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Migration as Personal Transition

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Abstract

Although acculturation is the preferred interpretation frame in migration research, it fails to fully account for the entire migration experience. The current study aimed to establish whether ‘personal transition’ per definition (Van Tonder, 2004) can be discerned from the ‘migration stories’ of research participants. Data were obtained from 21 South African migrants to Australia, using semi-structured phenomenological interviews. ‘Migration’ is revealed as a challenging, multifaceted and protracted change process, consistent with the personal transition curve. Viewing migration as ‘change’ enables a broadened perspective beyond the conceptual boundaries of acculturation and implies an extended intervention repertoire for assisting migrants.

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1. Introduction: From ‘acculturation’ to ‘change’ and ‘personal transition’

From a psychological perspective ‘acculturation’ has dominated research foci which engaged the subject of migrants and migration (cf. Berry, 1997, 2001; Berry et al., 2006; Dere et al., 2010), and rightly so as migration is an increasingly prevalent phenomenon of our time (Koser & Laczko, 2010). Although the construct of ‘acculturation’ is characterised by various conceptual ambiguities (cf. Boski, 2008; Matera et al., 2012; Van de Vijver & Phalet, 2004) it is usually articulated in terms of a mutual/reciprocal, social change process that takes place within both the migrant and the host culture (representatives) as a function of repeated contact between them. Acculturation (both psychological and sociocultural) has substantially advanced understanding of the dynamics and complexities of human relocation and for this reason remains the theory frame of choice for viewing and interpreting the migrant’s experiences on foreign soil.

Lazarus (1997) acknowledged the substantive contribution of Berry’s (1997) acculturation model, but at the same time cautioned that the prevailing conceptualisation of acculturation does not completely account for the

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scope and complexity of the migration experience: “We also need to recognise that any move to a new place, much less to a new society, creates major stressful demands and we need to wonder whether these stresses are different in degree and kind, over and above acculturation stresses, from those involved in relocation to another country” (p. 41). This observation implied that the acculturation phenomenon is a (significant) component of an otherwise more elaborate migration experience. Relevant in this regard is also the recent observation that more holistic and process-oriented approaches to viewing and attending to expatriate adjustment are important (Takeuchi et al., 2005). Arguably the adjustment stresses faced by migrants are equal if not more demanding than those encountered by expatriates.

In considering the migrant’s adjustment stress beyond intercultural contact, it follows that the entire adjustment process (of which acculturation constitutes the greatest part) should be of importance to those who have an interest in migrants and migrant communities. Many countries rely on migrant inflows to bolster labour pools and hence economic growth (cf. Clydesdale, 2011), yet are also confronted with the consistent observation that migrants’ economic performance, generally, fall short of expectations (Büchel & Frick, 2003; Schittelhelm, & Schmidtke, 2010). Optimising migrant adjustment, consequently, would have significant economic impact for the host country but also, and in particular, contribute to improved migrant mental health and wellbeing... an attendant risk of the migration process (cf. Bhugra, 2004; Nesdale & Mak, 2003; Neto, 2010; Phinney et al., 2001). This would entail (as implied by Lazarus, 1997) the adoption of an expanded theory frame extending beyond the conceptual boundaries of ‘acculturation’ to guide research and intervention.

The construct of ‘*adjustment*’, which in one sense is perceived as more expansive in meaning than acculturation, in itself is complex - as reported by scholars from different disciplines (cf. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Cigularova, 2005; Ward et al., 1998). Consensus on its exact meaning, understandably, is lacking (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Once the phrase ‘*adaptation*’ enters the discussion, in this context closely aligned to *adjustment*, the conceptual quagmire opens up. Sam and Berry (2010, p. 472) for example argue that *acculturation* ‘...is the process of cultural and psychological change that results following meeting between cultures’ and *adaptation* is ‘...individual psychological well-being and how individuals manage socioculturally’ and a result or outcome of acculturation.

Within the frame of ‘acculturation’ several authors have moved to more lifecycle-based views of the phenomenon, following exploratory, qualitative methodologies, and these typically portray the migrant’s experience as a series of reasonably sequential stages. Winkelman’s (1994, p. 122) summary of various models of the stages / phases of ‘*culture shock*’, which appears to embrace *acculturation* more broadly, as well as elements of *adjustment* (depending on your definitions of these constructs) allow for a ‘honeymoon or tourist phase’; ‘crises or cultural shock phase’; ‘adjustment, reorientation, and gradual recovery phase’ and the ‘adaptation, resolution, or acculturation phase’. Variations of this phase-bound process usually expand or collapse these four basic phases into processes with between five or eight essentially similar phases (for a brief overview see Brown & Holloway, 2008; Zapf, 1991). These depictions prompt questions about the conceptual ‘boundary lines’ of the different concepts (such as acculturation, culture shock, adjustment, adaptation) and poses the question as to where (exactly) *acculturation* fits in? Clearly more work in crystallising theory frames and constructs but also the fundamental discipline-specific philosophies of ‘man’ that inform these theoretical frames and constructs, are required.

The term ‘transition’ is similarly fraught with ambiguity, but there seems to be more consistency in its use within a ‘psychology of change’ perspective where it is employed more commonly as ‘individual transition’ or individual level change (see Van Tonder, 2004). Change theory, especially from an organisational and systems perspective, generally tends to be more embrative in scope, but not without criticism (cf. Pettigrew, 1990; Todnem By, 2005; Van Tonder, 2004). Notwithstanding the variation in definitions of acculturation and related constructs, the migration experience at a fundamental level constitutes change... certainly, when gauged in terms of the view that change is ‘...a non-discrete yet context bound process of energy movement that is reflected in an empirical difference in the state and or condition of the system over time’ (Van Tonder, 2008, p.

2). It is intuitively logical that the process of dislocating and relocating to a new and likely foreign host country should also fit the more elaborated personal change or personal transition process, which has been defined as a *'... gradual and progressive form of human change which encapsulates both cognitive and affective change and is viewed as an attempt at coming to terms at an intrapersonal level with environmental changes that impact on the person'* (Van Tonder, 2004, p. 233). To the extent that the 'Personal transition' process can be 'fitted' to migrant experiences, to this extent it should enable further specification of the individual level change dynamics that the migrant experiences, and would presumably do so beyond the intercultural contact stage (the narrow conceptualisation of 'acculturation'). While there are obvious parallels between different disciplinary accounts of this process-based perspective of the migrant's experience, the foci and level of specification would vary, potentially offering additional insight. Apart from temporarily disentangling the migrant's experience from the acculturation dynamic with its inherent complexity, sufficient alignment should also enable health professionals, institutional managers and policy makers to render an expanded repertoire of more focused and specific support (interventions) consistent with the fundamentals of change theory e.g. change preparation, planning, negotiating with resistance, and appropriately engaging and directing change ('managing change').

2. Purpose and methodology

The current study forms part of a research project which aims to bring more information to bear on the issue of effective (and accelerated) migrant acculturation and adjustment. 'Migrants' in this study refer to those people who permanently relocate from one country (often a 'developing' country) to another – usually a developed country (cf. Cao, Hirschi & Deller, 2012).

The focus in this study was specifically to establish whether personal transition (or individual change) can be discerned from the 'migration stories' of participants in the study. The researchers sought authentic, lived-world accounts of migrants' experiences of the relocation from their country of origin to their newly adopted country. The respondents for this study comprised South African migrants to Australia, representing the first of five migrant groups of different national origins. Relying on word-of-mouth followed by a purposeful sampling approach, 21 participants were secured for the research (see Table 1 for a brief outline of the profile of the sample).

The primary means for data gathering was semi-structured interviews, which were recorded, transcribed and subjected to basic content analysis. Participants were fully briefed and voluntary consent obtained prior to requesting them to relate their 'migration stories' to the researchers. This they did in response to a number of open-ended questions which focused on migrants' recollections of the onset of the migration process, their perceptions and experiences of the migration process and host country. Interview transcriptions were reread several times to surface unique and common concepts and themes, which were verified with co-researchers. From this point forward evidence of the various identifying features of the personal transition process were identified from the data. Observations so obtained are outlined and briefly discussed in the 'Results' section.

Table 1. Profile of South African migrant sample

Respondent ID ^a , Gender, Age, Residency ^b , Educational Qualification, Professional ^c
R1; Male; 39; 8; B.Ing degree; Engineer*
R2; Male; 44; 3,5; Hons B.Com, MBA; Chartered Accountant*
R3; Male; 44; 3; B.Ing degree; Engineer*
R7; Male; 48; 3; N4; -
R8; Male; 36; 21; Cert IV Building & Construction; -
R9; Female; 43; 3,5; Grade 12; -
R10; Female; 55; 12; LL.B; Lawyer*
R11; Male; 53; 3; M.Com, MBA; Psychologist*

R12; Female; 48; 3.5; Hons, MBA; -
 R14; Male; 25; 2.5; B. Tech; podiatrist*
 R16; Male; 27; 2.5; Hons B.Com; Chartered Accountant*
 R17; Female; 27; 2.5; B.Com, PG Cert in Education; -
 R18; Male; 53; 2.5; D.Litt et Phil; Psychologist*
 R20; Male; 44; 5; Hons B.Com; -
 R21; Male; 50; 5; Dipl Metallurgy; -
 R22; Male; 47; 4; LL.B; Lawyer*
 R23; Male; 51; 6; D.Com; -
 R24; Female; 35; 3; Hons; -
 R25; Female; 38; 4; Hons B.Com; Chartered Accountant*
 R26; Female; 52; 9; D.Ed, LLB; -
 R27; Female; 41; 3; Dipl; -

Note. All respondents were married.

*Respondent numbering reflect the administrative numbering sequence with omitted 'numbers' reflecting ineligibility for various reasons such as being of a different nationality (e.g. Chinese), or having retired prior to migration, etc. ^bPeriod of residence in Australia, in years, at the time of the research. ^c*Statutory professional status* prior to migration i.e. possessing a professional qualification and registered with the appropriate professional council in South Africa.

3. Results

The 'migration stories' of the 21 South African interviewees proved substantially revealing from several vantage points. However, only those observations ('themes') that relate more pertinently to the nature of the change, with which the migrant grappled, are reported. The first theme affirms the daunting nature of migration in general, while the second briefly conveys the stage-bound nature of migration. The third and last theme is concerned with the primary focus of the study i.e. the observed parallels between *personal transition* (or individual-level change) and the migration process as discerned from respondent narrative.

3.1. Migration as significant challenge

At a general level the findings of this study are consistent with the well-established position that migration is a demanding and deeply confronting personal experience, with 15 of 21 respondents commenting on the difficulty of the process (12 indicated intense negative affect, with four noting depression). This trend is evidenced for example in statements such as ...*'There is no harder challenge in life than to put your whole life in a box and emigrate. Failing, is a choice'* (R8) *'...Do not think, if your marriage is not strong, that you can come and fix it here'* (R9); *'It was hard, it was difficult. Sometimes I said to myself 'Gee...this is really hard' and my husband wasn't there and I was alone out there...'* (R10); *'... not that I'm saying it was a difficult task, it was just challenging and to get to know how things operate...'* (22). The migration experience invariably was accompanied by the sacrifice of a pre-migration lifestyle or elements thereof, with 16 of 21 respondents for example conveying a loss of financial independence (*'We came from being owners with a never-ending supply of money to here where we had to work on one salary'*, R27), occupational attainment (*'You take a step back... almost 10 years'* (R2); *'She had to give up her work back in SA she had actually her own business...'* (R3), and/or relationships / social networks (e.g. *'...most people sacrifice relationships with family'*, R22).

Particularly revealing though, is the intensity with which respondents experienced the migration process. More intense experiences are typically anticipated when the difference between the culture of origin and host country culture is substantial (cf. Van de Vijver & Phalet, 2004; Yost & Lucas; 2002). In this instance, however, interviewees indicated intense and often extremely taxing experiences despite the fact that these cultures are generally perceived as being very similar (e.g. both being English-speaking – Cao et al., 2012). This, most likely, reflects the impact of unanticipated but pervasive (though tacit) cultural differences on the back of misguided assumptions about the similarity of the two countries and cultures. Prior research has

indicated that when tacitly-held expectations of the host country / setting, among other, lack accuracy and objectivity, adjustment and mental health of migrants may be compromised (Furnham, 2008).

3.2. Migration as a stage-bound experience

Apart from the general distressing nature of relocating, respondents’ stories of their migration ‘journey’ revealed a pattern of four broad stages, not unlike those commonly proposed (see in particular Zapf, 1991, p. 108). Table 2 provides a brief illustration of what essentially can be described as the 'pre-arrival', 'arrival' (similar to the 'honeymoon' stage), 'settling-in', and 're-establishment' phases of the migration experience.

Table 2. Broad migration stages

Migration Stage ^a	Narrative ^b
Pre-arrival	‘...back in SA you actually do some research...’ and ‘...there is a lot of preparation that you do...’ (R3); ‘... we planned over, almost, 4 years, we planned the whole migration process...’ (R22)
Arrival	‘It was very positive. I think it’s the honeymoon period as people call it, you think everything is great. It’s beautiful, it’s safe...’ (R 25)
Settling-in	‘In the last couple of years we have really settled into the lifestyle here in Australia’ (R1); ‘Hmm, look it feels like home now, I mean...I have settled in nicely here. I’ve made good friends...’ (R10);
Re-establishment	‘I call Australia home...’ (R2); ‘...I’m Australian now, I’m a citizen’ (R25)

^aBroad stages in respondents’ stories of migration. ^bIllustrative excerpts (verbatim, random) from respondent narrative.

Consistent with similar stage-bound frames, the four stages here broadly suggest the much-debated ‘U-curve’ of migrant adjustment (Furnham, 2008; Ward et al., 1998). However, the utility value of this pattern or ‘curve’, being too general and residing at too high a level of abstraction, theoretically and practically remains limited.

3.3. Migration as individual-level change: Personal transition (PT)

The stage-bound pattern in Table 2, in a crude way, approximates *personal transition* (PT) (see Van Tonder, 2004, pp. 163-172). *Personal transition* offers a more circumscribed perspective on the dynamic often depicted as the ‘U-curve’ of culture shock, acculturative stress, cross-cultural adjustment and so forth. To determine the extent to which the *personal transition* frame ‘fits’ the narrative of respondents, excerpts from migrants’ stories which illustrate the general and more specific features of PT per definition (Van Tonder, 2004, pp. 163 – 172) are presented in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

Table 3. General character of ‘Personal Transition’ (‘PT’)

‘PT’ General features ^a	Narrative ^b
1. Gradual, progressive process	‘...it has become better and better... I suppose as time goes on ’ (R10); ‘...takes a while to get used to the environment, but I believe that will change’ (R20); ‘... and gradually that reality starts to set in’ (R26); ‘...don't underestimate that adjustment period, the time it takes to fully adjust to life in Australia and how different it is’ and ‘... it's not a two-month process, it takes a year to fully cope with your new role’ (R25); ‘My word, it's a total turnaround. When I first came here it took me two-and-a-half years to adapt to the Australian way of life for me’ (R27)
2. Contextual trigger	‘Adjusting to the Australian workplace proved to be more challenging and taxing than initially expected’ (R18); ‘...the most frustrating thing is the one in the workplace, because I don't have a handle on how to resolve it’ (R20); ‘...so then I realized while I was struggling to manage with him, I was struggling to come to grips why they do things in a certain way and what I'm doing wrong and things like that... you start realizing... you think: well what's wrong? You realize something is wrong, but you don't quite know what’ (R25)
3. Cognitive character / change	‘... a case of acknowledging and taking on that we are part of this country...’ (R1); ‘... trying to justify why we are here...’ (R3); ‘I took about six months to make the mind shift and now I am quite comfortable with it’

(R7); '...the fact that you **know** why you have made the move – for a specific reason and not simply for the sake of moving, I think this **reason** becomes an anchor in times of doubt.' (R11); 'I think it's more the **mental challenge**, it's not so much the physical, it's more the... to me that's where it lies, in the **mental fight**... and the price you have to pay to be here' (R20); '...as time goes by your **perception** does change and your **viewpoint** has to change whether you like it or not' (R27)

4. Affective character / change '...just frustrating to be so far from your family...' (R3); 'At the same time I experienced **feelings of self-doubt**' (R17); 'I was often **quietly anxious** and somewhat **worried** about the unknown.' (R18)
5. Interdependence: cognition, affect 'I also found that once I started working, it took **my mind off things** that were causing **anxiety and stress**' (R17); '... even though we don't **feel** that it's home yet, **we want** it to be...' (R22).

Note. Bold typeface added for ease of identifying category indicators/locaters. See also narrative in Table 4.

^aGeneral characteristics of *Personal Transition* (as per Van Tonder, 2004, pp. 163-172). ^bRandom excerpts from respondent narrative.

Van Tonder (2004, pp. 164-165) indicates that *personal transition* is a reactive and gradual intrapersonal process of change that entails coming to terms with a changed context (new reality) in a series of time-bound and seemingly sequential activities and/or stages with extensive emotion work around entrenched cognitions that require change e.g. assumptions, beliefs, attitudes (therefore a clear affective and cognitive character). How 'transition' unfolds and whether a person emerges from this as a contented, optimistic and forward-looking/committed individual is contingent on many considerations including individual predispositions prior to the change; the nature of the change itself (the implied transition); prevailing situational features; and how the individual eventually copes and deals with the change. Indeed, the width (duration) and the depth (extent and intensity) of the emotional trough hinge fully on these considerations.

To facilitate identification of the personal transition process, the different stages and features have been summarised in Tables 3 and 4. This categorisation is somewhat forced as the ebb and flow of personal transition is anything but discrete... stages, cognitions and emotions seamlessly integrate in the constant flow that is 'change'. Indeed, illustrative respondent narrative will often also reflect other (listed) features.

Table 4. Personal Transition (PT) evidenced in 'migration stories'

Specific 'PT' nodes and features ^a	Narrative ^b
1. Denial, minimization	'It was a holiday feeling and almost nice' (R9); '... so we thought we were just going to transition that whole situation and it didn't pan out that way' (R 25); 'When I got here I thought... well this is the land of opportunity and then, when I tried to find a job, I couldn't find a job...' (R27)
2. 'Alarm' & shock	'It only caught up with me that it is not a holiday when I started to work permanently every day. Then the reality struck me...' (R9); 'Initially you think it's very alike, and it isn't. That was a shock to me' and 'it is mainly just the differences in culture and how you adapt over time' (R20); '... so you have all these positive feelings. That's the initial thoughts and then it takes a few months for you to realize , yes, that's all great, but you've actually lost some things as well and that's when you start going downhill , I think' (R25); '... there's reality , that overwhelming sense of 'we are here'... we have actually moved, we are now going to live here, and this reality that you've left family behind, you are not here on holiday , there is no going back, you have a one-way ticket here. And gradually that reality starts to set in...' and '...you know even coming from South Africa to Australia for the first time can be a huge shock ...' (R26); '... when I first came here, what you see when you are on holiday and what happens when you get here and what fits into that environment, are two different things' and '...it took me a while to do that - it was so very overwhelming...' (R27)
3. Resistance	'...the hard times where everybody actually felt like: I want to get on the first plane and go back ...' (R3); 'You are accepting of it [new life], but I used to rebel against it ...In the beginning I used to think...' 'Oh this is for the birds...not for me' (R10); '...so it was actually quite difficult to uproot ourselves and really move, even though we'd talked about it, it was easier said than done to move out of that comfort zone , and leave family and very, very good jobs and a fabulous home behind' (R 26)
4. Negative affect (emotion work and the 'death valley' of change)	'...just frustrating to be so far from your family...' (R3); '...so, yes, I was stressed , and a little short tempered ...' (R11); '...I got frustrated because he was depressed all the time, I'm like 'get over it and move on' so, yes, there's strain in that but out of that comes a lot of growth as well and then you become very close after you've been through that pressure cooker' (R25) '... [Husband was] really struggling to fit in and he just hated every moment , hated the people, hated the atmosphere...the climate. He hated the fact that it was flat, and all he did was complain' and '...he took just strain, strain, strain, strain, strain...' (R10); '...she [wife] was

	depressed / struggling to adapt in Australia...’ (R16); ‘... I probably suffered a serious bout of depression... ’ (R18); ‘So that reality settled into my husband and that impacted on me because he then was... and struggled to adjust and wanted to go back to South Africa... ’ and ‘... I had to focus on so many different areas that I went through a really bad time, got really depressed... got very... like almost had a nervous breakdown...’ (R25)
5. ‘Letting go’	‘...so their longing back to there isn’t as great anymore...’ (R1); ‘...you realize that... that is sort of something that you’ve left behind... and this is your new life’ (R10); ‘ leaving friends and family behind in South Africa, also discovering how everything works here, as a lot of things are very different’ (R14); ‘I still feel a sense of nostalgia towards South Africa and my heart will always be there’ (R17). ‘...I feel I did not adapt yet to the Aus way of living, I still got all my family and things in SA ’ (R3); ‘... but in the end you can’t have the best of both worlds...’ (R24);
6. ‘New beginnings’ and Re-commitment	‘...and have a say in where this country is going to, I want to have that right’ (R7); ‘I think we’ve sacrificed financially, but we’ve gained in terms of quality family life...’ (R24); ‘... over time the healing comes and the frustrations sort themselves out, but it’s just going through the pressure cooker at the time’ and ‘...I’m Australian now, I’m a citizen’ (R25). ‘ I intend to take up citizenship as soon as possible’ (R17); ‘ I want to be a part of this country. That is why I came here and I identify myself already with this country’ (R21); What Australia has given us is a new...almost a new beginning... ’ (R22)

Note. Bold typeface added for ease of identifying category locaters.

^aSelected key nodes and features of the personal transition process - in sequence from 1 to 7 (see Van Tonder, 2004, p. 168).

^bIllustrative excerpts from respondents accounts of their migration experiences (‘migration stories’).

Excerpts from migrants’ accounts (Table 4) appear to ‘fit’ the personal transition in a fair measure. Migrants do shift from initial optimism and denial of the probable challenges of the host culture, to subsequent (*in situ*) recognition of the real magnitude of the change demands. This, invariably, is greeted with alarm, which triggers resistance, intrapersonal turmoil and extensive ‘emotion work’ – all indicative of the cognitive-affective demands associated with the unanticipated dissonance (as evidenced in Tables 3 and 4). Reference to this stage as the ‘Death Valley’ of change (see Elrod II & Tippett, 2002) is indicative of the intensity and taxing nature of this transitioning stage. Turning to the acculturation literature, this then is also the stage where ‘culture shock’ is likely to manifest (cf. Furnham, 2008; Winkelmann, 1994; Yost & Lucas, 2002). To further illustrate, consider respondent 24’s comments, which aptly capture the intrapersonal turmoil of this stage... confounded emotions and thoughts, and a sense of being ‘in limbo’ (also indicative of ‘culture shock’) is evident in this account of the adjustment trough:

‘... I tried to figure out what is this that I’m feeling, why am I crying? And I realised that there were many emotions and many reasons. The one was that I was really upset and angry because of the circumstances, and crime and violence forcing me out of the country that I loved, causing me to be in a country where I felt discomfort and not being at home. So I was furious on the one hand. On the other hand, I was so sad that I was in a country where they sang the national anthem but I don’t know the words, and where I felt as if I don’t have a home, I don’t belong in South Africa, it is not my country any more, and I don’t belong in Australia it’s not my country yet, so that feeling of hopelessness. Then I had this severe feeling of gratitude knowing that my children won’t be in the same situation, at least this song would be their national anthem...’ (R24).

Migrants generally emerge from this stage with greater receptiveness to new options and eventually refocus and recommit – having internalised the ‘new reality’ e.g. ‘... I had to cope with it and at the end of the day I managed myself through all of that and just put it behind me and do what you know you do best ...’ (R3);

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The ‘migration stories’ of a group of South African migrants were analysed for evidence of the *personal transition* process, which theoretically should offer an expanded and more detailed account of the migration experience when compared to *acculturation* (the ‘on foreign soil’ component). The use of the personal transition frame allows interrogation of the migration experience from a holistic, change-focused perspective and

consequently an expanded time horizon. This meant that otherwise understated considerations, for example the *pre-arrival dynamics* or the *interplay of cognition and affect* during migration, became more salient. The role of migrants' pre-existing assumptions about the similarity of the original and host cultures was similarly more accentuated and seems to perform a significant role in the intensity and extent of the 'death valley' of change. From within a personal transition (change) perspective this pre-arrival stage concerns the 'business case for change' i.e. migration during which the rationale, vision and anticipated migration process are conceptualised and initiated. All but one respondent had visited Australia prior to migration, which, while serving to familiarise, also created the platform for the eventual adjustment challenges. Subtle but important cultural differences are discernible only after extended immersion in the host country - most prominently in the workplace – and exposes the limitations in the pre-arrival preparation of migrants. Despite extensive prior research by several migrants this did not provide insight into the nature and complexity of the (tacit) host country culture (a phenomenon unlikely to be sufficiently sampled during a brief 'scouting' visit). This suggests an important intervention area for psychologists/organisational psychologists - one in which the adverse consequences of transition (and culture shock) could be mitigated.

The use of the *personal transition* frame furthermore prompted a conscious consideration of the role and interplay of *cognition* and *affect*, being two primary dimensions of the individual change experience (cf. Van Tonder, 2004), and an underestimated element of change failure (Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006). Cognition and affect are central to the individual's (and hence the migrant's) *resistance* to or *acceptance* of indicated change in response to the host culture. A clear understanding and a conscious commitment to the rationale, nature, requirements, sacrifices and demands of the change (cognitive domain) and a progressive shift from psychological discomfort and instability to psychological stability and safety (affective domain) are required for change acceptance and accelerated acculturation and adjustment. Viewing the migration experience from within the personal transition frame consequently accentuates the importance of a complete, correct and functional understanding of this 'extreme' change (migration), and an appropriately supported experience of the host country upon arrival on foreign soil. The important supporting role of friends, networks and community structures are clearly indicated, but advanced knowledge-based support beyond these social structures, which enables realistic anticipation of the interpersonal challenges arising from contact with host country representatives, are called for.

The changing character of the personal transition process from a predominantly cognitive phase (conceptualising and legitimising migration) to an intense affective and reactive experience (disillusionment, resistance) and eventually returning to a cognition-dominant phase (reflection, refocusing) also implies relatively continuous rather than sporadic support of the migrant. Professional support (counselling, guidance and/or coaching) would invariably accelerate the migrant's 'coming to terms' with an entirely new life situation, but needs to be offered in a more considered and continuous mode. An array of very different but productive intervention strategies now come into play and broaden psychologists' and institutional repertoires for assisting migrants.

This exploration of South African respondents' 'migration stories' suggest the applicability and potential value of approaching migration to a greater extent from the perspective of personal transition or change. However, substantial further research would be required to unambiguously establish the validity and application parameters of the personal transition frame across a range of migration settings, apart from broadening the respondent base and extending the research to a quantitative level.

It is important to note that acculturation theory, adjustment theory, change theory... all converge on the single, same individual, who is confronted by a new reality, culture and context - all posing demands that require adjustment i.e. personal change. Regardless of the theoretical frames we superimpose on the migrant's experience, change, and how this is engaged and resolved, remains a central consideration.

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