Reflections on the book by William Bridges <u>Managing Transitions.</u>

In the almost thirty years I have worked as a corporate manager and senior executive, I had never found such a great resource about understanding organizational change. The organizations of which I have been a part have never made a clear distinction between change and transition, let alone how transformation develops from transition. In defining these terms, change is the situational component. It may be the move to a new place, the retirement or loss of a key player in your life or work, it could be the reorganization of the roles of the team you are on, or any number of changes we experience in life and work. Change is situational because it is real, concrete, identifiable, etc. You know when change happens, and it is often abrupt which may significantly disrupt your life. Transition, on the other hand, is a psychological component. It is the process that people go through as they internalize, work out, and eventually come to terms with the details of the new reality that the change brings about. When most people talk about change, they typically focus on the transformational outcome that the change ultimately produces. However, when change actually occurs the transition process can continue for a protracted period of time until the transition process transforms into a new state of normal. People who are affected by change have to understand the new arrangements brought about during the transition period and come to terms with how they'll be affected by evolving into their new normal.

While change is usually abrupt, the transition that follows is quite different. The starting point for dealing with transition is the realization that you'll have to leave the old situation behind. It is a normal human tendency to try to hold onto the old pattern of life, however a successful situational change hinges on the new thing that is emerging. In other words, the psychological transition depends on letting go of the old reality as well as the old identity you had before the change took place. Letting go is then followed with embracing the transition and allowing it to transform you into a new reality. This takes courage, but is made easier in knowing that this process is a normal component that impacts all of humanity at different times in their life. There are any number of personal, relational, and organizational changes that foster this process including - marriage, parenthood, moving/relocation, job changes, etc. Each of these and countless other changes engage the change/transition/transformation process.

Thus, the three components of all change dynamics involve: 1) Change – the ending of the old order of things; 2) Transition – the neutral zone when the re-patterning of my life begins to take place and the old and maladaptive habits are replaced with new ones that are better adapted to the world in which we now find our self; and 3) the new beginning where the new paradigm is established and lived out. The courageous part of the process involves letting go of the old, allowing the re-patterning to take hold, and then intentionally making a new beginning where these processes reorient and renew my life.

As Christians we have an advantage over the worldly approach to the process of change/transition/transformation because we have confidence that God is intrinsically engaged

in this entire process. Faith and hope allow Christians to face change with the confidence of a hopeful future beyond the present circumstance… even when the process is hard or painful.

Paul wrote to the Romans nearly 2,000 years ago in comforting them in the midst of their own process of change/transition/transformation…

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." – Romans 8:18-28.

This was written obviously to engender hope and perseverance in standing in God's promise and walking forward… this is what Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is all about as well. Christians have confidence that God is involved in all the circumstances of our life… including the change/transition/transformation process. For the Christian, knowing God is in the process and looking for His presence focuses us on cooperating with the Spirit who is actively guiding the process.

I now realize that if I had Managing Transitions as a resource when I was undergoing personal change as well as in initiating organizational change in the organizations in which I served, it certainly would have made me a more understanding, compassionate, and effective change agent. As ambassadors of Christ, we are all called to be ministers of the Gospel which relationally and organizationally involves our being an agent of change. Jesus' call for His disciples to become "salt" and "light" is mindful of this charge to be change agents in the world… to advance the Kingdom of God. The Great Commandment and the Great Commission are the calling of every Christian in willing cooperation with God, not just the leadership.

One aspect of the book I found particularly useful involved the idea about recognizing and allowing for the emotional components to surface, find their voice, and encourage resolution of the change/transition process. Dealing with the emotional and psychological aspects of change and transition is something many organizations are now approaching with grief counseling and bereavement help, divorce counseling, etc., but in terms of the garden variety of change they pretty much ignore it altogether. Staff changes in a team are disruptive,

but the friendships and collaborative relationships developed require their own response… not to mention the replacement staff that result. Any paradigm or process change engages this same dynamic, and as leaders we need to be more mindful of how these actions affect people and take the time to explain, engage and encourage transition.

Another concept I found helpful involved the discussion of "normalizing the neutral zone" which acknowledges that when change occurs, employing the conceptual example of the "wilderness experience" as a change paradigm. Immediately after change, people find themselves wandering through a very real wilderness… a land that they don't know or recognize before they reach the destination of transformation into their new operational paradigm. In this wilderness state, the outlook, attitudes, values, self-images, and ways of thinking that were functional in the past have to 'die out' before people can be ready for their new life in the present environment. Christians and Jews are familiar with the story of how Moses led Israel out of Egypt. This was a very real and difficult change. Even though God was with Moses and the people and led the people out of Egypt, they found it impossible to let go of their past identity. Thus, the 40 years they spent in the wilderness "neutral zone" was necessary to get Egypt out of the people. This was a long and protracted transition that was necessary before the transformation in their new reality in the Promised Land.

In addition to the change/transition/transformation process, there are 7 phases that occur during the life cycle of every organization from inception to collapse. These phases include: 1) dreaming the dream [conceptualization]; 2) launching the venture [defining goals, objectives, and participants]; 3) getting it organized [planning phase], 4) organizationally making it happen [operational]; 5) becoming an institution [maturity]; 6) realizing the dream [success]; and 7) dying [having outlived usefulness/relevance]. These 7 phases are prototypically a natural part of every organization's life cycle.   To more effectively manage the process of growth, the book offers the insights of the "Anthropological Laws of Organizational Development" that help explain how these phases play out in a person's life within the organization.

The First Law of Organizational Development: "those who were most at home with the necessary activities and arrangements of one phase, are often the ones who are most likely to experience resistance with the subsequent phase as a personal setback." This concept helps to explain why people will resist an undertaking they recognize as potentially having a more dramatic effect upon them. More effective we are in managing the process means understanding the underlying transitional factors that individuals within the organization will face and planning accordingly.

The Second Law of Organizational Development: "the successful outcome of any phase of organizational change triggers its demise by creating challenges that the organization is not equipped to handle." "The things that made an organization successful in its infancy – such as extreme entrepreneurial hustle and risk, must give way to organizational rules and structure as

the organization grows and matures."

The Third Law of Organizational Development: "in any significant transition, the thing that the organization needs to let go of is the very thing that got it this far." This is an intuitively obvious outplay of the second law but explains the psychological resistance organizations need to overcome to properly develop into a successful operation.

The Fourth Law of Organizational Development: "whenever there is a painful, troubled time in the organization, a developmental transition is probably going on." Anyone who has been with an organization for a long period of time certainly understands these processes, but identifying the reasons behind such transitions makes them more tolerable.

The Fifth Law of Organizational Development: "during the first half of the life cycle through the making it phase – not to make a transition when the time is ripe for one to occur will cause developmental retardation in the organization." Being aware of the change process necessarily means being watchful for the correct time to initiate change. Failure to do some of the difficult things at the appropriate time means struggling though more difficult things at a later date.

Any senior manager of an organization can certainly relate to these phases but understanding that they are a normal part of organizational growth and realizing what they mean is extremely useful to guide people through the organizational life process. However, I found that I had a philosophical difficulty with the book – I observed that the book approached the organization primarily as an entity in itself apart from the people who comprise it. While this may be the prevailing mindset of many CEO/owners, most managers and executives operate with the principle that the people are the entity – apart from the people who comprise it, there is no organization. In this context it is necessary to understand the 'bifurcation' of any institution as 1) organization [structure] and 2) organism [life identity] that gives the organization value. While the 2 are inter-related, the organism is obviously where the intrinsic value remains. This understanding obviously impacts the appropriate standard of care leaders should employ. While this should apply to corporate America, this should be foundationally true of the organization of the church. In many organizations, the owners of a company operate with impunity with regard to change. While they have the legal right to render whatever change they desire, they need to be aware of the "collateral damage" that often occurs in the form of hurt or lost people in the process of doing business. I once worked for one of the most compassionate owners of a Fortune 500 company who when faced with a catastrophic turn of economic events, found the need to close down a number of their divisional offices. This owner took it upon himself to go to each office being closed and personally explaining what was happening and why. He observed that "when a friend or neighbor loses a job it's a recession; but when it's your job it's a depression." All too often those in authority do not think through adequately the results of their decisions let alone the manner in which they deliver them. This man made an extremely positive life-long impression

upon me about dealing with people in a noble and honorable fashion.

In corporate America it is usually understood that the interest of the organization supersede the interests of the individual employees. However, in the church this is a fundamentally a different matter. A church by nature is not merely an organization, it is an organism… it is the Body of Christ. Thus, a church should never be managed solely as an organization.   Church leaders are not owners but rather stewards, and they have both a moral and ethical responsibility to the individuals in their shepherding care as well as for those they have managerial oversight in the employ of the church. Most Christian leaders lament that the world has invaded their church… we now have nearly the same amount of divorces as the prevailing society in which we live. That is unfortunately just the start; we have nearly the same occurrence of adultery, substance abuse, spousal and child abuse as the surrounding society. Not to mention the ethical aspects of cheating on taxes, and other salacious appetites. There needs to be a different mindset employed in the church. In an era where compassionate ownership and responsible management has been countered by a mindset of "get it done at any cost and don't be too concerned about the affect it has on the component resources (individuals)," church leadership needs to set themselves apart as well as being more transparent in their managing practices.

In conclusion I found this an extremely well-conceived and thoughtful book. I felt that it has great application for owners, executives and managers of all organizations – including the church. It seems to me that more harm tends to be inflicted by well-intended but misguided leaders, especially in the church. Hence, expectations that frame the philosophical approach to organizational change should be carefully developed, planned, communicated, and made in such a way as to reinforce the value of the contributors (the organism) that comprise the heart and value of the organization. Actions initiating change have to be made in a compassionate and understanding manner that acknowledge and encourage the high performing stars while not diminishing or denigrating the rank and file. Christian leaders particularly need to maintain an attitude of stewardship in regard to Godly leadership in a compassionate and transparent manner. In the church, there is no justification for high handed leadership practices regardless of how much prayer is claimed to have gone into the decision making process… we must do better. The CEO mentality of corporate America has no place in the church.