Individual Change Process within an Agency

When involved with change in an agency that is beyond one's control, an individual may go through the following intellectual and emotional phases. Communities may go through similar processes.

Phase 1: Discomfort and resistance
Definition: The individual fears the unknown, laments the loss and comfort of the old, and may not believe that change needs to occur.
Example: Why change at this time. Things were not great, but they’re going OK.

Phase 2: Search for information
Definition: The individual tries to find out as much as possible about the change and its source. If little accurate information is available, rumors increase and are accepted as valid information.
Example: What have your heard? Mike heard from a friend that the director ordered the change.

Phase 3: Anger and blame
Definition: The individual reviews the past, seeking a cause or blame for the discomfort.
Example: I'll bet this is part of a larger scheme to address the problem of people submitting late reports.

Phase 4: Despair
Definition: The individual feels hopeless, helpless, and has a sense of loss and emptiness. The past keeps going through the individual's thoughts.
Example: We might as well go along. We certainly have no influence here. Why does this always happen where I work?

Phase 5: Humor
Definition: The individual uses humor to relive the past and heal the pain and frustration.
Example: Did you see the look on Mike's face when we told him about the new procedures?

Phase 6: Reaching out
Definition: The individual shares the frustration and determines how others are handling the change.
Example: You sure look sad. Can you believe it has come to this?

Phase 7: Rationalization and accommodation
Definition: The individual begins looking for reasons to accept the change
Example: The only good thing about the change is that we won't have submit paper reports anymore. I say, if you can't fight them, join them.

Phase 8: Emotional reorientation
Definition: The individually emotionally accepts the change.
Example: Maybe it won't be so bad after all. It’ll be nice to work with new computers for a change.

Phase 9: Acceptance
Definition: The individual comes to terms with the change intellectually and emotionally
Example: If we have to do it, lets get it done and do it right.

Phase 10: Involvement and stability
Definition: The change is accepted and used in a positive manner.
Example: I don't know what we worked without this new system.