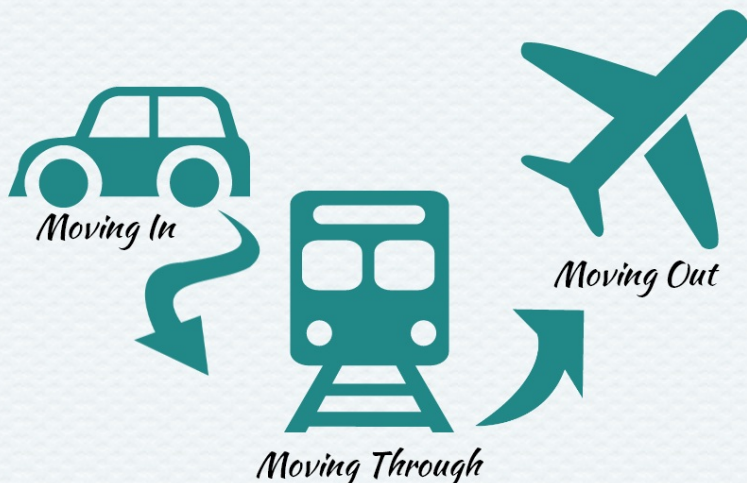




ADULT TRANSITION THEORY

TRANSITION

“any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (Goodman et al., p. 33) which often requires "new patterns of behavior" that may result in confusion, anxiety, and frustration (Curtis, 2009; Goodman et al., p. 33).



NATURE OF TRANSITION

The nature of an individual's transitional experience depends on whether they are moving in, moving through, or moving out of a transitional status (Goodman et al., 2006).

PERCEIVED TRANSITIONS



Anticipated Transition

occurs when the changes happen as planned or expected



■ Stress (10%) ■ Comfort (90%)



Unanticipated Transition

occurs when changes come as a surprise and are unplanned



■ Stress (90%) ■ Comfort (10%)



Non-event Transition

occurs when individuals expect a transition, but it does not come or is significantly delayed



■ Stress (90%) ■ Comfort (10%)

TRANSITIONAL IMPACT

Goodman et al. explain that transitional impact is the degree to which a set of life changes “alters one's daily life” (p. 37) and identify four variables influencing transitional impact.



SITUATION



SELF



SUPPORT



STRATEGIES



THE 4S'S OF A TRANSITION

SITUATION

refers to an individual's unique experience



Trigger: external or internal factor that sets off transition



Timing: when event occurs



Control/source: amount of control individual has over situation



Role change: gain or loss of roles



Duration: length of time experiencing transition



Previous experience: past experience dealing with or not dealing with similar situation



Concurrent stress: amount of stress factors occurring at same time



Assessment: individual's view of who or what is responsible for transition

SELF

refers to what the individual brings to the transition.



Personal and demographic characteristics: age, socioeconomic status, gender, state of health, ethnicity and culture, etc.



Psychological characteristics that people use to make it through stressful and trying times; includes maturity level, ability to remain positive and degree to which one believes in him- or herself, what one believes is highly important to one's life: family life, career achievements, financial success, etc., spirituality--how one finds meaning, and resiliency--an individual's inner drive to persevere in order to succeed.

SUPPORT

refers to support that helps make transition successful



Affect: positive feelings such as respect, love, admiration, or liking



Affirmation: expressions of agreement



Aid: “exchange of things, money, information, time, and entitlements” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 76).

STRATEGIES

refers to ways in which individuals cope with their transitions



Modify the situation



Manage Stress



Control meaning of problem

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Probing Questions using the 4S's

Situation:

- What triggered your situation?
- Was it at a good time in your life for this to happen?
- Did you initiate the transition or did it happen to you?
- Did you experience a role change? Is the transition permanent or temporary?
- Have you had any previous experience with a similar transition? If so, were they helpful or hurtful?
- Are you experiencing stress in other areas of your life?
- How do you view your transition overall? Do you see it as being a positive, negative, or benign experience in your life?

Self:

- Are you able to deal with the world in a self-directed way? Can you tolerate ambiguity?
- Are you an optimist? Do you see the glass as half-full or half-empty?
- Do you blame yourself for what happens to you?
- Do you feel in control of your responses to your transition?
- Do you believe that your efforts will affect the outcome of a particular course of action?
- Do you have a sense of meaning and purpose?
- Do you have characteristics that contribute to resiliency?

Support:

- Are you getting what you need for this transition? Affect? Affirmation? Aid?
- Do you have a range of support—spouse or partner, other close family or friends, coworkers? Colleagues? Neighbors, organizations, strangers, and institutions?
- Has your support system been interrupted by this transition?
- Do you feel the support system for this transition is a low or high resource?

Strategies:

- What strategies have you used to modify the situation? Are there others you think could help?
- What strategies have you used to control the meaning of the problem? Are there others you could use?
- What strategies have you used to manage stress? Are there others you think you could use?

A Transition in Limbo

Graduating from college marks a transitional stage in most young people's lives. Whether they continue their education, enter the workplace, or pursue other ventures, leaving college involves a series of changes for which recent graduates may or may not be prepared. Further, current weakened economic conditions may affect this transitional experience negatively. For many students, the anticipated transition into the workplace has been delayed, in essence, placing a generation of college graduates in transitional limbo.

The adult transition framework (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006) can provide insight into the transitional post-graduation experience under these more difficult conditions. Within this framework, a transition is “any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles” (Goodman et al., p. 33). Further, transitions often require “new patterns of behavior” that may result in confusion, anxiety, and frustration (Curtis, 2009b; Goodman et al., p. 33).

The nature of an individual's transitional experience depends on whether they are moving in, moving through, or moving out of a transitional status (Goodman et al., 2006). Recent graduates, for example, are moving out of the student role and into their new status of former student; they anticipate moving through the transition into the workplace.

For some, the perceived transition into the workplace after graduation is smooth; for others, it can be difficult. The framework defines three types of perceived transitions: an anticipated transition, which occurs when the changes happen as planned or expected; an unanticipated transition, which occurs when changes come as a surprise and are unplanned; and a non-event transition, which occurs when individuals expect a transition, but it does not come or is significantly delayed (Curtis, 2009b; Goodman et al., 2006). An individual who encounters anticipated changes typically adjusts more easily to the transition; unanticipated changes are more difficult to accommodate. Currently, many graduates experience a non-event transition, because the acquisition of a job post-graduation takes longer than anticipated, and the forward momentum of career pursuits is delayed. Goodman et al. explain that transitional impact is the degree to which a set of life changes “alters one's daily life” (p. 37) and identify four variables influencing transitional impact: situation, self, support, and strategies. These variables can assess transitional difficulty. Table 1 defines each transitional variable and the corresponding transitional factors and provides an example of each variable's influence on a recent graduate's job search transition. This table may help advisers and their graduates assess ongoing transitions.

Table 1 Transitional variables, transitional factors, and student example

Transitional Variables	Transitional Factors	College Graduate During Recession Example: James, 24 years old
Situation: refers to an individual's unique experience	Trigger: external or internal factor that sets off transition	Trigger: James graduated with a bachelor's degree in business

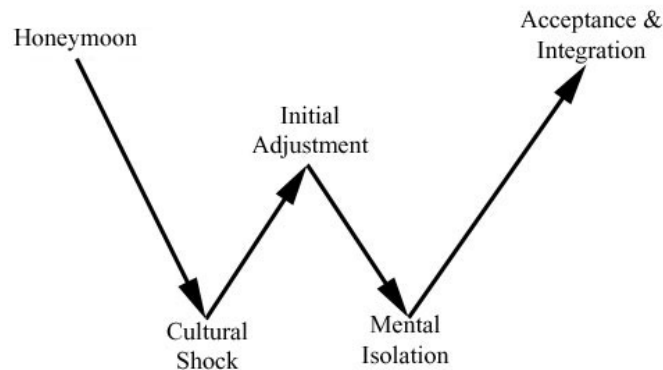
	<p>Timing: when event occurs</p> <p>Control/source: amount of control individual has over situation</p> <p>Role change: gain or loss of roles</p> <p>Duration: length of time experiencing transition</p> <p>Previous experience: past experience dealing with or not dealing with similar situation</p> <p>Concurrent stress: amount of stress factors occurring at same time</p> <p>Assessment: individual's view of who or what is responsible for transition</p>	<p>Timing: May, 2009, during an economic recession</p> <p>Control/source: very little personal control over economy</p> <p>Role change: transitioned from being busy, full-time student to bored and unemployed</p> <p>Duration: unemployed, uninsured, and living with his parents for the past five months; pursued both part-time and full-time employment vigorously but without luck; parents and family members constantly treat him as if he is not trying hard enough</p> <p>Previous experience: has always been active in school and has held part-time jobs in the past; has never been unemployed</p> <p>Concurrent stress: because of lack of money, moves in with his parents, has lost sleep, and worries he will never find a job</p> <p>Assessment: perceives that he may not be good enough, although he knows the job market is challenging due to the economy</p>
<p>Self: refers to what the individual brings to the transition.</p>	<p>Personal and demographic characteristics: age, socioeconomic status, gender, state of health, ethnicity and culture, etc.</p> <p>Psychological resources: characteristics that people use to make it through stressful and trying times; includes ego development (maturity level), optimism and self-efficacy (ability to remain positive and degree to which one believes in</p>	<p>Personal and demographic characteristics: James is a healthy, 24-year-old male from a middle-class family.</p> <p>Psychological resources: tends to be mature but lacks much “adult” experience in the working world; tends to be pessimistic especially when it comes to his writing abilities and sometimes has a hard time believing he can succeed in the “real world.”; parents</p>

	him- or herself), values (what one believes is highly important to one's life: family life, career achievements, financial success, etc.), spirituality (how one finds meaning), and resiliency (an individual's inner drive to persevere in order to succeed)	have encouraged him to pursue a career in business management, and he is highly focused on pursuing career achievements; has yet to give up in his search for a job but after five months of submitting applications, he feels burnt out and lacks self-confidence
Support: refers to social support that helps make transition successful	<p>Affect: positive feelings such as respect, love, admiration, or liking</p> <p>Affirmation: expressions of agreement</p> <p>Aid: “exchange of things, money, information, time, and entitlements” (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 76).</p>	<p>Affect: James receives respect from family and close friends, although he feels they all would admire him more if he would find a job.</p> <p>Affirmation: most family and friends agree that he went into the right field—business—but some question his decision; wishes he could secure a job and prove to them that he was right</p> <p>Aid: parents have been very helpful and have let him borrow money, fed him, and provided a place to stay for past five months; feels guilty for this although very thankful</p>
Strategies: refers to ways in which individuals cope with their transitions	<p>Modify the situation</p> <p>Manage stress</p> <p>Control meaning of problem</p>	<p>Modify the situation: James has tried extremely hard to change his situation by landing a job. Until he is able to find employment, he does not know how he can change his life. He feels stuck.</p> <p>Manage stress: has done little if anything to manage his stress; does not know who to talk to; when talking to his parents, feels like he is a failure; is embarrassed to talk to his friends who have jobs; exercises regularly to help with his moods</p> <p>Control meaning of problem: tries to realize that he is a smart and prepared college graduate but without luck in the job market; tends to place much</p>

(Curtis, 2009b; Goodman et al., 2006; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978)

The W-Curve and the First Year of College

The W-Curve is a predictable pattern of stages occurs when a person experiences culture shock. This is based upon research done with students studying abroad. Zeller and Mosier (1993) found that the W-Curve could also be applied to first-year college students and the phases they go through in adapting to a new culture. It's normal to have the ups and downs of the W-Curve, and knowing about this may help make the transition easier. At the first signs of culture shock, some first-year students may think this means they have made a mistake about going to college or that they have chosen the wrong school. If they see that this is just part of journey that everyone goes through, they may be better able to take it all in stride.



The Honeymoon: The Honeymoon starts before students first arrive on campus. It usually begins once a student has chosen and been accepted to a college and builds as students attend Orientation programs, get their housing assignments, and begin planning for school to start. Although they may also experience some nervousness, the overall feeling is generally one of excitement and positive anticipation. According to Zeller and Mosier, "As students arrive on campus, there generally is a strong sense of welcoming from the campus community. Other new students quickly become friends, returning students become mentors, and staff and faculty are available to assist them through a variety of first-week programs. The initial sense of freedom new students feel often is exhilarating. For traditional-aged students, moving away from parental oversight and taking responsibility for one's own lifestyle creates a strong positive feeling." It is common for students to begin to have some feelings of homesickness mixed in with all of the fun and energy of a new beginning.

Culture Shock: As the newness of the college culture begins to wear off, first-year students begin to deal with the reality of the many adjustments they are experiencing. In the residence halls, students are adapting to having roommates, sharing a room, shared bathrooms, and lots of neighbors. Elsewhere on campus, they are growing accustomed to eating in a cafeteria, and the diversity that comes with meeting people from different backgrounds and cultures. The process of making new friends is fun, but can also be draining. On the academic side of college life, Zeller and Mosier argue, "the unfamiliar territory of the college classroom also creates dissonance. Large lecture classes, unclear guidelines for note taking and studying, and unfamiliar...faculty work together to produce potential adjustment difficulties." Outside of the classroom, students may struggle with things that seemed simple at home. "Routine tasks that were taken for granted become problematic chores. Where to go shopping, get a haircut, or receive medial attention can create feelings of frustration" (Zeller and Mosier).

Homesickness may increase and some students may try to deal with this by maintaining strong ties to their home community, often going home on weekends and staying in constant contact with friends from home, and possibly even continuing a romantic relationship. They may have a lot of pictures and other memorabilia in their rooms.

Developmental life cycle tasks are also continuing such as becoming self-sufficient, establishing identity, and accepting responsibility for their actions. "In summary, the college freshman has many personal issues to deal with in addition to focusing on the critical issue of academics: reworking relationships with parents, establishing interdependence with peers, dealing with separation and its resultant anxiety and dealing with conflicting values. Attempting to synthesize these personal challenges into some formal structure requires a great investment of energy. It is important to understand that this is a period of great potentially positive change, but it is also a period of more intense personal conflict and anxiety" (Zeller and Mosier).

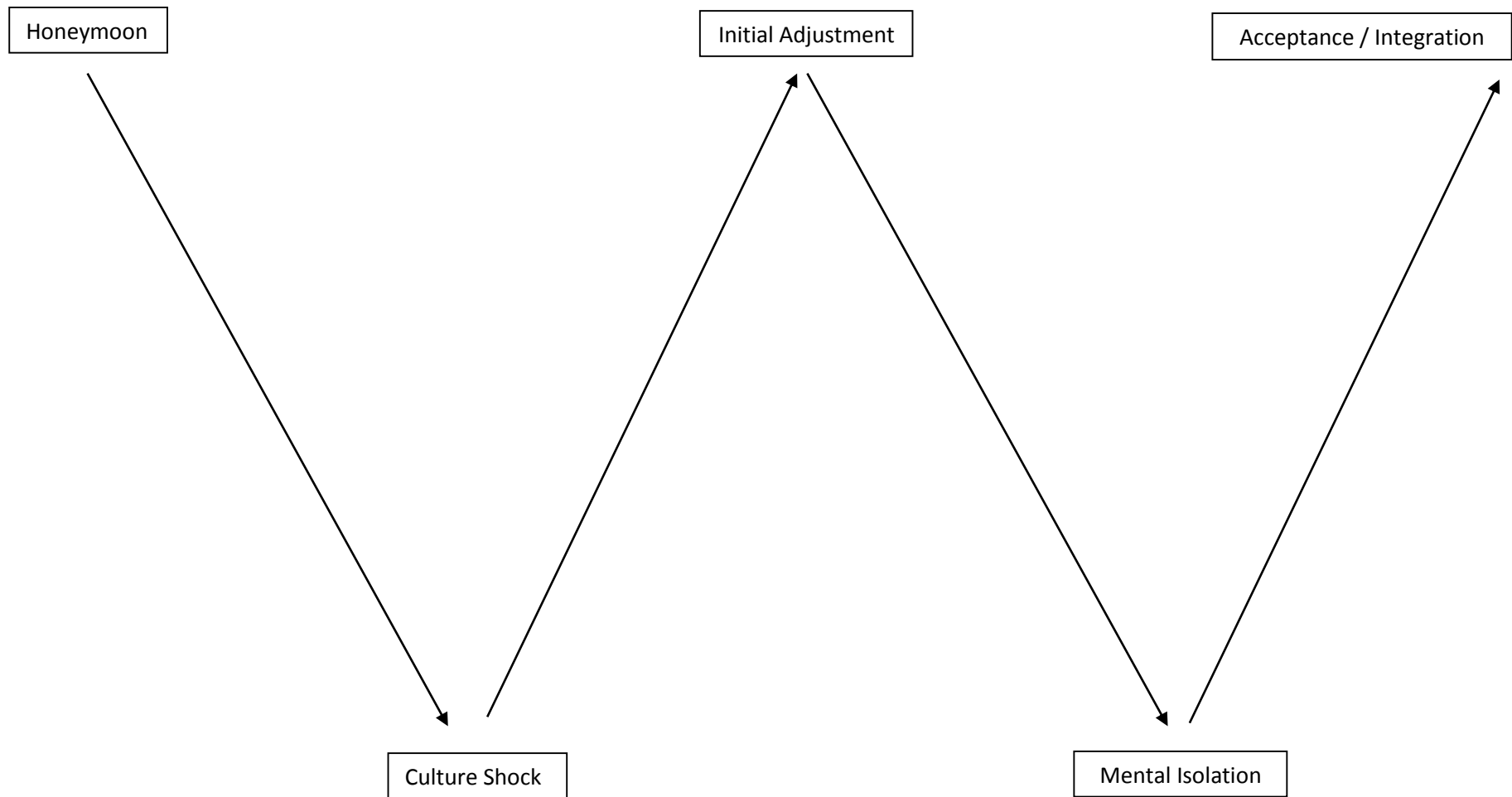
Initial Adjustment: As initial adjustments are made, first-year students experience an upswing as they have successfully managed many of the issues that have come their way. Simply overcoming the culture shock stage brings about a sense of well-being. They fall into a routine as they gain confidence in their ability to handle the academic and social environment of college. They feel they have regained some sense of control and normalcy in their lives. Conflicts and challenges may still continue to come and go, but students are now feeling more in the swing of things.

Mental Isolation: According to Zeller and Mosier, “Although the physical environment has become more familiar, new students will relapse into a sense of isolation as they make comparisons between their new culture and their more familiar home culture.” This may arise after students go home for an extended break between semesters. “Strong feelings of homesickness begin to surface, as first year students move through a second culture shock in adjusting the new environment.” This is a time of feeling caught between two worlds. The new college environment is still not as comfortable as home used to be, and home is now not as familiar as it once was. Students may have a sense of not completely belonging in either place. With all of the activity occurring when first coming to college, students may not realize how much they miss home until they have been away for quite awhile. And even then, going home to visit can still leave them feeling homesick for a home environment that no longer seems to exist. It can be shocking to find that changes have happened at home, too, and not having been in on these changes on a day-to-day basis can be upsetting. “The initial euphoria of the entrance into the university dissolves as the realities of campus life surface. Not all professors are friendly and helpful, not all living-group peers are potential friends, and everything is not as great as publicity brochures and admissions staff may have indicated. Questions of doubt regarding the decision to attend the institution may surface. Questions regarding major career and academic potential may surface as the realities of first year grades and test scores take over. As the tension and stress mount, first year students may retreat to a safer, more secure home culture environment. They may feel their beliefs and values systems being challenged, and they may not be able to adapt or integrate the new values of the university cultures. The historical base remaining from the home culture continues to be alluring, as does a desire to strengthen connections with high school friends. First year students must seek resolution to this second cultural shock, move from their feelings of isolation, and join their new university cultures. This requires integrating the values and beliefs of their home culture with their new university environment” (Zeller and Mosier).

Acceptance, Integration, and Connectedness: As students become more involved in campus opportunities, gain some history with new friends and get to know some faculty and staff members, they begin to feel a true connection to the campus community. They begin to have a more balanced and realistic view of the University, seeing and integrating the good experiences with the challenges. “They begin to think that, generally, it’s a pretty good place to be. The university becomes the students’ home. The original home culture becomes somewhat foreign. There is less dependence on parents and former peers “ (Zeller and Mosier). It may be shocking for a parent to hear their college son or daughter refer to college as “home.” A true sense of acceptance, integration, and connectedness occurs when a student has successfully adapted to their new world.

Source: Journal of College and University Student Housing, Volume 23, No. 2, 1993. Culture Shock and The First-Year Experience by William J. Zeller and Robert Mosier

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