

Insights for Renewal:
William Bridge's

Organizational Lifecycle

A vibrant butterfly with black, yellow, and red wings perched on a green leaf. The butterfly's wings are primarily black with bright yellow and red markings. It is positioned on a large, green leaf, and the background is a soft-focus natural setting. The butterfly is the central focus of the image, with its wings spread slightly.

Life Cycle Generally

William Bridges's organizational lifecycle is based on works of others, but concisely explains how organizations change over time, and includes a model for regeneration, returning again to the beginning of the cycle.¹ The cycle describes how organizations start, mature, and end/regenerate. This model is helpful for evaluating any organization since recognizing what stage one is in, and may be entering, can prepare leaders for the challenges they are facing and will be facing. Bridges's model can help evaluate the current state of affairs in your organization and help us prepare an adequate vision for the future.

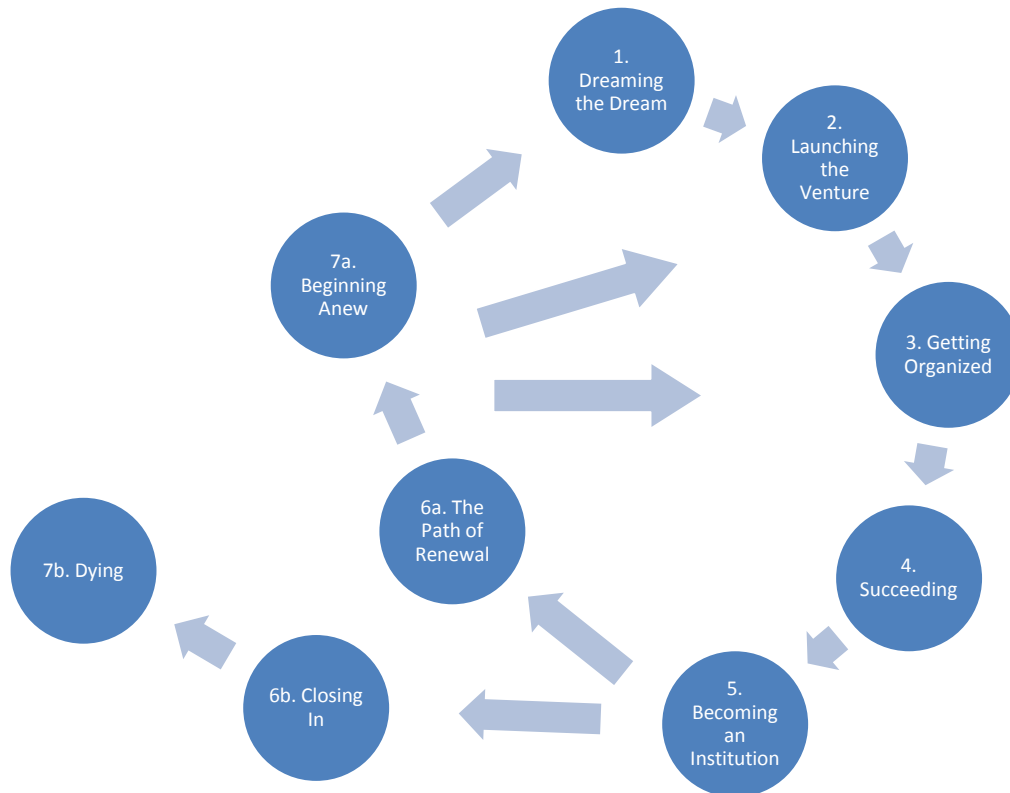


Figure 1. Bridges's organizational lifecycle²

¹William Bridges, *Managing Transition: Making the Most of Change* 2nd ed (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 76-95. Bridges credits Ichak Adizes with developing the foundation of his model.

²Bridges, 88.

Bridges' Organizational Lifecycle	
Stage 1 Dreaming the Dream	In the first stage of the lifecycle, plans are made, but nothing may yet have been accomplished. The dream remains a dream until it is enacted, at which point it moves to the second stage.
Stage 2 Launching the Venture	The organization may be successful, but there are not yet established systems and policies to structure the entity. Interestingly, those who thrive and survive in this stage will be the ones who, in later stages, look back at the Venture stage and declare them "the good ol' days."
Stage 3 Getting Organized	One can only shoot from the hip for so long before having to systematize their efforts and integrate into the growing organization. Roles become specialized, duties become delineated. Some may feel that, as the organization becomes organized, the family atmosphere is lost.
Stage 4 Making It	After developing a stable structure, the organization moves into the Making It stage, when it can reap the harvests of its hard work in the earlier stages. In this stage the organization may grow and develop, but its core structure developed in earlier stages remains the same.
Stage 5 Becoming an Institution	The shift from the Making It stage to the Institution stage is subtle, a change in perception more than a change in structure. It is a shift from conquering territory to occupying territory. Part of the shift is the reputation of the organization—an institution has a reputation. At all stages before, the organization was creating its reputation. A telling fact about the Institution stage is "there is little talk about further development." ³ Peter Steinke, citing Edwin Friedman, notes that those who helped build the institution then block continued growth: "Those who come first are the last to accept new ideas." ⁴
Stage 6a—Closing in As institutions mature, they begin to operate as if they are impervious to the challenges that likely gave rise to the organization in the first place. This stage "marks the loss of the vital tension between the organization and its environment." ⁵ The organization degenerates into bureaucracy or simply loses its ability to sustain its success.	Stage 6b—The Path of Renewal An organization at the Institutional stage may choose not to close in, but rather to walk the Path of Renewal. Renewal comes not by fixing problems, nor by "changing specific practices or cultural values but by taking the organization back to the start of its life cycle." ⁶ This renewal is difficult since the organization had developed systems to protect itself from the kinds of changes needed to move the organization back to the start of the life cycle.
Stage 7a—Dying Dying Organizations will eventually die. This death may take the form of selling the organization or merging. Or, the organization may simply shut down.	Stage 7b—Beginning Anew Renewal will lead to starting at the beginning, re-dreaming, re-launching, and re-organizing. The Beginning A new stage is the purposeful transition into a new lifecycle. In the words of St. Benedict: "Always we begin again."

³Bridges, 81.

⁴Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2006), 79.

⁵Bridges, 81.

⁶Bridges, 87.