

## ***Lewin/Schein's Change Theory***

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Kurt Lewin theorized a three-stage model of change that has come to be known as the unfreezing-change-refreeze model that requires prior learning to be rejected and replaced. Edgar Schein provided further detail for a more comprehensive model of change calling this approach “cognitive redefinition.”

### Stage 1 – becoming motivated to change (unfreezing)

This phase of change is built on the theory that human behavior is established by past observational learning and cultural influences. Change requires adding new forces for change or removal of some of the existing factors that are at play in perpetuating the behavior. This unfreezing process has three sub-processes that relate to a readiness and motivation to change.

- Disconfirmation where present conditions lead to dissatisfaction, such as not meeting personal goals. However, the larger the gap between what is believed and what needs to be believed for change to occur, the more likely the new information will be ignored.
- Previous beliefs now being seen as invalid creates “survival anxiety.” However, this may not be sufficient to prompt change if learning anxiety is present.
- Learning anxiety triggers defensiveness and resistance due to the pain of having to unlearn what had been previously accepted. Three stages occur in response to learning anxiety: denial; scapegoating & passing the buck; and maneuvering & bargaining.

It is necessary to move past the possible anxieties for change to progress. This can be accomplished by either having the survival anxiety be greater than the learning anxiety or, preferably, learning anxiety could be reduced.

### Stage 2 – change what needs to be changed (unfrozen and moving to a new state)

Once there is sufficient dissatisfaction with the current conditions and a real desire to make some change exists, it is necessary to identify exactly what needs to be changed. Three possible impacts from processing new information are: words take on new or expanded meaning, concepts are interpreted within a broader context, and there is an adjustment in the scale used in evaluating new input.

A concise view of the new state is required to clearly identify the gap between the present state and that being proposed. Activities that aid in making the change include imitation of role models and looking for personalized solutions through trial-and-error learning.

### Stage 3 – making the change permanent (refreezing)

Refreezing is the final stage where new behavior becomes habitual, which includes developing a new self-concept & identity and establishing new interpersonal relationships.

## **References**

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