

CHANGE vs. TRANSITION

Transition is very different from change. Change is situational. Transition on the other hand, is a three-phase psychological reorientation process that people go through when they are coming to terms with change. The difference between change and transition can be illustrated with the example of a geographical move. The change is the relocation itself; it involves packing and taking a trip. The transition involves all the confusion, distress, and excitement that you go through. Changes are always unique to the situations in which they take place, but transitions show a remarkable similarity, one to another.

Change

External

Situational

Event-based

Defined by Outcome

Can occur quickly

Transition

Internal

Psychological

Experience-based

Defined by Process

Always takes time

The Checklist of Change

1. Take your time
2. Arrange temporary structures
3. Don't act for the sake of action
4. Recognize why you are uncomfortable
5. Take care of yourself in little ways
6. Explore the other side of change
7. Get someone to talk to.
8. Find out what is waiting in the wings of your life
9. Use this transition as the impetus to a new kind of learning
10. Recognize that transition has a characteristic shape.

TRANSITION

Transition is made up of three parts: the experience of an *ending*, the experience of a confusing in-between time called the "*Neutral Zone*" and the experience of a *new beginning*. It is important to our well-being that we recognize and respect this three-part process, for transition is the bridge which we cross to enter the next chapter of our lives and to renew ourselves.

1. **Endings:** Transition always starts with an ending. Even though change can be initiated by something new, the internal, psychological process that accompanies it always starts by separating from, getting closure on, or bidding farewell to the old reality and the identity that went with it. Even in a "good" change, like starting a family, one has to let go of the old life. You cannot make a new beginning without an ending first. We must deal with the loss before we can have a new beginning.

2. **Neutral Zone:** After the ending has been made, a beginning is possible—but it cannot occur immediately. First you must go through an in-between state that there is no accepted name for—a time when the old reality and the old identity are gone, but the new ones have not yet taken root in your mind and heart. This is called the “neutral zone” to capture the in-betweenness and the neither-this-nor-that quality.

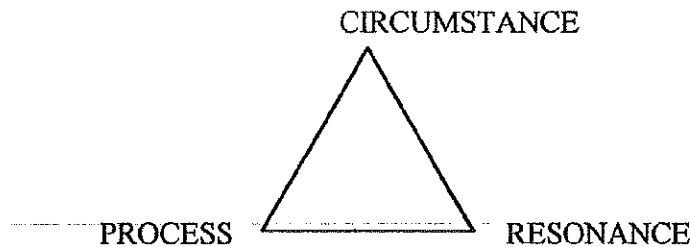
Generally, people who do well during this in-between time are people who have good sources of the elements of the acronym, **CUSP**.

- **C:** They are people who find things to do that help them to be (or at least feel) more in **CONTROL** of their situation. Anything that does that helps.
 - **U:** They are people who **UNDERSTAND** the transition process and know why they are feeling what they are feeling. They also **UNDERSTAND** (as much as possible) the reason for the changes they are being affected by.
 - **S:** They are people who have pretty good **SUPPORT** systems—friends, family, even professional counseling if that is appropriate. Otherwise, transition is a terribly lonely time.
 - **P:** They are people who have a fairly clear sense of **PURPOSE** to carry them along and help them decide which way to go when they get to a crossroads. It may well be a new sense of purpose, since the change may have rendered the old one obsolete.
3. **New Beginnings:** The ending disengages us and the neutral zone is a kind of fallow time when old habits are extinguished and the new possibilities are born. It is out of the neutral zone that the third and final phase of the transition (the beginning) emerges. This beginning is not to be confused with the “start” of the new situation, which may have happened on Day One. The beginning is when people really buy in, get on board, and feel at home with the new.

Transition is the psychological process that the person must go through to unplug from his or her old identity and become reoriented to the new one. The person must leave behind an old life, not just a job or relationship. Needless to say, transition takes longer than change. The new circumstances may take shape immediately, but the new life, the new reality, the new identity will take months to fully take form.

To make matters more difficult, there is a third factor besides the changing circumstances and the transition process; that is **personal resonance**. Some current situations “resonate” disturbingly because of our past experience with comparable situations. If your parents separated when you were young, the breakup of an adult relationship will stir old fears and resentments that do not exist in someone with a different childhood experience.

CPR Triangle:



Circumstances-Process-Resonance: The *circumstances* are the situational elements that are changing in the person's life, the *process* is the inner transition from the old way of being to the new one, and the *resonance* is private meaning that is triggered in memory by the present event. The way to deal with *resonance* is through counseling or psycho-therapy, just as the way to deal with *circumstances* is through analysis, planning, and careful management.

How do you deal with the *transition process*? The first thing to understand about transition is that it has three stages or phases: an ending, a neutral zone, and a beginning. The second thing to understand is that the ending comes first, not last. People in transition are always forgetting that an old life, an old way of being, an old identity has to end before a new one can begin.

The external details of the change may be unique and confusing, but the real transitional task is always the same: to let go of some reality or strategy or personal identity that characterized the previous leg of our journey. The question life asks is always, "What is it time for you to let go of?"

RULES OF TRANSITION MANAGEMENT:

1. You have to end before you begin
2. Between the ending and the new beginning, there is a gap
3. That gap can be creative
4. Transition is developmental
5. Transition is also a source of renewal
6. People go through transitions at different speeds

By William Bridges, Ph.D:

Dealing Successfully With Personal Transition,

Personal Transition

The Rules of Transition Management