feedback Method
February 2024	BOLD Vision Framework	Organizational Vision
March 2024	MOVING Mission Framework	Organizational Mission
April 2024	Leadership Circle Map	Leadership Skills
May 2024	Digitalization Staircase	Digital Strategy
June 2024	Time Management Funnel	Personal Time Management
July 2024	Wicked Problem Scorecard	Organizational Decision-Making
August 2024	Hunting & Farming Typology	Sales Management
September 2024	Guiding STAR Matrix	Objective Setting Approach
October 2024	Corporate Synergy Typology	Corporate Level Strategy
November 2024	Self-Centered Thinking Traps	Thinking Styles
December 2024	Sustainability Maturity Ladder	Sustainability Management
January 2025	Top Line Growth Pie	Growth Strategy
February 2025	Innovation Sins & Virtues	Innovation Management
March 2025	Interpersonal Interaction Drivers	Communication Determinants
April 2025	Frictionless Flow Framework	Customer Journey
May 2025	Five Phases of Change	Change Management
June 2025	Core Courage Model	Leadership Behaviors
July 2025	Performance Assignment Matrix	Corporate Strategy
August 2025	Embedded Innovation Pipeline	Innovation Management
September 2025	New Learning Curve	Personal Learning
October 2025	Synergy Value Matrix	Corporate Level Strategy

November 2025	Triple Diamond Model	Organizational Decision-Making
December 2025	Embedded Identity Model	Personal Awareness
January 2026	Partnership Distance Model	Interorganizational Relations
February 2026	Dynamic Organization Paradigm	Human-centered Organization
March 2026	Leadership Journey	Leadership Development
April 2026	Low Performance Team Slide	Team Building