

Modes of Transitions: Designing Interactive Products for Harmony and Well-being

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Introduction

Issues of behavior and social change challenge today's designers with their complexity and magnitude. The traditional way of working on a single product or an isolated functional problem has lost its sway. Design fields, with influences from cognitive and engineering sciences, respond to these challenges by focusing on motivation and end goals.¹ But what if a person has no clear goals or motivations, and she is, instead, in a state of flux? What if the lines between change and *status quo* are not that clear and well-defined? Although a person's well-being is likely being challenged while in a state of flux, the way to design resources for her to support herself and navigate this state is not obvious.

To understand and act on issues of change, a designerly stance providing an experience-based lens and a deeper insight on human conditions is necessary. This article paves the way to such a stance by introducing a design framework called *modes of transitions*. This framework provides a more nuanced, and perhaps more comprehensive, understanding of "change" by highlighting the paradox of how the changing and the unchanging reside together. This paradox leads the inquiry to the ways in which the designer can use the modes of transitions framework to analyze issues of change and to synthesize products accordingly. The article concludes by highlighting the significance of the framework in the pursuit of well-being.

The Problem: Transitions that Threaten Peoples' Well-being Create Wicked Challenges for Designers

Contemporary individuals encounter issues of "change" more dramatic than their historical counterparts. Whether in a post-industrial society or a developing country, they must contend with a constant struggle between the new and the old, change and the status quo. Think of a person who is trying to change a certain behavior, like smoking. She is in an ongoing struggle between the changing and the unchanging states in which she operates. From an experience-based lens, the struggle with this dynamic

1 B. J. Fogg, *Persuasive Technology: Using Computers to Change What We Think and Do* (San Francisco: Morgan Kaufmann, 2002), 1–13.

of changing-unchanging can be understood as a *transition*. At its most basic, a transition occurs when a person is in the midst of passing from one state to another.

Transitions usually challenge an individual's well-being in physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. These challenges usually come with serious threats to well-being—for example, in the context of getting diagnosed with a major illness. If a doctor diagnoses a patient with esophageal cancer, the patient is immediately thrown into a serious set of transitions. The most prominent “changing” factor is her body, as cells multiply, form tumors, and disturb her whole physical system. Alongside this body transition is a cascade of other transitions, at both the material and the abstract levels. Her days are spent at the doctor's office; she is surrounded by doctors, nurses and other patients; she takes drugs; and she likely faces changes in her eating, exercise, sleeping, and relationships with those around her. On an abstract level, her expectations of the next months have to change, as may well her life goals, what she values, how she talks about her life trajectory, and what motivates her. With these symptoms, one can say that issues of change suggest a deeper transition challenge: the possibility of decline in one's well-being.

With their complexity, transitions stand as a wicked problem for designers as well. In each transition, the many moving parts make it difficult to comprehend an individual's functional and experiential needs. Moreover, transitions are usually personal, and implicit by nature, which presents a major challenge to designers: How can they address the overarching plots and underlying emotions that a person goes through? Simplifying the complexity and explicating these experiential needs require new ways of approaching transitional experiences.

The Hypothesis: Modes of Transitions Framework Leads to Design Interventions that Support Well-being

The relevance of design in tackling transition challenges is crucial. As Arendt claims, “the things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life,”² and as Csikszentmihalyi states, “objects provide continuity of the self through time, by providing foci of involvement in the present, mementos and souvenirs of the past, and signposts to future goals.”³ Moreover, product attachment theory explains why products are involved in transitions,⁴ how critical their involvement is, and how they may serve well-being. A person attaches to a product during the flux of transition, perceives the product as something graspable, and holds onto it firmly. A toddler carries his security blanket wherever he goes while becoming independent, or a man in a mid-life crisis redefines himself with the help of a convertible car, or an immigrant reconnects to her culture with her clothing. In all these instances,

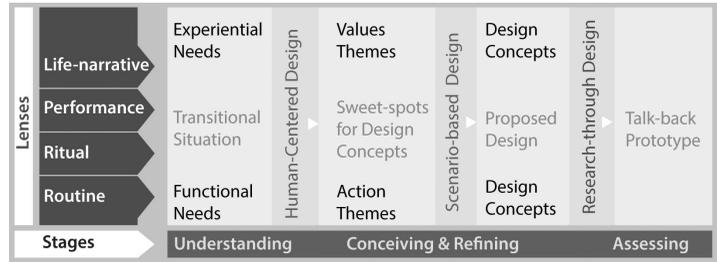
2 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 157.

3 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, “Why We Need Things,” in *History from Things*, Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, eds. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 22–23.

4 W. Russell Belk, “Possessions and the Extended Self,” *The Journal of Consumer Research* 15, no. 2 (1988): 139–68.

Figure 1

Modes of Transitions framework, with lenses for a three-stage design process: structuring human-centered design methods, scenario-based design, and research through design.



- 5 Ervin Goffman gives a thorough explanation of what a framework does and how it functions in a social context: "Social frameworks provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of intelligence, a live agency, and the chief one being the human being.... [W]hat it does can be described as 'guided doings.' These doings subject the doer to 'standards,' to social appraisal of his action based on its honesty, efficiency, economy, safety, elegance, tactfulness, good taste, and so forth. A serial management of consequentiality is sustained, that is, continuous corrective control, becoming most apparent when action is unexpectedly blocked or deflected and special compensatory effort is required. Motive and intent are involved, and their imputation helps select which of the various social frameworks of understanding is to be applied." Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on Organization of Experience* (New York, Northeastern, 1986), 22–23.
- 6 F. Kursat Ozenc, "Reverse Alarm Clock: a research through design example of *designing for the self*" (paper presented at the Conference on Designing pleasurable products and interfaces, DPPI 2007, Helsinki, Finland, August 22-25, 2007); F. Kursat Ozenc, Lorrie F. Cranor, and James H. Morris, "Adapt-a-ride: Understanding the Dynamics of Commuting Preferences through an Experience Design Framework" (paper presented at Conference on Designing Pleasurable Products and Interfaces, DPPI 2011, Milano, Italy, June 22-25, 2011); and F. Kursat Ozenc and Shelly D. Farnham, "Life 'modes' in social media" (paper presented at the Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, CHI 2011, Vancouver, Canada, May 5-7, 2011.)
- 7 Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on Organization of Experience*, 22–23.

products are more than mere functional devices. They are holders of deeper emotions, like frustration, hope, and happiness. Products carry this strong potential for being companions and facilitators during transitions.

How can designers interpret this potential of products in a situation of transition? Among their many virtues, effective designers are particularly good at two tasks: making things, and empathizing with people who would use these things. Designers then need to leverage this potential by better understanding people and designing products accordingly. To guide their efforts, they need to look through a pragmatic lens—one that can flesh out the nuances of transitions, thus enhancing their understanding of people and their way of making things.

This lens is called "modes of transitions," and it was borne out of the interplay between design process and theoretical investigation. As a framework, it gives designers sensitizing lenses that result in ways of understanding and ways of acting on a transition situation,⁵ which thereby also give resources to individuals to draw on and to transition with well-being. The framework follows a design process of three stages: *understanding*, *conceiving and refining*, and *assessing*. It provides analytic and synthetic methods at each of these stages for designers to use to comprehend and help move people along through transitions. As a practical design framework, it focuses on how an individual acts with agency to compose a harmonious transition. The framework has been deployed in several design projects, with promising outcomes.⁶

Design frameworks generally rely on two distinct perspectives: one on traditions of design and another on traditions of social science. Design tradition suggests analyzing a situation and synthesizing a resolution in the form of a product or service, whereas social science suggests a structured yet flexible framing for analysis and synthesis. Modes of transitions structures the analytical and synthetic design processes, providing frames for "guided doings" to balance the level of agency both in understanding and acting on transitions.⁷ It offers a flexible structuring of human-centered design methods to analyze and comprehend transitions; combines it with scenario-based design to provide a means of action; and suggests building talk-back prototypes by using research-through-design methods (see Figure 1).

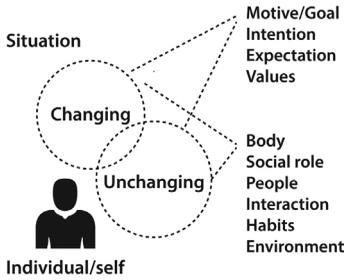


Figure 2

During transition, individuals encounter the tension between changing and unchanging dimensions.

Modes of Transitions: The Understanding Stage

Two of the fundamental *wicked* problems in transitions are unweaving the complexity of a transitional situation and explicating the implicitness of people’s experiential needs. One challenge in addressing these wicked issues is the gathering of relevant data, another is making sense of that data. The modes of transitions framework addresses this challenge with its understanding stage, which simplifies the complexity by offering ways for collecting and making sense of the data.

Modes of transitions allows the designer to understand the transitional situation via the framework’s heuristics. The transition heuristics provide a lens to identify the conflict in the transition situation, with a focus on determining the changing and unchanging dimensions of body, role, interactions, habits, and environments.⁸ In any transition, some elements of a person’s life experience may be changing while others simultaneously remain unchanged (see Figure 2). At a material level, a person’s body, her roles, the people around her, and her interactions, behaviors, and environment might change. All these factors are manifest in the physical world and are observable to others. At a more abstract, interior level, a person’s motives and goals, intentions, expectations, and values are also factors that might be in flux. Also to be considered, but more likely to be “unchanging” rather than “changing,” except in more extreme transitions, are a person’s genetic and cultural codes, and her personal and collective lived experiences.

Modes of transitions focuses designers on uncovering the most prominent transition in a situation—the body’s changes in the situation of illness, the role changes in the situation of becoming a new parent, the environment changes in the situation of moving to a new country. By mapping a range of material and abstract dynamics, designers can identify where the transition is felt, and can see the transition not just in the most apparent changing dynamics, but also in the underlying shifts in the situation. The framework recognizes that the experience is multi-layered, often with a cascade of transitions and not just a single one. The framework gives the designer directions in gathering the data and identifying emergent themes.

In addition to mapping these specific dynamics, the designer should also delineate the needs in the situation. Each transition consists of both *functional needs* and *experiential needs*. Functional needs are immediate and relatively transparent in nature, like traveling from A to B; experiential needs are long-term and implicit by nature, like having “me-time” while traveling from A to B. Modes of transitions highlights this nuance and brings the implicit, experiential needs to the surface. As designers observe and categorize these needs, they begin to better define the transition problem and how well-being is at risk.

8 F. K. Ozenc, “Transitions Heuristics in the Pursuit of Well-being: Situating Interactive Products and Services in Transitions” (paper presented at the International Design Research Society (DRS) Conference, Montreal, Canada, July 7-9, 2010).

Modes of transitions offers another lens to gather and make sense of data on the transition situation. It allows for the plotting of four facets of an individual's life: routine, ritual, performance, and narrative. These four facets guide the human-centered design methods, such as interviews and surveys. Plotting these four facets helps designers to uncover a person's action and values themes for the understanding stage. In each of these plots, they can identify the critical interactions between the transitioning person and her environment and discover the underlying functional and experiential needs for a potential product.

Routines

A routine is a mechanical or habitual performance of an established procedure.⁹ Prior research shows us that routines are automated actions that people unconsciously perform; they are unremarkable in character, serving as the glue of everyday life.¹⁰ Routines are shaped creatively; they can be social; and they can become predictable.¹¹ A routine's relationship with the other modes is a crucial one. In their routines, individuals can perform their roles. And routines can be the building blocks of a person's narrative and ritual, giving her material actions with which to view and self-narrate her life. In a transitional situation, routine is the first lens people wear; it is the plot for habits and automated actions. To the degree that it is unchanging, it can provide order for a person in a transitional situation. It may be challenged with changing situations (e.g., moving to a new city), or it may need to be challenged with changing interventions (e.g., acquiring a new habit).

Role Performances

Performance means the execution of an action. For human experience, it is an individual's enactment of roles in various contexts. It may be conscious or habitual, depending on the role and the situation. Erving Goffman defines performance as "the activity of an individual occurring during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers."¹² Suchman interprets these performance situations to be ones in which a person's actions are highly contingent, founded on local interactions with the environment, and based on improvisation.¹³ This notion grows out of the concept of "personas": a person performing a chosen role, depending on her assessment of the situation. A performance can occur through routine or ritual acts, and it can supply material through which a person forms her narrative. It provides the plot for role enactments and improvisation, provides flexibility and an improvisation aspect in a changing situation, and gives the role enactment according to a script and audience in an unchanging situation. Performances are manifested through personas in the design process, helping designers to foresee enactment possibilities in scenarios.

9 "Routine," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/routine (accessed February 17, 2013).

10 Peter Tolmie, "Unremarkable Computing," *Proceedings of Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (Minnesota, ACM, 2002), 399–406.

11 Ron Wakkary and Leah Maestri, "The Resourcefulness of Everyday Design," *Proceedings of Creativity and Cognition 2007* (New York, ACM, 2007), 163–72.

12 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), 15.

13 Lucy A. Suchman, *Human Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 185.

Rituals

A ritual is an act, similar to that of routine, but imbued with meaning.¹⁴ It is a habitual behavior, of which a person is conscious—perhaps more conscious than any other act, with a distinct meaning for the person’s sense of self—whether it be in a personal, social, moral, or other sense. More precisely, rituals are expressive and symbolic activities composed of several sets of performances, which happen in a repetitive manner.¹⁵ Rituals, then, grow out of routines and can be a location of performances, and they are key components in the narrative process. Because they are such conscious and meaningful acts, they provide especially strong material with which people can narrate their lives. Ritual is the plot for meaning making; it is both changing and unchanging; and it provides a liminal space for harmonizing changing and unchanging facets. Think of an interaction ritual: Each time a person greets someone, for example, the ritual is changing because the context is different, but the ritual is also unchanging because it carries the same script and enactments during the performance. Or think of a graduation ceremony: During the ritual, the person is still a student and is unchanging by following the rules of student conduct; but the person also becomes a graduate and represents the changing process of becoming. Ritual provides the focused interaction, sweet spots, and ritual moments for engagement. They can be manifested through scenarios.

Life Narrative

Narrative means the narration of a story or the representation in art of an event or story. In a transitional situation, it can occur in a person’s inner dialogue, dialogue with other people, or interactions. Every person, conscious of it or not, assembles experiences and thoughts into a narrative. Ricoeur’s idea of “emplotment” details this notion, explaining that people plot their routines, performances, and rituals to generate unified wholes.¹⁶ McAdams’s identity theory also finds that people make sense of their life and construct their identity by means of composing their life-story.¹⁷ Narrative operates at the highest level of the four modes: A person’s self-narrative may guide her routine, ritual, and performance acts, and these three, in turn, feed into her story of herself. A life narrative provides and is the plot for identity/character construction in a dynamic manner. Individuals can harmonize the changing and unchanging situations based on their values and agency variables. For example, think of a new graduate’s life story in a new job situation. She constructs it according to her past lived experiences in college while also trying to construct a changing, future life-narrative within the constraints and possibilities of her new situation. Life-narrative has the potential to help individuals realign themselves in a new situation.

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- 14 Ritual is an overarching theme studied widely in social science fields. Catherine Bell identifies three main schools of thought in ritual scholarship: those looking at the *origins and essence*; those looking at *social function and structure*; and finally, those looking at *cultural meanings, symbols, and practice*. The origins and essence school, as its name implies, investigates whether myth or ritual is the essence for religion and culture, in its particularity, bringing evolutionary, sociological, and psychological approaches to ritual. The social function and structure school investigates the purpose and function of the ritual. The last school of thought emphasizes the meaning-making aspect of ritual and how people create meaning while embodying rituals. Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 80–81.
- 15 W. D. Rook, “Ritual Dimension of Consumer Behavior Research,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 12, no. 3 (1985): 251–64.
- 16 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 54.
- 17 Dan P. McAdams, Ruthellen Josselson, and Amia Lieblich, ed., *Turns in the Road: Narrative Studies of Lives in Transition* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001).

Each of these four plots offers the designer a means to gather data about the transition, and a means to conceive and refine designs to address it. In terms of gathering data, designers can investigate the transitions through routine and ritual mappings, social role enactments, and transition stories. Each tool can be applied separately, or they can be considered together. The plots offer strong, yet flexible, guides for what the designer should pay attention to in all of the complexity of a transition situation. Human-centered design methods can explicate how these four plots figure into a person's transition and unveil potential "sweet spots" for building agency and well-being.

One powerful method of analysis is mapping people's routines and rituals through participatory activities with participants. *Life mapping activity* is an example of this method.¹⁸ The designer prepares a setting (e.g., with a whiteboard or wide-size white paper) and then asks participants prompt questions to map the general elements as well as the particulars of a situation. The participants use very basic tools, such as Post-its and markers, to report on the transitional situation. Questions for the session are crafted according to the specifics of the transitional situation, but the modes—routine, performance, and ritual—guide and shape the nature of the questions. These mappings show the issues that cause breakdowns in people's routines, or issues that threaten people's stability and continuity.

Another method for mapping routines and rituals is *role enactment activity*. Designers, practitioners, and clients can use this activity to understand different threads of an experience, including its routines and rituals. Similar to experience prototyping¹⁹ and body-storming activities,²⁰ which emerged with the need to better understand experiences and their situations, role enactment activity calls for focusing the participants on a particular context and asking them to enact a particular routine or ritual in that context. Having enacted the routine or ritual, the participants are then asked to reflect on their own routine and to identify the underlying functional and experiential needs that motivate them. Thus, the designer leads the participants, and the group, to the sweet spots for potential themes and consequently to product concepts.

One other method to gather data that can explicate the experiential needs is the *transition story interview*. Here, designers look for the conflicting social roles in the transitional situation. Having identified the roles, they then craft transition story prompts along the two axes of stress and arousal-stimulation. The resulting stories thus provide the emotional hook for the actions and values themes. For example, "fear" might cause an individual to lose her sense of self, or "anger" might be aroused from not being respected in a particular role. The questions typically probe into the best and worst memorable events from past experiences,

18 Ozenc and Farnham, "Life 'modes' in social media": 564-65.

19 Marion Buchenau and Jane Fulton Suri, "Experience Prototyping," *Proceedings of the 3rd Conference on Designing Interactive Systems: Processes, Practices, Methods, and Techniques* (New York: ACM, 2000), 424–33.

20 Antti Oulasvirta, Esko Kurvinen, and Tomi Kankainen, "Understanding Contexts by Being There: Case Studies in Bodystorming," *Personal Ubiquitous Computing* 7, no.2, (2003): 125–34.

time span	micro	macro
role	social role	life stage
environment	spatial	migration

Figure 3
Types of Transitions.

as well as aspirations and worst-case scenarios from future projections. This story construction gives designers at least three things: values that come from the past; values that matter in the present; and values that are not formed yet, but driven by future expectations. These values themes can then be investigated during the scenarios. At this point, the designer is not married to any of the values, but has a wide selection from which to choose and on which to focus in the design process. Examples of values might be “me-time” during daily commutes, or “parental moments” for nighttime routines.

As designers gather data about transitional experiences, the modes of transitions framework provides resources for analyzing and prioritizing this input. The understanding stage provides analytic methods that can frame the wicked transition problem, point to sweet spots for design interventions, and stage the synthetic phase.

An initial step is to name the type of transition. Four main transition categories are spatial, social role, life stage, and migratory transitions (see Figure 3). After determining whether the transition is primarily occurring at a micro or macro level, and at a role or environment level, designers can use this matrix to give a name to the transition.

Modes of transitions then focuses on the action themes and values themes that exist in the transition. Action themes are built on functional needs, whereas values themes are built on both functional and experiential needs. Action themes give material for the functional goals of the product proposals and are usually related to the routine plot, where the goal is providing a mechanical functioning for an experience. At their core, action themes give resources and direction on how users can build new routine actions and experiences. For example, in a ride-sharing role transition, the person needs to go from point A to point B, regardless of her values. Values themes, meanwhile, give material for the experiential goals of products. Values themes are more related to rituals and narrative plots. They point designers toward priorities, narratives, and beliefs that the user values and indicate the resources designers should build into the experience. In a ride-sharing role transition, values would be the privacy, the “me-time,” and such values might be more important than traveling from point A to point B.

In discovering action and values themes, designers need to look at recurring patterns in the gathered data and identify the themes based on these patterns. Sometimes patterns lead to a constellation of themes that crystallize into a certain functional or experiential need. Seeing patterns makes the designer’s job of prioritizing the themes easier—as in a ridesharing transition, where all the small routines and rituals point to a “me-time” theme. In

some other situations, however, competing themes make prioritizing the themes more difficult. At this point, designers need scenarios with embodied stories that establish experiences behind these values and that provide a user's feedback on prioritization.

Conceiving and Refining Stage

In the conceiving and refining stage, designers use a scenario-based method to investigate the action and values themes,²¹ and how they serve the functional and experiential needs of the transitioning individuals. Scenarios are crafted with the four plots of routines, rituals, performances, and narratives in mind. Contrary to the persona approach, in which the designer develops the personas before developing the scenarios and concepts, here the designer begins with the plots themselves, and the plots advance the themes that are learned in the understanding stage. In a way, the modes of transitions framework, rather than fixing the individual with goals, offers an alternative way to approach a person's ever-changing contexts and search for goals. Note that in a transitional situation, values or goals are usually not yet formed, which is the core reason why people get lost metaphorically; they lose their life-narrative and their goals during the transitions. Each plot probes into the action and values themes and uncovers the overarching narratives—goals of the individual who is transitioning. This approach also gives the designer the mechanism to see how the person is switching between these different modes, or life channels.

In developing product concepts using scenarios, the designer can work to construct cascading plots, integrating the emergent action and values themes, to provide resources for agency and well-being in the transitional situation. In forming the plots, designers need to keep in mind several principles. Each plot needs to follow the dramatic structure of *beginning*, *middle*, and *end*. For instance, a designer might prototype a routine plot that would consist of four unfolding scenes: setting the transitional situation, the conflict, the proposal, and the outcome of the proposal.

In developing plot variations, designers should explore extreme situations, as well as quotidian situations, to allow for mapping out a spectrum of possibilities for handling the transitional situations. When a designer presents this range of scenarios to users, and sees how they would follow the plots or deviate from them, key insights emerge that can be used to develop the design or create new iterations of it.

In a transition situation, routines are the most vulnerable plots. For example, a new college student just moved to a new country for university study. Her challenges are many, but primary among them is not having established routines or coordinated activities. To develop routine plots, the designer needs to

21 John Carroll, *Making Use: Scenario-based Design of Human-computer Interactions* (Boston: MIT Press, 2000), 46–74.

translate action themes into design concepts. In a transitional situation, a particular challenge is the threat of changes to the unchanging activities of an individual. These unchanging activities incorporate features of time, people, places, and coordination of these activities. To address this challenge, designers need to forge the theme of *flexibility* in their scenarios and design proposals to help individuals probe new routines and new unchanging activities.

Think of our new college student again. She has just finished high school and has few resources on which to draw for navigating college life. She relies heavily on the conventions of her new role and the connotations that come with it. Research shows that when people gain a new role, they use products as props for their role enactments.²² In a transitional situation, designers should be aware of the potential that products have as props and scripts for a particular role enactment. However, they should also be aware of an individual's need to improvise in her new role, instead of relying on an unchanging prop or script to manage the changing and unknown situations.

To consider both the changing and unchanging roles, designers should be aware of how people switch between different roles in a transitional situation and what cues and keys they use to do so. In the "Life Modes" project,²³ one of the findings about role performances was that people use time, people, location, schedules, and their own outfits as cues for role switches. Designers, while probing into new roles through products, can think of these cues and explore them in scenarios. Individuals also prioritize their roles and performances. An insight from the modes of transitions framework is that people wear many hats at the same time, and focusing on one specific role is not enough to probe the performance plot. The notion of *strategic interaction*, a term coined by Goffman, is relevant here.²⁴ Borrowing ideas from game theory, Goffman defines strategic interactions as consisting of four steps: assessment, judgment, moves, and payoff. Each step is a way to enact certain roles in front of a certain audience, and the goal is to reach harmony and integrity (character). In a transitional situation, designers might work on design proposals for multiple role performances, in which some roles function like the guiding or leading roles and others function more as complementary roles.

Rituals are consciously performed routines whereby the individual invests emotions and meanings in a particular transition situation. They likely carry strong values themes. Designers need to probe ritual plots and consider which ritual moments and focused interactions could embody the discovered values themes. For example, the personal ritual of a commuter might involve listening to a selection of songs on a music player, or saying prayers with prayer beads. Each ritual, in a way, embodies certain values.

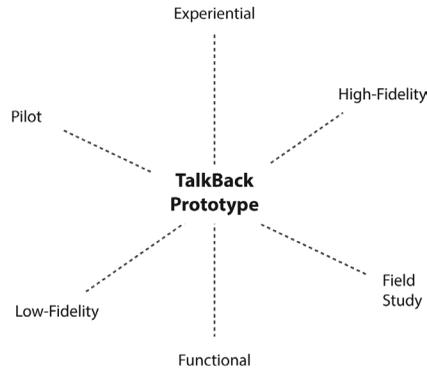
22 Belk, "Possessions and the Extended Self," 139-51.

23 Ozenc and Farnham, "Life 'modes' in social media," 566.

24 Erving Goffman, *Interaction Rituals: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), 149-234.

Figure 4

Talkback prototypes, allowing the designer, user, and product to “have conversation” about intentions and expectations, and their meeting point via prototype use.



A designer can design props or frames for these ritual moments. The Reverse Alarm Clock project provides an example of the design of ritual moments: The clock was used to construct family bedtime rituals, in the form of a music box for both children and their parents. By selecting the morning music at night before sleep, children become more invested and part of the ritual.²⁵

Assessing Stage

Having developed design proposals, designers need to actualize these proposals with talkback prototypes. Talkback prototypes can be built ranging in complexity from low-fidelity to high-fidelity. How much refinement is worth investing on the function or the form of a prototype depends on the constraints of a project. Talkback prototypes should also investigate the goals of the transitional situation along the spectrum of functional to experiential needs (see Figure 4). Based on the prototype’s location within this range, the designer can choose to run pilot or field studies for the prototype. In assessing their talkback prototype, designers can use diaries and logs to assess the routine plot; transition stories from interviews to assess the ritual and performance plots; and surveys to assess rituals and performance plots. Note that surveys and interview questions need to consider the placebo effect—that is, how the product is perceived and actually used in the intended situation. To overcome this effect, the designer needs to craft questions sensitively and perhaps ask indirect questions about the influence of the product on role performances and rituals. When assessing these plots, designers must tie the assessment to the point at which they started: with action and values themes. In other words, they must assess what really triggers an individual in transition to pursue well-being through her use of the product.

The Real Assessment: Does the User Engage the Design as a Resource for Well-Being and Agency?

Ideally, a product embodied with action and values themes makes an individual aware of, and in deliberate control of, her transition. The process of agency requires several steps: awareness,

25 Ozenc et al., “Reverse Alarm Clock: A Research through Design Example of *Designing for the Self*,” 6-7.

character-in-action, talkback, and strategy making. In the process of agency, products first must develop the user's awareness of the transition. The product helps make the transition explicit to the individual. In this awareness, she can then be more sensitive to the situation around her, recognizing how her virtues and priorities apply to the transition and consulting her communities for further guidance. If she is not aware of her values or priorities, design can guide development of that awareness as well.

Through the modes of transition framework, an individual is able to "talk back" to the transitional situation with her character's values and priorities. This dialogue leads to strategies. The self gradually builds and acts out strategies using the resources offered by the product that has been embedded with modes of transitions.²⁶ Thus, the individual gains the agency needed to compose her or his own harmonious transition. Transitioning individuals become more aware of the transition and engage in talkback dialogues with the product and their environment, which in turn encourages character development and strategy making. Through this action-centric model of transition design, the designed products offer a means for individuals to achieve greater agency.

Conclusion: Toward Transition with Well-being

Modes of transitions, in its ways of analysis and synthesis, gives designers sensitizing lenses and directions to structure design processes and human-centered design methods. With the tools it offers, the design process encompasses both functional and experiential needs of people, with the goal of enhancing their well-being. Well-being through the modes of transitions lens means helping people thrive in their personal and social relationships; discover meaning in their daily and long-term interactions; balance their life modes (e.g., work, home, and social time); and embrace their emotions and values. When the process incorporates the discovery of meaning and the need for balance, products are designed to act as companions and to mediate people's relationships with each other. Well-being is not a state, but rather an ongoing effort for harmony, where individuals can embrace both the changing and unchanging dimensions in their life with ease.

Modes of transitions grows out of a modest design research inquiry in an academic setting. Future work should focus on both short-term and long-term transitional situations and test the framework in broader settings. Future work can prioritize the emergent areas of health-care, communication, education, and community building. Well-being has high stakes in each of these areas and should be investigated with modes of transitions in mind.

26 Strategies can be defined as a person's high-level actions that deploy her flexibility and resources to successfully maneuver in a transition.