

# Understanding and managing how people react to change

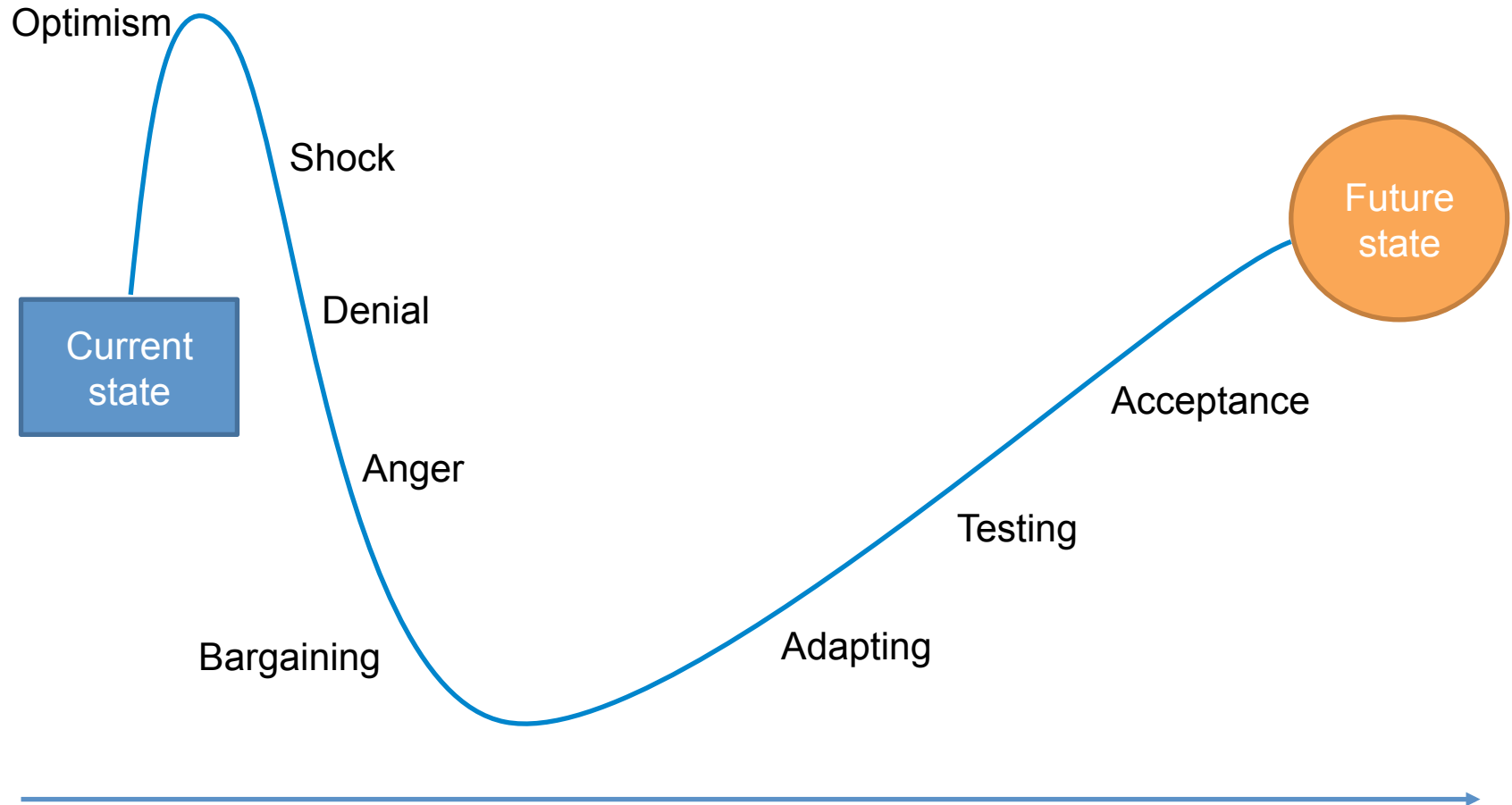


# How change affects people

When we experience a major change, we will encounter in ourselves and those around us a variety of responses.

- The Change Curve is a useful model that can help you to understand the emotional reactions that people can have in response to a change.
- It is generally accepted that at some point, most people will move through all of these stages, although some responses may only happen briefly. So briefly, in fact, that they may go unnoticed.
- The Change Curve is not necessarily a linear process. Events that occur as the change progresses may cause people to move back through the curve to previous state.

# The change curve



# Recognising and responding to behaviours in the change curve

## Optimism

### Typical behaviours

- Initially, people will tend to feel positive about the proposed change
- The focus on the positive aspects of the new way of working can lead to over-enthusiasm and people overlooking any down sides

### Useful tactics

- Harness people's positivity to create momentum behind change and gain ambassadors who can role model new behaviours or pilot new processes
- Praise people's support and remember to engage with them regularly so their optimism doesn't fade
- Set realistic expectations to avoid any potential disappointments

# Recognising and responding to behaviours in the change curve

## Shock

### Typical behaviours

- As more information becomes available or people have time to reflect, they could become unable to relate to or discuss what's happening
- You might notice people react with silence or apparent compliance

### Useful tactics

- Allow people the time and space they need to work through their personal thinking – don't force them to adjust to your pace
- Focus on building and maintaining positive relationships, especially in less formal environments
- Encourage your team to approach you at times that suit them – adopt an Open Door policy and make sure they know it is genuine

# Recognising and responding to behaviours in the change curve

## Denial

### Typical behaviours

- As people move beyond shock, they might enter a state of denial. Meetings and deadlines can be ignored and they won't be engaging with the change

### Useful tactics

- Avoid over-zealously challenging or confronting people
- Support them in taking small steps towards the change, e.g. reading more information or going along to a meeting
- Set simple, short-term change-related tasks, and follow up informally on a one-to-one basis

# Recognising and responding to behaviours in the change curve

## Anger

### Typical behaviours

- Next, people might start to direct their frustration and hurt at others.
- You might see knee-jerk reactions, emotional outbursts, back-stabbing, malicious compliance and seething silence

### Useful tactics

- Accept signs of anger as being legitimate – don't trivialise them. Empathise and try to support them in working through what is upsetting them
- Listen without necessarily offering solutions; show you understand the person's issues
- Identify people who are still feeling the same sense of anger, but aren't vocalising it, and support them in the same way

# Recognising and responding to behaviours in the change curve

## Bargaining

### Typical behaviours

- After anger comes bargaining. People might try to negotiate – offering to comply with change in return for other benefits.
- They may also find excuses for not implementing some parts of the change, or request adjustments like lower targets or deadline extensions

### Useful tactics

- Don't immediately start making concessions, and be sure that you understand the implications of agreeing to any adjustments
- Be consistent with your messages and the rationale for change
- Deal with bargaining on a one-to-one basis

# Recognising and responding to behaviours in the change curve

## Adapting

### Typical behaviours

- People now start to come to terms with the reality that they need to change
- Although they may be regaining their old sense of control, this is usually an internal process and not something you'll observe

### Useful tactics

- As people start to get used to the idea of change, it's important to offer praise and encouragement
- Continue to demonstrate the positive aspects of the change, enabling people to see what good looks like as they start to adapt

# Recognising and responding to behaviours in the change curve

## Testing

### Typical behaviours

- At this stage, people will start to explore the new ways of working
- They might set themselves some trial deadlines, or start evaluating the impact of the change

### Useful tactics

- Extend the level of involvement and ownership of decision-making to people who are at this stage
- Encourage and praise everyone who's willing to act, especially early pioneers
- Initiate learning reviews

# Recognising and responding to behaviours in the change curve

## Acceptance

### Typical behaviours

- People have come through the change curve and are embracing the new way of working
- Performance improves and people are interested in the continuous evolution of the change

### Useful tactics

- Publicly and privately acknowledge any progress made, and identify the key lessons learned
- Use relevant or agreed reward strategies
- Initiate and lead continuous improvement efforts early on