



Managing the transition process **SUCCESSFULLY**

*The different phases of workplace transition and
how to deal with the challenges of a new role*

Words by **Agnes Bamford**

Change is known to be a major source of stress for most people, which means that no matter how hard you have worked for a promotion at work, or how excited you are by the challenge of moving to an innovative new company, you are likely to find the transition stressful.

There are many variables that influence transition stress, from basic changes in routine to potentially profound changes in how you see yourself and your role within an organisation. Often, much of the focus centres on elements outside of your control, which can make it hard to understand exactly why you feel the way that you do.

The stages of transition

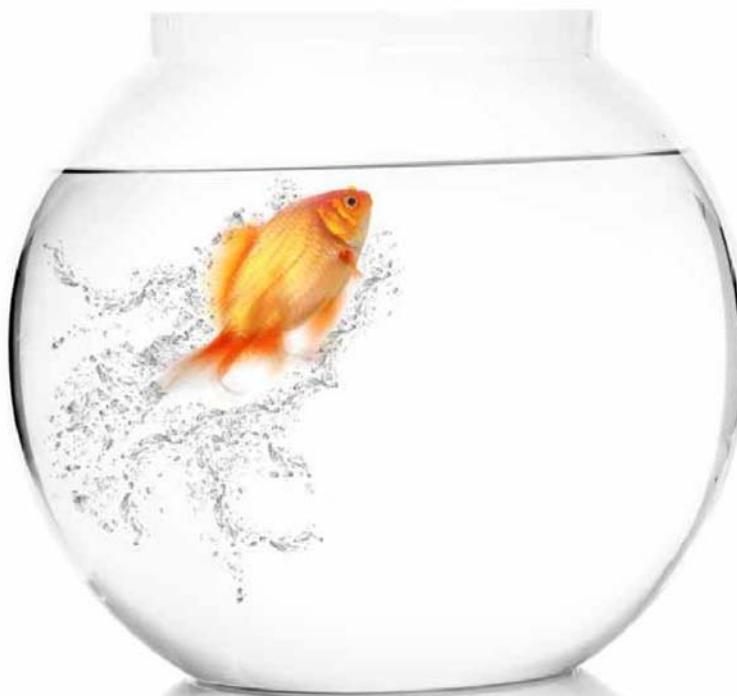
The transition period typically involves several phases that most people experience, although the timescale and intensity can vary widely.

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Stage one - firstly, you are likely to experience the ambiguity of initial excitement coupled with anxiety about the new situation. This may be followed by a honeymoon period of discovery and exploration, where people assist you as a newcomer.

Stage two - the first dip is normally a reaction to the environment and an inability to function within it as well as you know that you are capable of. This includes logistical systems and procedures that you haven't yet learned to manage. After learning to adjust to the new environment and its demands, you will soon function more comfortably and successfully.

Stage three - as you become more involved in the role, you may experience a second dip: an internal reaction as you continue to adjust your behaviour. This is because former behaviours may not be sufficiently effective or generate the expected reaction. However, you should eventually find a way to adapt to the behaviours and norms of the new culture.



It's normal to experience these negative emotions, so accept and acknowledge them, whilst focusing on finding the positives and taking action.

Prepare for the challenge ahead

The good news is that there are practical strategies that you can use to help manage the anxiety of transition.

The first step is being realistic about the situation that you are entering. This means recognising that transitioning between jobs will almost certainly incur periods of uncertainty and doubt. However, just acknowledging that this is normal can help you to deal with the situation better. It is also important to appreciate that this is an emotional process, a rollercoaster for some, and therefore not something that you can rationalise your way out of.

Think about how you normally tackle hardship and how you can prepare for these experiences. Difficult situations are often easier to tackle – and may even act as a powerful motivator - as long as you are prepared for them. Whilst the majority of your attention should be focused on success, it will also help if you are prepared for any

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negative experiences. It is possible to change your mindset and learn how to like being uncomfortable, teaching yourself to enjoy the possibilities offered by tough challenges.

Learning from the past

Looking back at other past transitions can help you understand how you may react to change—even if these were other types of transitions such as having children, getting divorced or moving house. Think about a transition that you have faced.

- What were the periods of emotional ‘highs’ and enablers of these?
- Similarly, think of the periods of emotional ‘lows’ and what triggered them.
- Reflect on how stress manifested itself during the lows.
- It may be helpful to focus on what helped you to manage this transition.

Now that you have reflected on this past transition, consider the potential implications for your current situation. What did you learn about yourself that you could apply to your current transition?

Identifying your stressors

Another process to help you understand how you may react during the transition is to reflect on what normally causes you stress. Identify the situations, types of people, responsibilities or areas (work and personal) that typically cause you stress. Think about how stress impacts you: what you tend to think, feel and do as a result. Then consider what you can

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do that will help you to feel balanced and manage stress more effectively, reflecting on what you say or think to deal with these stressors.

10 tips for managing transition stress

1. Knowing what helps us manage transition stress is the first step to a successful transition. Acknowledge and encourage your past successes whilst focusing on going forward.

2. Get into a positive mindset. Reflect on and list the top ten successes in your working life so far. Consider:

- Where you have added value to the organisation or people in it.
- When you have received praise or recognition.
- What has brought you the most enjoyment?
- When you have felt positive and satisfied.

3. Considering the above, identify the main skills/qualities you bring that have enabled your success? Identify ten.

4. Look objectively at your new role:

- What are the four or five best things about this opportunity?
- Which of your main skills will be useful?
- What would be the best outcome for

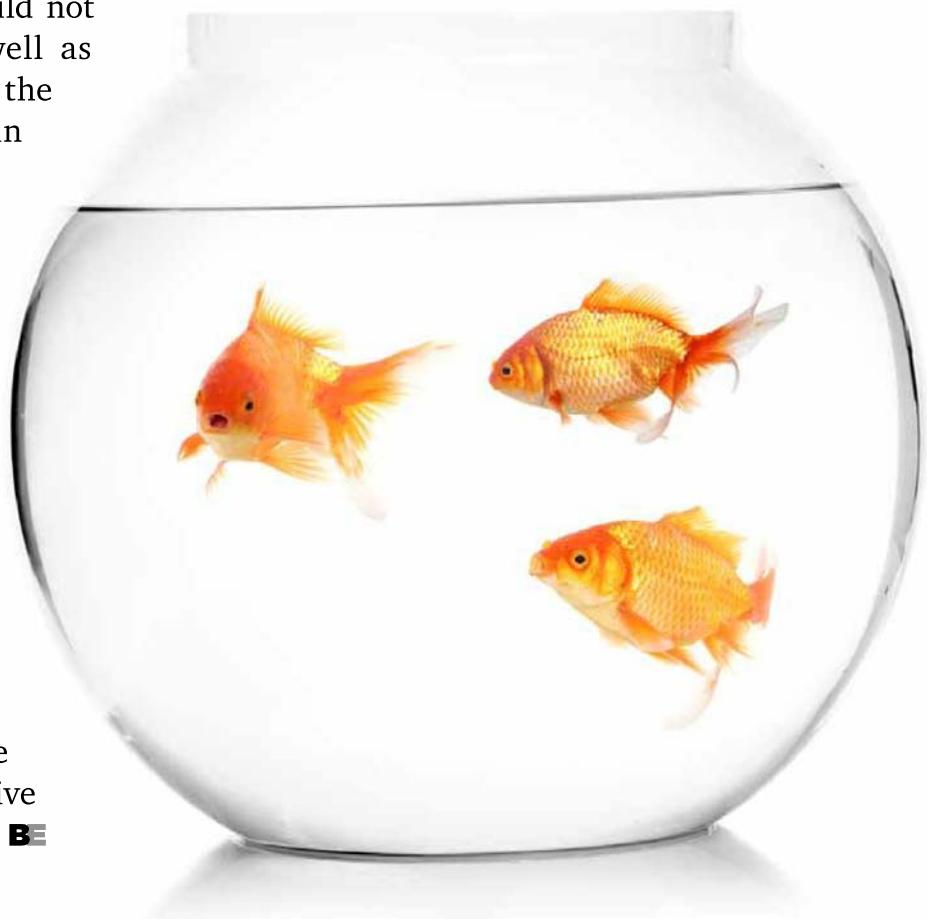
you in this role 12 months from now?

- What two things can you do straight away to move towards achieving this outcome?
- Imagine a colleague you admire stepping into this role. What would they do in the first month/three months?
- Look for the positive people in your life. Turn to family and friends for support. Share thoughts and concerns with people you trust who will listen and enable you to talk things through without judgment.
- Try to make sense of your environment. Look for logical reasons for why people behave as they do and for why things work differently. Look for the ‘big picture’.
- Pay attention to the different values, behavioural patterns and communication styles of your new colleagues and respect those differences. How do your beliefs, values and assumptions colour the way you perceive them?
- Be prepared to step outside of your comfort zone. Great learning can occur when you do. Take advantage of your new environment and take reasonable risks. Get involved in the new community: volunteer, explore and interact.

9. Pay attention to your physical well-being: stay healthy with a well-balanced diet, appropriate exercise and sufficient rest. Feeling physically well will have a significant impact on your ability to deal with new situations and the stress that this can bring.

10. Approach a colleague that you trust who can introduce you to parts of the new culture that you would not otherwise have access to, as well as helping you to make sense of the differences. New colleagues can show you the culture from the inside, as well as helping you to interpret reactions around you and develop effective interaction with others. They can offer feedback and act as a safe sounding board before you take action.

Transition stress is almost inevitable, but with preparation it can be managed and minimised. Ultimately, it's all about committing to the small actions that will have the most impact on creating a positive experience in your new situation. **BE**



About the author

Agnes Bamford is a partner at executive coaching company The Results Centre and a board member of the Norwegian-British Chamber of Commerce in the UK. Agnes specialises in coaching people through work and life transitions and regularly works with executives from international businesses. She holds an MSc in Business from the Norwegian School of Economics and a PGCE in coaching from the UK.

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