

Tip Sheet: Navigating Uncertainty

I had heard that 2020 was going to be a time of great change. Wow! Isn't that an understatement!?

My heart offers my best and most sincere condolences to all of us who have experienced loss and suffering.

And, my hope is that this upheaval will be just what we need for climate and environmental challenges (and solutions!) to become front and centre. I'd love to see us come out the other side with an ecologically-healthy and socially-just world.

To catalyze this important shift, and to be our best, we have to understand and be graceful with our own uncertainty, fear and anxiety.

Even in “normal times”, those of us working in the environmental space have long talked about uncertainty – the long time frames we deal with, the complex natural processes we’re continually learning about, the inconsistent legal requirements.

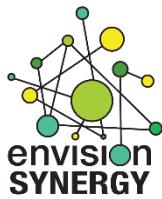
While we may be somewhat more versed than others, I suspect many of us are now truly feeling this uncertainty in new and profound ways.

What's a person or organization to do?

1. **Name it.** As facilitators we know that naming an idea, situation, phenomena helps us understand what's happening. Think about going to the doctor. Even if I don't like a diagnosis I've just been given (who does?), it at least reduces my uncertainty. I know something.

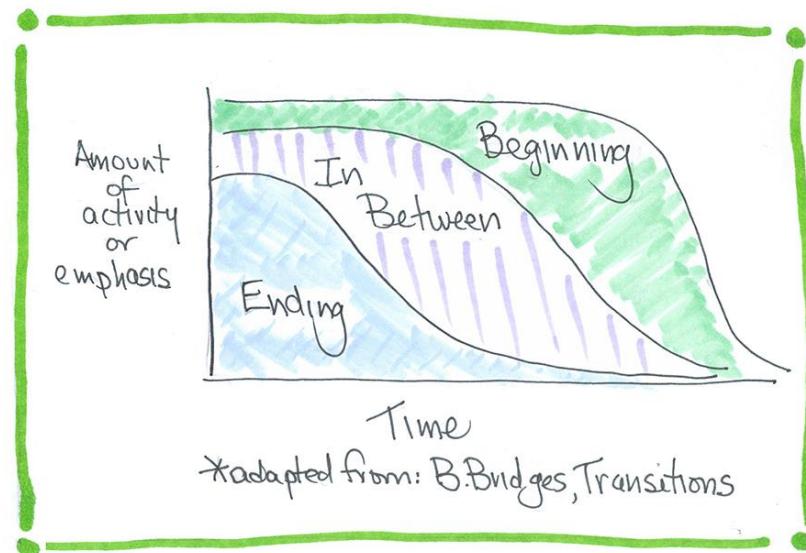
Here are **two pictures** that have stood the test of time that allow us to name the uncertainty:

Simple, elegant and super useful, Bill Bridges “transitions” diagram has provided me and the organizations I work a visual to understand what's happening in any change. It's particularly apropos right now.



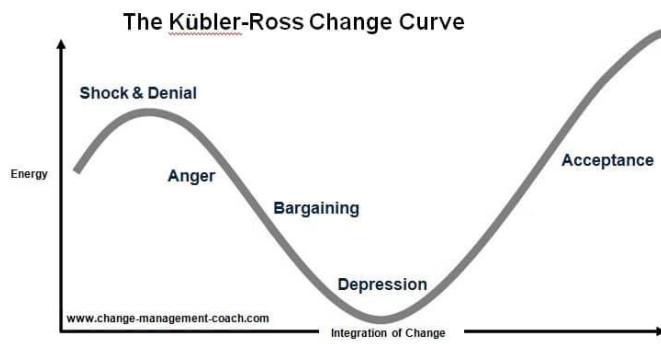
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We're in what I call the "in-between"¹ zone. It feels totally yukky. There is no clarity. Who knows when it might end?



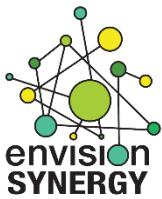
My experience is that we want to rush through it. Try as we may, we can't. But, with the diagram we can see what we're experiencing so we can be a bit patient and live with the yukkiness until we start to see some light at the end of the tunnel.

Another helpful picture is the grief curve.² It applies now as well. Our world as we knew it is dying and another one will emerge. It sometimes feels like a roller coaster that the picture alludes to.



¹Bill Bridges terms it the "neutral zone" or sometimes the "transition zone." For me, there's nothing neutral about it, so in my version, I've renamed it to "in between" to try to capture the rudderless feeling it invokes.

²Originally conceived by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross to describe the emotional process people went through after a death. While the linearity of it doesn't always reflect people's actual experience, I find the ups and downs are certainly relevant.



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While the diagram has a linear quality to it, my observation and experience is that we pass through all these stages, sometimes as diagramed, but often not. And, we typically experience the journey multiple times and often at the most unexpected of moments. I suspect this change is only more intense that way.

2. **Take it moment by moment.** What an opportunity we have in these times: we can focus on whatever it is, instead of jumping ahead to the future. Our love of the outdoors teaches us that, so we've already developed this "muscle" to some degree. One can't really be on a phone when they're navigating the next set of rapids in the river, eh?

Can you tune yourself into these daily moments that may be passing you by? For example, I'm listening to a robin sing. My crocus are just beginning to pop their heads up – the colour is wonderful! I'm fully enjoying the longer daylight.

How long has it been since you've really savored the taste your morning coffee or tea? Given your full attention to your work task without checking a phone or an email or thinking ahead to your next "to do?" Been really present with one of your children? Now we get to do that. What a gift!

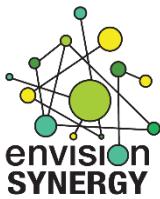


And a bonus: You may have discovered -- when you are in the moment with whatever it may be, you actually get more accomplished!

3. **Generate possibilities.** Who knows what the other side of this "in between" stage will look like. There will be both pleasant and unpleasant surprises. Yet, I imagine many of us have ideas that have been dormant for years that may need to be dusted off. Now's the time to brainstorm our wildest dreams and hopes for a healthy planet.

The act of generating options helps in at least two ways:

1. Generating hope – it shows us possibilities and options.
2. Getting ready for what's next -- just thinking through some options can help with making us more nimble and responsive when similar realities actually emerge in the future.



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The idea here is to invent stories, not predictions, about how things might unfold. How many “what ifs” possible plots can you imagine? How might you respond if something like one of them came about? What capacities do you need to build now so you can respond?

Here's to taking many slow, deep breaths and living in the “in-between.” Let me know how it's going.

Wondering how to be with this uncertainty? **envision** would love to support you. We can:

- As a licensed practitioner in the Framework for Acting Under Uncertainty and Complexity, help **build your capacity** in the principles of VUCA: volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous challenges
- **Lead a workshop** (yes on line, most likely) where we brainstorm/ generate options that can help you better prepare for what the unknown
- Hold a teleconference or **offer coaching** as you share your experiences and hopes as we navigate this new world
- **Capture your thinking in visual format** so that you can refer to it for inspiration, or post it prominently – in your home office, on your websites, with your social media networks
- Figure out how to **evaluate** those initiatives and programs you never have time to look at until now

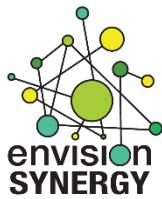
Charlotte

Want more? Here's to further reading:

Bridges, W. 2019. *Transitions: Making sense of life's changes*. Revised anniversary edition. NY NY: Hachette Book Group.

Kubler-Ross, E. 2019. *On death and dying: What the dying have to teach doctors, nurses, clergy and their own families*. 50th anniversary edition. NY NY: Simon and Schuster

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%BCbler-Ross_model. Retrieved, March 30, 2020.



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Who is envision SYNERGY?

envision SYNERGY -- “environmental vision together” – supports teams, silos, organizations and sectors in **working together** for bigger, broader, better solutions to today’s environmental, natural resource and sustainability problems.

Along the way, we **build strong organizations** that both excel in carrying out their own work and magnify their successes as they work with others so collectively we advance a healthy planet.