

## Learning on the Run 7: Pitfalls of Transition

How might we help leaders assess their feelings and readiness for planned transitions?

**The Request.** The senior leadership team of a regional government science research institute requested help in reviewing their planned change effort to restructure the institute.

**Larger Context.** Given the propensity to conduct research, the institute began a systematic study of several possible organizational structures that were being considered according to criteria previously established. A few of the criteria included requirements to form more partnerships with clients and encourage more client involvement in deciding the focus of research. The leadership was getting ready, on the basis of employee input, to select a future structure for the institute. They realized that the employees and scientists would be anxious about the planned changes given the level of uncertainty over job security, changing roles and the perceived lack of control over their research agenda. There was also the belief that the leadership team may not have been giving an honest appraisal of their feelings and wants as well.

**Consulting Intervention.** A half-day workshop was conducted with the senior leadership team. A model of the emotional phases of change was presented<sup>1</sup>. The emotions depicted were: Interest, certainty, doubt, hope, confidence, joyful pride, and satisfaction. Each individual placed a dot on the curve that represented their experience at this moment of their restructuring effort. The team was able to discuss the results, formulate some conclusions and consider implications for their change effort. Additionally, each person took a 9 item, 7-point semantic differential scale depicting important pitfalls that typically occur during change efforts<sup>2</sup>. The team scores (average and range) for each item were compiled. The team was able to discuss their own analysis of the data and draw conclusions and implications for practical next steps.

**Last Line.** When the hidden emotions of leaders who are sponsoring a large change effort may be creating unintentional barriers, the Emotional Cycle of Change and Pitfalls of Change models may help create more transparency and provide ideas for practical sponsorship.

<sup>1</sup> The model was adapted from: Don Kelley and Daryl R. Conner, The Emotional Cycle of Change, in JE Jones and JW Pfeiffer, eds. *The 1979 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators* (San Diego, Calif.: University Associates, Inc., 1979). 31. Ibid., 118; Ronald Havelock, *The Change Agent's Guide to Innovation in Education*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Educational Technology Publications, 1973)

<sup>2</sup> The Pitfalls Model was adapted from: Bridges, W. *Organizations in Transitions*, 1989,. Davis & Salasin. The Utilization of Evaluation. In: *Handbook of Evaluation Research*, Vol I, 1975. Glaser, Abelson, & Garrison. *Putting Knowledge to Use*, 1983. Havelock, R.G., *The Change Agent's Guide to Innovation In Education*, 1973. and Shepard, H. A. *Rules of thumb for change agents*.

© 2015 Philip S. Heller, Learning on the Run 7

Philip S. Heller is a senior associate with Learning Design Associates. For over 40 years he has helped plan systems change and develop leaders in government, academia, medical centers and community agencies.