

# LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

## IMPACTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

While periodic leadership and organizational changes are an inherent part of life, it's important to recognize that these changes can create uncertainty and illicit anxiety, anger or frustration, especially in those who are already experiencing stress associated with other life factors. With new leaders comes change through new visions, priorities and strategies. It's incumbent upon all leaders, co-workers, and insider threat (InT) programs to remain vigilant to individuals who struggle with the change, or actively undermine new leadership and who may react in an unhealthy—or perhaps illegal—manner, which could harm our National Security. Equally as important is to continue to value and respect all employees, their views, and their experiences. By proactively addressing these periods of change and potential for reactive behaviors, leaders can reduce insider threat risks. An often-used mantra in government is 'change is constant'; therefore, identifying the things that can be controlled and those things that cannot, in a healthy and legal way, is the wisest strategy to manage the stress of uncertainty.

## STATE OF OUR STRESS<sup>1</sup>

The American Psychological Association's (APA) Stress in America™ poll revealed a populace dealing with multiple stressors relating to transition and change in 2024-2025. In the survey, the most reported sources of stress centered were related to the general political climate<sup>1</sup>:



"The future of our nation"



Political/social tension makes them less likely to connect with others



Social divisiveness

## BTAC BULLETIN

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

# SPECIAL ISSUE

## LEADERSHIP CHANGE & InT NEXUS

## EMPLOYEE DEPARTURES & UD

### CYBERSECURITY CONCERNS AND InT NEXUS

During times of personnel transitions, there are increased cybersecurity and insider threat risks to DoD data through unauthorized disclosures (UD). Individuals may start backing up or removing work related files, exfiltrating through personal internet-based capabilities (e.g., social media, online storage, personal email), portable electronic devices, excessive printing, and/or copying to removable media. Periods of transition are fraught with potential concerns for intentional and unintentional insider threats and an erosion of trust. It is imperative during these times that leadership is clear about limits on acceptable workplace behavior, transparent about leadership transitions, encourage open dialog, acknowledge risks, plan for exits, and have standardized procedures for departures.

*The following quick tips assist in preparing for this type of change:*

- **Personal preparation:** Resist the impulse to exfiltrate data using physical copy/print, removable media, smart devices, and internet-based platforms/storage/social media upload.
- **Organizational administrative preparation:** Reinforce data protection/information protection policies and agreements, ensure signing of IT acceptable use agreements, post awareness posters, and conduct refresher training.
- **Organizational technical preparation:** Employ best practices for Data Loss Prevention (DLP), User Activity Monitoring (UAM), endpoint security, rogue wireless device detection, email gateway, www monitoring, and User Behavior Analytic (UBA)/User and Entity Behavior Analytic (UEBA). Test systems to ensure successful mitigation.

## INTENTIONAL UD

As new leaders take their positions, some personnel within the organization may have differences in opinion, develop a feeling of **distrust** of the new leader, or cultivate **moral outrage** over something they think they know about the leaders past. This can lead to concerning behaviors targeting the new leadership including seeking to intentionally harm them through the release of classified, unflattering, or embarrassing information, or the destruction of information to impede leadership success. Organizations should provide retraining on the impact of biases and be transparent in addressing the impact in the workplace.

### "DON'T WORRY ALONE"

If personnel are concerned about behavior that may undermine national security, whether intentional or unintentional, there are resources they can use to consult with professionals (i.e., Leadership, InT Hubs, Whistleblower Hotlines, Security Office)

## UNINTENTIONAL UD

With every departure, there is inherent risk of someone packing their office including classified files, adding classified information to a resume, venting online with information that may be classified, or exhibiting unprofessional behavior in the workplace in reaction to the increased stress. It's important for leaders to enact pre-departure training on UD and continued responsibilities to protect classified and CUI information, enact increased bag and box checks during transitions, and reiterate policies on pre-publication review for resumes and appropriate workplace behavior.





# POSSIBLE IMPACTS OF TRANSITION

## PSYCHOLOGICAL TOLL OF CHANGE

When people experience change, they inherently experience stress as the body and the brain seek to adapt to the new norm. Whether this is a new job, a new boss, a new social environment, this change triggers a “stress response”—where the body seeks to react to the stressor and prepare for a perceived threat to the status quo. Humans have a fantastic ability to adapt, but in some cases the stress is either too great, or its chronic nature depletes one’s resources. When this happens, an individual can experience distraction, avoidance, emotional ups and downs, concentration problems, and difficulty making decisions. These normal psychological responses then have a tendency, when unmitigated, to lead to downstream interactions that further magnify the effects in what can be described as a stress cycle or “incivility cycle” of behaviors. In the workplace this can manifest in developing disgruntlement, neglecting security protocols, or making a hasty or poorly advised choice of posting on social media. When it comes to insider threats, especially unintentional, stress is often a root cause. It is imperative that leaders understand this interaction and seek to proactively mitigate the risks before they develop into grievances and disruptive action.

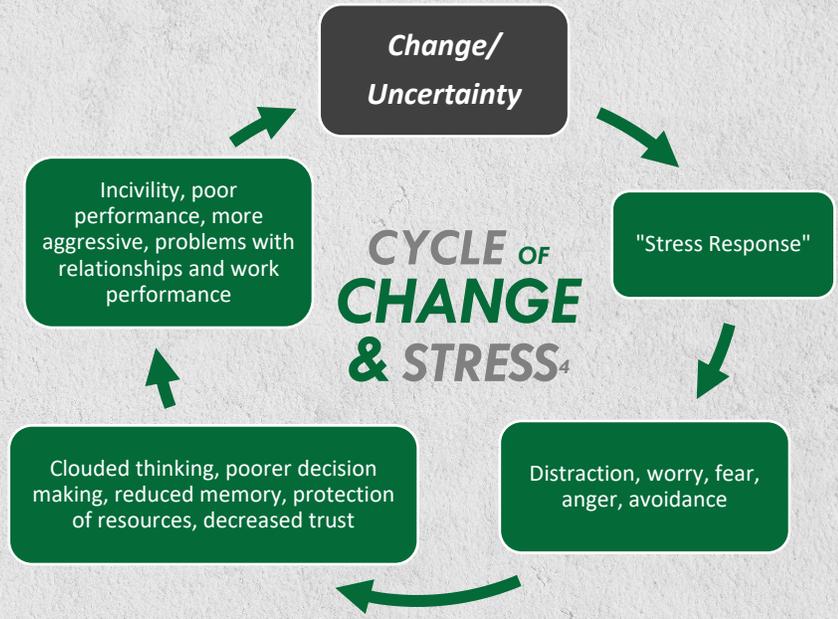
## TIPS FOR MANAGING CHANGE

### LEADERS<sup>2</sup>

- Focus on the long-term mission, organizational tenets, and what you can control
- Cultivate a focus on mission goals versus personality driven beliefs
- Avoid quick reactionary changes, focus on mission needs
- Resist oversimplification & quick conclusions
- Acknowledge your emotions in relation to change as a model for personnel
- Strive to avoid stress responses, frustration, rumors, nonproductive behaviors
- Ensure transparent communication about change

### EVERYONE<sup>3</sup>

- Reflect on past stressful/frightening situations that have been overcome—think about what was helpful in those times
- Limit exposure to news—it can activate the stress response
- Control what can be controlled: plan out the work, day, perform well, establish daily routines
- Self-care: exercise, sufficient sleep, good nutrition, moderate alcohol use, stress release (yoga, meditation)
- Seek support: don’t isolate, talk to family and friends, socialize
- Communicate professionally about concerns to leadership and use reporting options



## LEARN MORE

MORE INFO

**Reporting UD**  
(CDSE Job Aid)

MORE INFO

**Whistleblower Hotlines**  
(Whistleblowing for your DoD organization)

MORE INFO

**Unauthorized Disclosures** BTAC Bulletin

MORE INFO

**Understanding Insider Threats** CITRAP Article

MORE INFO

**Disgruntlement**  
BTAC Bulletin

## CHANGE, SOCIAL IDENTITY, AND TRUST

Concepts of social identity and life-long loyalty to an organization have changed. As Dr. Eric Shaw puts it, “Conflict between organizational policies and practices and an employee’s values, beliefs, identity and even their interpretation of constitutional or patriotic values can damage organizational attachment.”<sup>5</sup> In this digital age, people increasingly can turn to online forums to connect with others with similar views. The existence of online forums and social media echo chambers has promoted increased polarization in opinions and viewpoints that may be exacerbated to the point of insider risk during times of leadership transition<sup>5</sup>.

When individuals experience abrupt change, they can revert to their other stable social groups for “security” and stability further entrenching their bonds with these groups at the detriment of dedication to their work organization. “...Many previously dedicated employees may feel a bit whipsawed by abrupt policy and other changes impacting their beliefs and values, leading them to question their attachment to their organization.” This can then lead to “...decreased morale and esprit de corps, and the increased disgruntlement that can be one of the many building blocks of insider risk.”<sup>5</sup>

1. American Psychological Association (2024) *Stress in America Survey 2024-A Nation in Political Turmoil* 2. American Psychological Association (2024) *10 tips for dealing with the stress of uncertainty* 3. Harvard Business Review (2020) *Managing When the Future is Unclear* 4. Raza MA, Imran M, Rosak-Szyrocka J, Vasa L, Hadi NU. *Organizational Change and Workplace Incivility: Mediated by Stress, Moderated by Emotional Exhaustion*. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2023 Jan 21;20(3):2008. 5. E. Shaw (2022) Employees feeling whipsawed by changes could question allegiance. On Guard, DHS Security Enterprise Newsletter, SEP 2021



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