

**A SAGE
White Paper**

Dealing with Change

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

Dealing with Change

*To everything there is a season—turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under heaven.*

—The Byrds, *Turn! Turn! Turn!*

The Response to Change

It is a truism that change is all around us. “The only permanent thing in this world is change,” the Greek philosopher Heraclitus declared in the sixth century BCE. Whether at the macro or micro level, few of us remain unaffected by changes that have occurred in the environment around us. Then there are the changes that we deliberately plan for ourselves: taking up a new job, getting married, and pursuing higher studies. Also, sometimes there are traumatic changes that we have no option but to undergo, whether we like it or not, such as death of a loved one or a messy divorce.

In the workplace, too, changes occur which we have to deal with sooner or later. Some are insignificant and barely affect us; some, like policy changes and functional changes, make us redraw our plans or alter our work schedules; some, involving our colleagues, may lead to a different way of interacting with them. In short, whatever the nature of the change, we deal with change almost on a daily basis.

This is as true for individuals as it is for organizations: with a business environment that has been aptly christened VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous), organizations have to constantly modify, reshape, and rework their strategies and tactics in order to remain going concerns. It is not surprising, therefore, that a large body of business literature exists on the subject of dealing with change and helping employees cope with change. Typically, from the organizational point of view, we have to

- Make a case for the change.
- Form a high-level committee/task force to oversee the change process.
- Secure the buy-in of employees through frequent communication, counseling where necessary, training, and retraining if required.
- Have a plan ready to mitigate the negative aspects of the change.
- Review progress of the change periodically.
- Celebrate achievements—“small wins”—on the way.
- Monitor stabilization after the change process has ended.

For the individuals affected by change, it is necessary to know how to confront it and deal with it so that its negative effects are minimized. Thus, there are a variety of strategies that can be used which are as follows:

- Understand the change: Many times, we are scared of change because of our fear of the unknown. However, if we really try to examine the change and estimate the worst that can happen, then in many cases we find out that it's not really as bad as we feared.
- Understand what we can control and what we can't, and then take steps to make the change process easier in the area within our control.

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- Break it up: Q. How do you eat an elephant? Ans. You cut it into small pieces. Breaking up a seemingly insurmountable problem into bite-sized parts makes it easier to tackle.
- Look for the positive aspects in the situation; this will allow us to feel better and more optimistic.
- Action planning (what needs to be done) can be very useful in getting our brain to start working in constructive ways.
- Meditation, mindfulness, and other relaxation techniques are a great way to handle the stress caused by unwanted change.
- Seeking support when we feel overwhelmed, from family or friends or professionals such as counselors or psychotherapists, also helps.
- Analyze: what can we learn from this? It automatically puts some distance between us and the problem and helps us regain our perspective.
- Understand that the process will end and cannot go on indefinitely.

These strategies, although very useful and practical, do not take us under the skin of our response to change. In other words, they are aimed at minimizing the harmful effects of change on our *behavior*, without first trying to understand *what that response is* that makes us behave as we do when dealing with a painful change.

Let us see, with the help of an example, exactly what that response is.

Ramesh looked up from his work as his subordinate Mathur entered the cabin: "Well, have the promotion orders been issued?"

Mathur looked at him uneasily: "Yes Sir; I'm sorry, your name's not there."

Ramesh was stunned. He had worked sincerely and hard all through the year, met all his targets, and had received a

handsome incentive, the highest permissible. His superiors had often congratulated him on his good work. He slumped back in his chair and somehow managed to say: "I see.... You can go now...."

Mathur left, relieved to have made his escape, leaving an ashen-faced Ramesh staring blankly at the wall.

After some time, Ramesh's mind began working: "How is it possible...? They've made a mistake... clerical error ... these things happen."

But deep down, he knew it wasn't that. He walked out of his office and went home and spent the rest of the day lying on a sofa staring at the ceiling.

The flood of anger came the next day: "Never once did anyone say that there was something wrong with my work.... I received so many appreciation letters ... got 'outstanding' ratings all through ... sweated blood for the company ... and this is how they treat me!"

After a few days, however, he began to come to terms with the new reality. At the office, he was able to talk normally with people who dropped in to sympathize with him and was able to commiserate with other deserving colleagues who had not been promoted. His boss called him for a chat and tactfully explained to him that he should not regard it as an adverse comment on his performance. He suggested that Ramesh should try taking on additional responsibilities and enlarge his job role so that, next time around, he would simply be too good to ignore.

He was now able to accept the situation and started learning the new skills he would need to discharge his additional responsibilities. When he had learned enough, he started applying his new knowledge on the job and eventually settled down in his new role.

If we analyze the above example, we can see that Ramesh's reaction to the news of his not being promoted passed through the following stages:

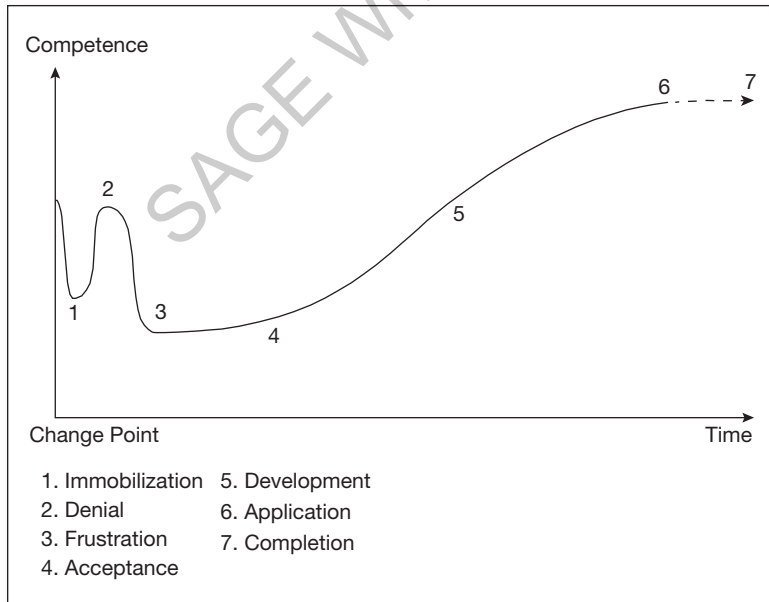
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1. Immobilization
2. Denial
3. Frustration
4. Acceptance
5. Development
6. Application
7. Completion

The impact of these stages on Ramesh's performance and competence is shown in a competence curve (Figure 9.1).

These stages (1–7) seem to occur most commonly when a change disturbs our psychological equilibrium. Thus, we are initially **Immobilized** (1) because we need time to absorb the change and its implications for us; we don't know how it will affect us; we

Figure 9.1 The Competence Curve



Source: Reproduced with permission from Hay (2009a).

haven't worked out what to do; we are scared. We behave like a deer caught in the headlights of a car, frozen in the moment.

This is followed by the **Denial** phase (2), where we perceive a threat to ourselves but refuse to acknowledge it. We live in a make-believe world, hoping that everything will turn out to be alright. Of course it doesn't, and we experience a period of Frustration.

In this **Frustration** phase (3), we know that we need to change but are unable to work out how. We feel deficient and don't know how to make up the deficiency. Sometimes, we direct our frustration outward and blame other people for our situation.

In phase 4, we move into **Acceptance**, as we eventually recognize and accept reality. Our struggles during phase 3 have also given us some insights into the changes we need to make and the skills we need to acquire. We consciously set about finding the best ways to learn these.

If we are able to proceed smoothly, this phase is followed by a period where we are learning and developing new skills and approaches (phase 5—**Development**). We concentrate on mastering the skills that we need to work effectively in the changed situation.

In phase 6 (**Application**), we start applying what we have learnt and carve out our own distinct identity in the changed role: how we fit in; how we will relate to others; our beliefs and perspectives about the organization.

Once we are comfortable with our new role and are using our new knowledge and skills effectively, we have moved on to phase 7—**Completion**. We are no longer transitioning and have adjusted to the changed reality.

Coping with Change—Cycles of Development

Now that we have identified the distinct phases of our response to change, we can plan how to overcome or at least minimize the negative impact associated with them and also plan how to effect

a smooth transition from one phase to the next. This will prove useful not only for ourselves, but also, as managers, when we have to help other people through the change process. However, in order to do that effectively, we must first understand the TA concept of **Cycles of Development**.

Every one of us passes through five stages of development, from the time we are born until the age of 13. In the sixth stage, which lasts until the age of 19, we repeat the first five stages, but at much faster speed, as we integrate them. After the age of 19, we repeat the whole 19 years again and again and again. In each stage of growing up, we have certain developmental needs that we require to meet. If these needs are not met initially when we first go through the cycle, we try to take care of them in one of the subsequent cycles.

These stages are as follows:

Being: Until the age of about 6 months, we need to experience just being, that is, we need a secure nonthreatening environment, and we need to feel that we are safe and wanted, without any strings attached. If this need is not met, when we grow up we may have difficulty in believing that it is OK for us to exist. Also, when we pass through the cycle again, we will need to rework this stage.

Exploring: From 6 to 18 months, we start exploring, first with our eyes and then with our hands and mouths. We need the freedom to explore on our own, but also need to have someone around to take care of us. If we are denied the freedom to explore, we may grow up not wanting to face new situations.

Thinking: From 18 months to 3 years, we develop our thinking abilities. If a cup of liquid spills when we hold it, we quickly figure out how to hold it so that it will not spill. We start to understand cause and effect and begin to work out things for ourselves. At the same time, we begin to want to make our own choices and figure out things on our own. If we are not allowed to and forced to “toe

the line,” when we grow up, we may find it difficult to think for ourselves.

Identity: From 3 until the age of 6, we construct our own identity. We determine who we want to be, and how we want to behave. At this stage, we need the acceptance of the grown-ups as we define who we are and how we will act. If we are not able to construct our own identity, as adults we may be unsure about our role in life. This is also the age at which we decide our script.

Skills/Structure: From the age of 6 to 12—we have figured ourselves out and spend this time acquiring the skills we need to match our identity. We also pick up a whole range of values, beliefs, and opinions from our role models that impart a coherent structure to our worldview.

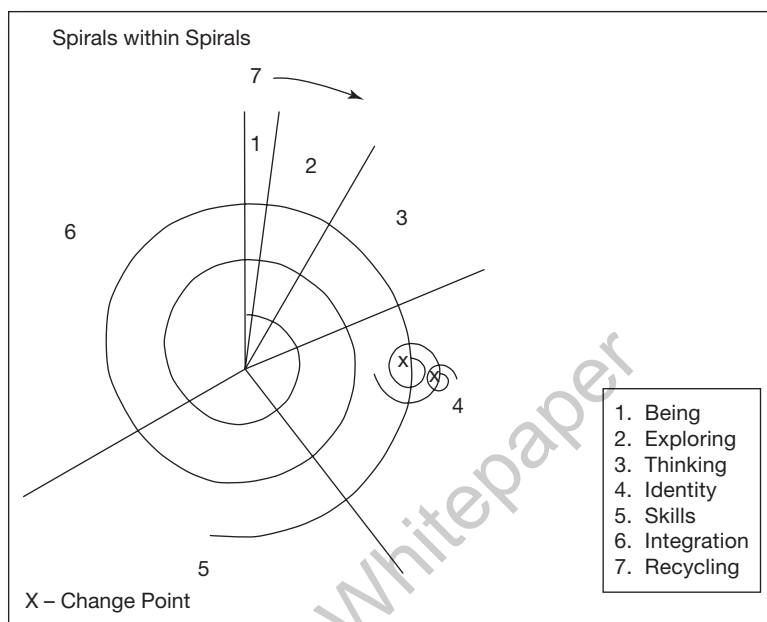
Integration: At the age of 12, we begin again as if we were babies, but we move at twice the speed, covering in 6 years the stages which had taken us 12 years. By the time we are 18, we have finished the second cycle and have also integrated the various aspects of our personality into a complete whole. We need to be encouraged to achieve this integration, without which the process of growing up is not complete.

Recycling: After the age of 18, we begin the process of recycling through the earlier stages. As we pass through them, we try to take care of needs that were not met earlier.

We can think of the Cycles of Development as a continuously unfolding spiral. We complete the first full spiral by the age of 19 and thereafter keep recycling (repeating). This gives us the opportunity to complete what we had missed out on earlier (however, we may not always take advantage of this opportunity).

As and when an important event (read: change) occurs in our life, whether positive or negative, a smaller spiral is sparked off

Figure 9.2 Cycles of Development



Source: Reproduced with permission from Hay (2009a).

at the point where we are on the major spiral (Figure 9.2). This also has the same stages of development (however, in this case, it would be more appropriate to call it “adjustment”) but we go through them much more quickly than in the major spiral. We can race through them in minutes, or take weeks and months; it depends on the nature of the change and, also, the point at which we are on the major spiral. If we happen to be passing through a difficult stage, it will take us longer to adjust.

Putting It All Together

Now that we have identified the phases of our response to change, and know about the Cycles of Development (or Adjustment), we can put the two together to get useful insights about what we need to do when experiencing change to help us pass through the stages

more easily, without any hiccups on the way. This holds true both when dealing with change at a personal level and as a manager, helping people to adjust to change.

Jaya stared blankly out of the window of her train compartment as the scenery rolled by. She was not registering it.

One week ago as she sat at her desk in Delhi in the Information Technology department at the Head Office of her power company, she had been handed a transfer order transferring her to a remote power station of the company. This came as a bolt from the blue.

She sat silently for a while, all sorts of thoughts running through her mind: "Maybe it was a mistake, they meant to transfer someone else.... I can give a request for revoking my order on compassionate grounds.... They'll consider it, and it might happen...."

She had gone to see her boss: "Sir, why this transfer all of a sudden?"

"The IT department there has an urgent requirement of someone with specialized expertise, and you fit the bill," he said.

"But Sir," she protested, close to tears, "My husband works in Delhi, and I have a small daughter whom I cannot take with me. I will have to stay alone there. And who will look after my child?"

Her boss shrugged, "You will have to make some arrangement. Perhaps you can call your in-laws to stay in Delhi. You have to join within a week."

She stood silently in front of him, as the enormity of the change dawned upon her. She realized, too, that she would have to go. He picked up some papers and pretended to be busy with his work.

The next few days passed by in a daze, as she made whatever arrangements she could, and, bidding a tearful goodbye to her family, she boarded the train for the power plant.

As she alighted at the railway station, she met a middle-aged heavyset man.

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"Madam Jaya Murthy? I am Suresh, from the HR Department. I have a vehicle to take you to the Guest House in our township. You can freshen up and rest for a while there, and join office after lunch."

After lunch, she reported for duty to the HR Head Amitabh Saxena. He greeted her warmly, "Welcome to our project! Have a cup of tea with me, and then I'll take you to your HOD."

After meeting the HOD, he had taken her to a shoulder height cabin with a desk and chair and PC. "This is your room. Make yourself comfortable. If you need anything, there's a list of important intercom numbers in the drawer, the most important being that of the canteen! You can also give me a call any time you like." With that, he left her to her own devices.

She took out a few personal items from her briefcase—a framed photo of her husband and child, a table calendar, a memento from a recent holiday, and arranged them on her desk. Then she sat down quietly.

After some time, she began to take in her new surroundings. The photo frame and the memento helped, bringing a touch of familiarity into an unfamiliar world. No one disturbed her; once, a waiter from the canteen looked in and asked her if there was anything she wanted. She shook her head.

She could hear the voice of her HOD giving instructions to someone else. Afterwards, he came to her cabin as well.

"Settled down? Want anything? No? OK, relax and get used to the place. We'll have a chat later."

She could hear the normal bustle and activity of a busy office all around her. After some time, she went out of her cabin and began exploring the department. At one point, she had to use the washroom, where she met the lady who had the cabin next to her.

"Hi, I'm Sharmila. You must be Jaya from Head Office. Have you settled down yet?"

"Frankly, no, and I don't know if I will really be able to," Jaya replied, "I've left my husband and my three year old in Delhi.

He can take care of himself; but I keep thinking about my daughter all the time. Why did they do this to me?"

"I know it's tough," replied Sharmila sympathetically, "I was in your shoes once. But I'm sure you must have made arrangements, and you can always check on her daily if you need to."

Jaya went back to the department with her new-found friend, who introduced her to a few colleagues. Afterwards, she went back to her cabin.

"She was right," Jaya thought, "I can always check on Priya every day. And I'm sure I can get leave now and then to visit them and spend time with her."

This cheered her up, and she turned her attention to her area of work. She went to have a look at the IT equipment and met more colleagues. She asked about professional challenges and was secretly pleased when they described problems that she thought she could find a solution for.

After a few days, Jaya had come to grips with her situation and adjusted to it. She had also begun to carve out her identity in the department. Because of her specialized knowledge, it was not long before many of her colleagues were seeking her help, and she quickly became the department's "go-to" person. Her boss sat down with her and they jointly agreed on a work plan for her. He sent her for training in areas where she was deficient, owing to not having been posted at a power plant before. Coupled with the exposure she got on the job, where her colleagues helped her out, she began applying the skills that she had learnt. She was also able to help her team members acquire skills in her earlier technical area.

Jaya quickly grew into the role that had been envisaged for her and got used to life in the township of the power station. When her husband visited her, he was happy and relieved to see how well she had coped.

How did it happen? Jaya's response to the change in her situation—the transfer—went through the stages that we have outlined above. Let us see how.

When she received the transfer order, a spiral of change started; she was temporarily immobilized, unable to believe it. The denial phase came, when she thought it was a mistake; then, when she went to see her boss about it, the frustration set in, compounded by her unhelpful boss and the thought of the family she would have to leave behind. Acceptance came after that, as she made her arrangements and boarded the train; but it was a fairly negative spiral, with no help forthcoming, until she arrived at the power station.

When she alighted from the train, a second spiral started, but the negative effects were considerably reduced by the friendly welcome she received and the freedom she was given to work things out on her own; in other words, the impact of Immobilization was lessened by gently helping her into the Being stage. The freedom she was given to Explore meant that she did not have to go through the Denial stage. At the same time, she was not ignored. Her colleagues encouraged her to do some serious Thinking on how she could effectively manage. This led her into Acceptance of the change, and she began to interact with her colleagues professionally, examine the equipment, and so on. In other words, she began creating a distinct Identity for herself in her new role, with the help of her new boss.

This was followed by a period of Development, as she grew into her new role. She was facilitated to acquire the Skills she would need and, at the same time, learned to put her old skills to good use in her new role. The more she learned how to apply them (Application) with the encouragement and support of her colleagues, the more she could achieve Integration of her new identity, knowledge, and skills.

Finally, she settled down in her role and grew to be comfortable with the adjustments she had been required to make in her personal life (Completion).

We can imagine a scenario in which no one received Jaya, she had to make it to the power station on her own, she was not immediately given her own workplace, and she was immediately put on the job and expected to produce results. This would have

produced another negative spiral, when she did not get the kind of support she required at each stage. This would have resulted in potentially damaging emotional consequences.

Unfortunately, such things do happen, and they only result in making the transition from one phase to another more painful; sometimes, the complete cycle of transitions may not be achieved at all.

On the other hand, if we know about the Cycles of Development, we can mitigate the pain of change and provide for a smooth transition from one phase to another and also bring the process to completion, as actually happened in Jaya's case.

So far, we have been talking about helping others through the change process. Let us now turn the lens on ourselves, and see how we can navigate change successfully by meeting our needs in accordance with the Cycle of Development.

Stage 1—Immobilization/Being: We need to get used to the fact of the change. We can plan our day so that we have plenty of time to ourselves and are able to indulge in our favorite methods of relaxation. We can review and take pride in our previous accomplishments, to boost our self-confidence. At this stage, we need other people to make us feel welcome and cared for.

Stage 2—Denial/Exploring: When we slip into denial mode, we are generally not aware that we are doing so. We can mentally check if we are acting in a manner that implies that no change has occurred at all in our circumstances. It is a good idea to ask a person whom we trust and respect to give us feedback about our behavior, in this stage.

We can actively explore our new situation, approach people, and ask questions. If we can treat the change as an opportunity to do new things and visit new places, so much the better for us.

Stage 3—Frustration/Thinking: It's all in the mind. If we experience anger or frustration at the change, we need to recognize the

fact that this is perfectly normal and to look for harmless outlets for them. Again, frank discussion with a person whom we respect about the change and its implications will be of great value in getting us out of anger/frustration mode. We can talk to other people who have been through similar changes, to get their perspective. We can also prepare an action plan for ourselves, writing down what we need to do to successfully navigate the change. At this stage, we need to be allowed to do our own thinking, rather than being told what is expected of us.

Stage 4—Acceptance/Identity: If all goes well, we are now in a position to accept the fact of the change and plan how we need to adjust to it on a personal level. It helps if we can regard it as an opportunity for our development. We can review our behavior and our priorities and especially consider those occasions where we were less effective than we would have wished. We can then recast our priorities and attempt to change our behavior to fit the new identity we have created for ourselves.

Stage 5—Development/Skills: Now we are ready to consider what we need to learn to be successful in our changed situation. We can identify the persons we would like to approach and learn from, the training which we need to acquire the skills that are going to be useful for us. We can also explore other ways of learning which may benefit us, such as on-the-job exposure.

Stage 6—Application/Integration: Now we are at the stage where we are putting our new skills to use. We make a conscious effort to keep them in harmony with the new identity we have created for ourselves. We can review our progress regularly and fine-tune our behavior and skills if required.

Stage 7—Completion/Recycling: We have now mastered this particular change and are in a position to help others through it if required.

Therefore, we can see that the Cycles of Development model is a most potent tool for dealing with, coping, and finally mastering change. It works whether we are the one affected by change or we are helping others through change. What is required is to attend to the specific needs at each stage in the spiral:

Being: We need to feel wanted.

Exploring: We need others to be patient with us as we find our way.

Thinking: We need them to be tolerant as we talk about thinking about the situation.

Identity: We need them to accept the identity we have constructed for ourselves.

Skills: We need them to train, coach, and mentor us.

Integration: We need them to encourage us as we “get into the groove.”

Another way to look at it is in terms of what messages we need to receive if we have issues pertaining to unmet needs at any of these stages. Examples of the kind of responses we need to hear, in order to progress smoothly to the next stage, are given in Table 9.1.

The creator of the Cycles of Development model, Pamela Levin, has suggested dividing your current age by 13 and using the remainder to find out where you are in your current spiral. This then gives an idea about the needs that have to be met and the support required, to make an easy transition to the next stage.

- Find out at which stage you are in your current spiral. What needs of yours require to be met? What support is required from others?

Table 9.1 Different Strokes at Different Stages

Stages of Development	Needs	Appropriate Messages
Stage 1—Being	Deciding to be, to exist To have needs met To trust someone	“Good to have you here.” “Welcome to our team.” “We’re here for you.”
Stage 2—Exploring	To be active To use the senses To feel safe while exploring To be reassured that it’s OK to explore	“Feel free to look around.” “Have a look at the filing cabinets.” “See what kind of facilities we have.”
Stage 3—Thinking	To solve problems To express feelings To think for oneself	“How do you feel about this?” “What would you like to include in your job description?” “What do you think?”
Stage 4—Identity	To acquire information To assert oneself To socialize To weigh consequences	“Think about your own style in the job.” “It’s OK to do the job your way.”
Stage 5—Skills and Structure	To learn new skills To test out skills To learn from mistakes To test one’s beliefs and opinions against others	“It’s OK to make mistakes.” “Just try it out and see.” “Think about what went right and what went wrong.” “We can discuss your point of view.”
Stage 6—Integration	To integrate identity, skills, and structure To become independent	“You’ve put it all together very well,” “How are you doing?” “Are you ready for another change?”

Source: Created by author.

- Do you have any unmet needs from previous stages? If so, then how best could you plan to meet them?
- If you have undergone a change recently, where do you think you are currently in the new spiral?
- In case the change took place earlier, have you reached the Integration phase? If not, what will it take to reach it?

This elegant model gives us illuminating insights about what we do when affected by change. It helps us in mitigating the adverse effects of the change process and also in transiting smoothly from one phase to another. We can work out where we are on the spiral, what we need to move easily to the next stage, and how to fulfill those needs. We can not only meet our needs at any stage (once we know how), we can do the same for others also, and thereby help them through the change process. This is especially important because as managers, we will be responsible for, or at least party to, a whole gamut of changes during our working life, such as promotions, transfers, redeployment, layoffs, redundancies, organizational restructuring, and the like. Each of these will vary in the intensity of their effect on the employees, and it is prudent to visualize, anticipate, and plan how to deal with the likely effects of the changes. The model of Cycles of Development shows us how.

What's more, Cycles of Development holds out an exciting promise; since we repeat the cycles all through our adult life, we are repeatedly offered the opportunity to meet any needs that were unmet earlier, and now we also know how we can do this. In this context, the song "Turn! Turn! Turn!" by The Byrds, whose opening verse was quoted at the beginning of this chapter, is strikingly appropriate. The last lines of the 1965 hit are as follows:

*A time for love, a time for hate;
A time for peace; I swear it's not too late!*

It's never too late.

About the Author

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Indranil Mitra was educated at Modern School, New Delhi, and St Stephen's College, University of Delhi. He did his postgraduation in physics from the Department of Physics and Astrophysics, University of Delhi. He later joined NTPC Limited as an executive trainee in the HR department and completed Post Graduate Diploma in Personnel Management and Industrial Relations from Punjabi University, Patiala.

In his 30-year career in HR, he held various positions of responsibility in the company's coal- and gas-based power plants, a subsidiary, and the NTPC Corporate Centre in New Delhi. During Indranil Mitra this time, he designed and implemented various HR/HRD initiatives in NTPC. Subsequently, he joined its apex-level training center, the Power Management Institute, Noida, as Senior Faculty Member in HR and Organization Behavior. He is a certified neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) practitioner and has also obtained certification in TA 101.

Indranil's lifelong interest in transactional analysis (TA) led him to develop a workshop titled "Building Interpersonal Skills through Transactional Analysis," which he has been conducting at the institute. He wrote this book to make this remarkable technique for self-development and personal growth accessible to a wider audience. He has also co-authored and edited a book, *Manthan: Art and Science of Developing Leaders* with K. K. Sinha and Ajay Soni, published in 2017. He lives in New Delhi with his wife and daughter.

He is keenly interested in literature, philosophy, music, drawing, art and culture, and bridge.