

# Managing the Neutral Zone: A Checklist

1. Have I done my best to normalize the neutral zone by explaining it as an uncomfortable time that (with careful attention) can be turned to everyone's advantage?
2. Have I redefined the neutral zone by choosing a new and more affirmative metaphor with which to describe it?
3. Have I reinforced that metaphor with training programs, policy changes, and financial rewards for people to keep doing their jobs during the neutral zone?
4. Am I protecting people adequately from inessential further changes?
5. If I can't protect them, am I clustering those changes meaningfully?
6. Have I created the temporary policies and procedures that we need to get us through the neutral zone?
7. Have I created the temporary roles, reporting relationships, and organizational groupings that we need to get us through the neutral zone?
8. Have I set short-range goals and checkpoints?
9. Have I set realistic output objectives?
10. Have I found the special training programs we need to deal successfully with the neutral zone?
11. Have I found ways to keep people feeling that they still belong to the organization and are valued by our part of it? And have I taken care that perks and other forms of "privilege" are not undermining the solidarity of the group?
12. Have I set up one or more Transition Monitoring Teams to keep realistic feedback flowing upward during the time in the neutral zone?
13. Are my people willing to experiment and take risks in intelligently conceived ventures-or are we punishing all failures?
14. Have I stepped back and taken stock of how things are being done in my part of the organization? (This is worth doing both for its own sake and as a visible model for others' similar efforts.)
15. Have I provided others with opportunities to do the same thing? Have I provided them with the resources - facilitators, survey instruments, and so on-that will help them do that?

16. Have I seen to it that people build their skills in creative thinking and innovation?
17. Have I encouraged experimentation and seen to it that people are not punished for failing in intelligent efforts that do not pan out?
18. Have I worked to transform the losses of our organization into opportunities to try doing things a new way?
19. Have I set an example by brainstorming many answers to old problems-the ones that people say we just must live with? Am I encouraging others to do the same?
20. Am I regularly checking to see that I am not pushing for certainty and closure when it would be more conducive to creativity to live a little longer with uncertainty and questions?
21. Am I using my time in the neutral zone as an opportunity to replace bucket brigades with integrated systems throughout the organization?

Source: Adapted from Bridges, W. M. (2003). *Managing transitions: Making the most of change, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing.