

Nothing lasts forever!

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Sometimes we forget that nothing is permanent. In our 24-hour economy everything seems to be available 24/7: energy (heat, light), entertainment (Internet, TV-radio) and food (long opening hours of shops). To a considerable degree we withdraw from the natural cycles of nature and the seasons. At the most, the winter vegetables are slightly more expensive in the summer, or the heating has to work a little harder in the winter night, but the climate and nature have been reduced to mood-setters in the background.

Technology plays a crucial role in the realization and organization of such a continuously available reality around us; (ICT) technology and services contribute to the illusion that we humans are just as continuous as the artificial - denaturalized - world around us. This makes it easy to forget that our psychological and biological reality is completely cyclical, just like nature and the climates.

A simple way to observe 'natural' fluctuations is to look at our relationships with friends, loved ones and our work. Our willingness to invest in relationships depends on a large number of factors, but these factors are different for each phase. In the initial phase of, for example, a working relationship - the growth phase - often a lot of investment is required to adapt ourselves to the new job demands. For this it is important that the perceived compensation is well attuned to the investment delivered. Psychologically, these processes are not always linear. For example, it has been proven that a large investment with a meager but adequate compensation is preferable to a generous fee with a lower investment. The theory of cognitive dissonance plays a role in this. Because we want to keep the image that we have of ourselves consistently, someone who invests a lot and receives relatively little in return, is inclined to take the investment for his own (internal) account (motivation). After all, we do not like to see ourselves as losers who work so hard for nothing; we work hard because it's important!

After the first phase in a new (work) relationship, we enter a phase of more stability. In this growth phase we can also concentrate on other issues than the new relationship, although we can only fully rely on our automatisms in the third phase, the routine phase. But of course, things change continuously both at work and in relationships (a new boss or colleague or new procedures). Although it is relatively easy to adapt to changes in the stability phase, this is difficult in the routine phase. Automatic patterns become difficult to break. If it really is necessary to break the patterns, you can easily enter a fourth phase, the phase of renewed choice. In this phase everything is upside down. Break, burn-out or further growth to another job, relationship or level, is more prominent within the possibilities than in the other three phases. After such a "choice", the cycle repeats: growth, stabilization, routine and choice.

During our lives we go through many of these cycles. It is no coincidence that, now that our world is so constantly available, on average we start with jobs, friends and loved ones over and over again. Now that we derive our stability from a continuously available environment, our cyclical nature is fully reflected in our relationships and our jobs (serial monogamy, hopping jobs). Although I believe that our psychological well-being would benefit from maintaining a more reciprocal relationship with our sources and nature (and that would certainly benefit the environment), it is important to recognize these phases in relationships and at work.

Most HRM tools presuppose continuity of the employee, for example by emphasizing personality. Together with colleagues from the Hanze University of Applied Sciences and software house BizzXL my team builds a tool that specifically highlights the different phases for the individual employee and thus helps the employee to orientate himself on his own cycle: APK Werkscan. We use data mining algorithms and we try to contribute to emphasizing that everyone is always changing: Nothing lasts forever!

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