## **Managing Change and Transition on the Multidisciplinary Team**

*“The only constant in life is change.” – Heraclitus*

Before jumping into this article, take a moment to think of the first word or feeling that arises when you read the word ***change***. What is your initial response? Does it feel expansive or restrictive? Perhaps somewhere in between?

We started with this exact question at the [MDT](https://www.regionalcacs.org/mdt-facilitator-peer-forums/) Facilitator Peer Forum in June, a virtual space for multidisciplinary team (MDT) facilitators hosted by the four regional children's advocacy centers (RCACs). The responses were wide-ranging: fear, opportunity, exhaustion, innovation, and resistance are just a sampling of what we heard during the forum.

While we know that change and transition are regular occurrences throughout the life of an MDT, we also know that an individual’s response to change is varied and contextual. Change is both tactical and emotional. In this issue, we will explore both components and provide strategies and resources to add to your toolbox. The strategies we share cater to the experience of the Team Facilitator, given their [unique role](https://www.regionalcacs.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/RCAC-Beyond-Case-Review-Sept-2021_FINAL-1.pdf) of supporting the MDT as a whole, and the many moving parts that lead to successful outcomes for children. However, everyone can benefit from greater awareness of change and a deeper understanding of your default response to it.

Let’s start with some important definitions. **Change** refers to the external shift that takes place in a situation and can be initiated by us or imposed upon us by external sources. **Transition** refers to the internal process that we go through to make change our own – as individuals and as teams. For example, a common change we see on MDTs is team member turnover and the introduction of a new team member. The arrival of the new team member is change, while the process it takes for the team to onboard, adopt, and integrate the new team member is the transition.

Many of you reading this are seeking tactical strategies to address external shifts. Tactical strategies give us a sense of control, they help us feel like we can *manage* change. However, we are going to start with the emotional side of the work – the transition process –because your initial response to the word change was likely an emotional one. Remember the words opportunity, resistance, innovation, and exhaustion that we spoke of earlier? Our beliefs, feelings, influences, past experiences, and mindset are all wrapped up in the emotional side of change and transition.

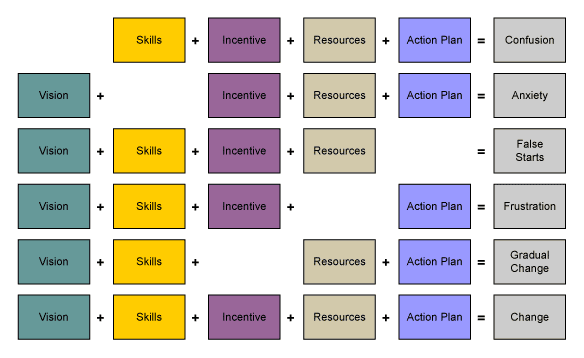
[William Bridges](https://wmbridges.com/) is an author, speaker and organizational consultant who created the [Bridges Transition Model](https://wmbridges.com/about/what-is-transition/) that has been used for more than 30 years to help teams and organizations understand and effectively manage transitions. This model introduces three overlapping phases, defined as endings, neutral zone and new beginnings. It reminds us that it is just as important to honor endings as it is to celebrate the new beginning.

1. **Endings** require us to identify what we must let go of to leave old ways behind and make room for new ways. As a Team Facilitator, you can help your team understand and accept the reason behind the change and identify what you would like to carry forward about your current culture. Make space for grieving the old ways.
2. **The neutral zone** is the land of not knowing - when old ways no longer work, yet new ways are not yet clear or comfortable for the team. This land of ambiguity will sound familiar as it is what we’ve all been living in during the global pandemic. As a Team Facilitator, you can normalize the transition process, and help the team shift from “this is happening TO us” to “this is happening FOR us.” In this phase it is important to emphasize communication and set short-term goals to manage expectations.
3. **New beginnings** are when the new ways begin to emerge because of the work that was done in the first two phases. This phase is most successful when teams have spent time honoring endings and embracing the uncertainty that comes with the Neutral Zone. As a Team Facilitator, you can practice and model the new behavior, help the team visualize success and celebrate the small wins.

As you may have guessed by now, each one of these phases is critical to supporting the beliefs, feelings, and mindset of the team through any transition. You may have also noticed that you might naturally gravitate towards one of these phases that feels more comfortable. When we have presented this model to Team Facilitators and MDTs, most people like to avoid the neutral zone and get straight to the new beginning. Organizational resilience is the ability of an organization (or MDT) to anticipate, prepare for, respond, and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruption in order to survive and thrive. Sitting in the neutral zone a little longer allows us to set and celebrate short-term goals within the change that we’re experiencing and prepare for the shift. This is your invitation to sit in the neutral zone a little longer because it is in the neutral zone that we strengthen our resilience as a team and bring clarity to what is ahead.

In addition to understanding and supporting the emotional needs and responses of our team members, we can also begin to see change as a tactical challenge. MDTs and CACs are asked to both react to changes that are imposed upon us from external forces and to initiate change to improve services for children and families.

The [Ambrose Model of Change](https://cliweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/TransformationalChange2-1.pdf) pictured below can be helpful in planning change or identifying where we may have gotten stuck, off track or missed a step in a change process imposed upon us. This model suggests that when we can tend to all five components of complex change (listed below), we will see tangible results. However, when one or more of these components is missing, we may experience confusion, anxiety, false starts, frustration, or slow gradual change.



[Image Source](https://inthelearningage.com/2017/05/15/lead-with-training-look-beyond-the-recipe/)

1. **Vision** – It is critical to have a vision for change that is as clear as possible. What is the new reality we are hoping to create or arrive at as a result of the change? What will we be doing, seeing, hearing, and feeling when this change is successful? Communicating the vision often and consistently is critical.
2. **Skills** – All change requires skills, some more technical than others. As you embark on a change, make a list of all the skill sets needed to be successful and ensure that these skills are available on the team or through outside support such as a consultant.
3. **Incentive** – This is essentially answering “what’s in it for me?” for each team member. What will make this change worth it for each member to engage in and adopt? The incentive, just like the vision, should be communicated often.
4. **Resources** – As you embark on change, consider all the resources that will be required to be successful, including financial, people, energy (such as motivation and belief), space and often the influence of key leaders from various disciplines.
5. **Action Plan** – To address the ambiguity that we already explored in the Neutral Zone, crafting a clear plan of action that defines roles, responsibilities and key benchmarks will support the team in measuring progress towards the desired change.

Given the complexity of change and transition on MDTs and CACs, it is important to experiment with strategies that best support the emotional and tactical aspects of change that will work for your MDT or CAC. Remember that navigating change and transition is a grey area that requires curiosity and a learning mindset. Use the models above as a guide and know that we are here to support you.

Additional resources for Team Facilitators can be found on the [multidisciplinary team resource page](https://www.regionalcacs.org/multidisciplinary-team-mdt/) on the new RCAC website. If you are interested in training and technical assistance for Team Facilitators, check out the [Team Facilitator Training Guide](https://www.regionalcacs.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Team-Facilitator-Training-Guide-5.9.2022_508.pdf) or reach out to your regional CAC.

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**Kori Stephens** (she/her) is a culture curator, leadership coach and organizational consultant. Her personal mission is to amplify the resilience of communities by empowering radically aligned leaders. Kori began her career in the child abuse field at the Midwest Regional CAC serving as a strategic advisor, organizational consultant, trainer, facilitator and leadership coach for 11 years. In 2020, she launched her own consulting firm, Resonance Rising, as a sanctuary for recovering from burnout, dropping into deep restorative soul care, and re-igniting joy and passion in community change agents across the country. After two years as a solopreneur, she decided to rejoin the movement as a Senior Chapter Specialist for the Southern Regional CAC. She believes that leading people is both a responsibility and a gift that requires a deep commitment to personal growth and evolution. In her current role she supports the development and growth of Chapters through strategic planning and initiatives, executive coaching and transformational learning experiences. When she's not working in the CAC movement you can find Kori at the kick-boxing gym or dance studio and exploring the great outdoors with her family.

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