



Facing Transition

Leaving an organisation or making a decision on a career change can be a significant moment in anyone's life and the circumstances under which this transition occurs can certainly add to the feelings of uncertainty and anxiety that individuals feel. Not that this is always a negative thing as career changes or transition can also create feelings of excitement around new opportunities.

Understanding these feelings and emotions is often the first step in effectively managing them and minimising any potential negative reactions to a transition.

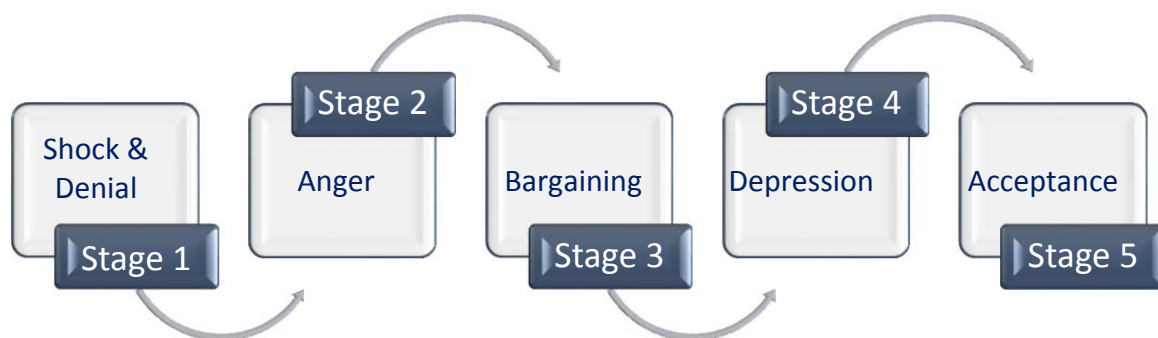
Coping With Change

One of the most widely recognised and used models of change comes from the work of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross¹ and her research into the phases that people went through during a bereavement.

For most people leaving a role or an organisation won't feel like a bereavement but it is recognised that people do go through similar stages to those outlined below during a wide range of situations where change or transition is involved.

The 'grief cycle' is actually a 'change model' for helping people to understand and deal with personal reactions to change. This is because emotional impact along with personal coping mechanisms are relative to the circumstances and people involved.

Kübler-Ross's Five Stages

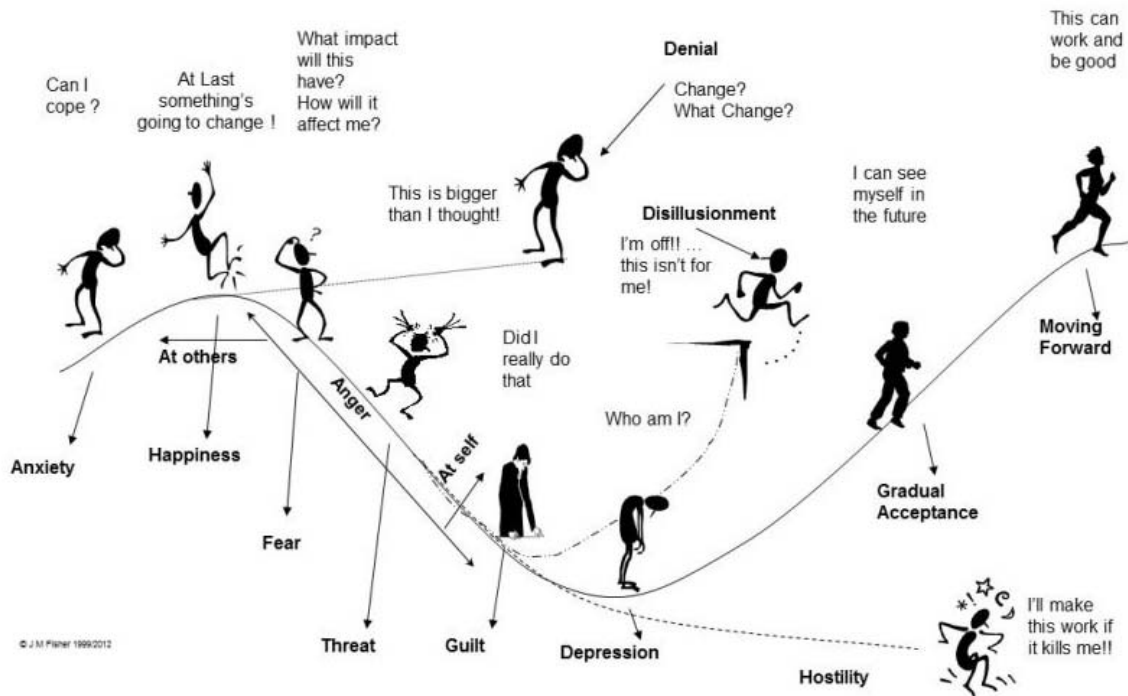


¹ On Grief and Grieving: Finding the Meaning of Grief Through the Five Stages of Loss. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler

- (1) **Shock and Denial** – Denial is a conscious or unconscious refusal to accept facts, information, reality, etc., relating to the situation concerned. It's a defence mechanism and perfectly natural. Some people can become locked in this stage when dealing with a traumatic change that can be ignored.
- (2) **Anger** – Anger can manifest in different ways. People dealing with emotional upset can be angry with themselves, and/or with others, especially those close to them. Work can become a difficult place for those working with or supporting someone at this stage and knowing this helps keep detached and non-judgemental when experiencing the anger of someone who is very upset.
- (3) **Bargaining** – For people facing less serious emotional trauma than death, this bargaining can focus on seeking to negotiate a compromise with the people involved. For example "can we still work together in the meantime?.." when leaving an organisation. Bargaining is important to us because it puts off the change and attempts to find a way to avoid the situation. Bargaining rarely provides a sustainable solution and often is in the 'here and now'.
- (4) **Depression** – In a way it's the dress rehearsal or the practice run for the 'aftermath' although this stage means different things depending on whom it involves. It's a sort of acceptance with emotional attachment. It's natural to feel sadness and regret, fear, uncertainty, etc. It shows that the person has at least begun to accept the reality of what is going to happen. At this stage, people dealing with change at work may reach a point of feeling demotivated and uncertain about their future.
- (5) **Acceptance** – Again, this stage definitely varies according to the person's circumstances, although broadly it is an indication that there is some emotional detachment and objectivity. This can be a creative space as it people start to consider their options and it can force people to explore and look for new possibilities. At the same time it can be a stage of self-discovery with people having the focus to learn about themselves.

The concepts covered in the Kübler-Ross model have been developed further to look at how individuals deal with personal change as covered in Fisher's process of transition below².

² © J M Fisher 1999/2012.



This model outlines a number of stages that individuals go through when faced with a change based around core internal emotions and feelings. How long different people will spend at different stages depends on how they perceive themselves, how in control they feel, and past experiences. Interestingly much of the transition is done subconsciously and may only become clear when people look back and reflect on their experiences.

As with the bereavement model, understanding where you are within the curve can be a useful first step in taking control of the change process and provides a starting point for moving through your personal circumstances and transition.

Taking Control

As referenced earlier, one of the key factors in how quickly someone passes through the different stages of the transition is how much control they feel they have around the change. The reality is that in many career transition changes, the individual may not have much control over the cause of the change (e.g. in a redundancy or redeployment context) but there are other factors that are within your control. Recognising the difference between these two and avoiding a focus on those factors outside of your control can both be helpful activities in taking greater control over your experience.

What Next

Understanding how a transition point in your career affects you and what you might be going through is a useful starting point. However, one way of taking control over your future career and helping to ensure that the next career move is as positive as possible, is to develop a structured plan to set a focus for any transition activity.

The 'Guides' and 'Diagnostic' tools we have produced, along with the 'Personal Career Planning Template' have all been created to complement one another and practically support you through a career change or transition.

To understand more about yourself and what type of change will work best for you then access our introduction to our diagnostic tools or the Personal Career Planning template can be accessed.