



connexion

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special feature:

corporate social responsibility



in times
of
economic
crisis

An illustration showing a group of stylized human figures holding hands in a circle around a central globe. The globe is a transparent sphere with a map of the world inside. The figures are dark blue silhouettes. The background is a light blue gradient.

MANAGING AND MOTIVATING DURING THE THREE PERIODS OF THE CAREER CYCLE... IN A TURMOIL ECONOMY

ECONOMIC SITUATION

The actual economic turmoil speeds up everything and everybody so that we are most likely to end up grasping with difficulty the rim of this spinning wheel! Before exhaustion and even more ejection, why not move to the middle of this turmoil or wheel – and of ourselves – in order to stand serenely centered as would do a whirling dervish?

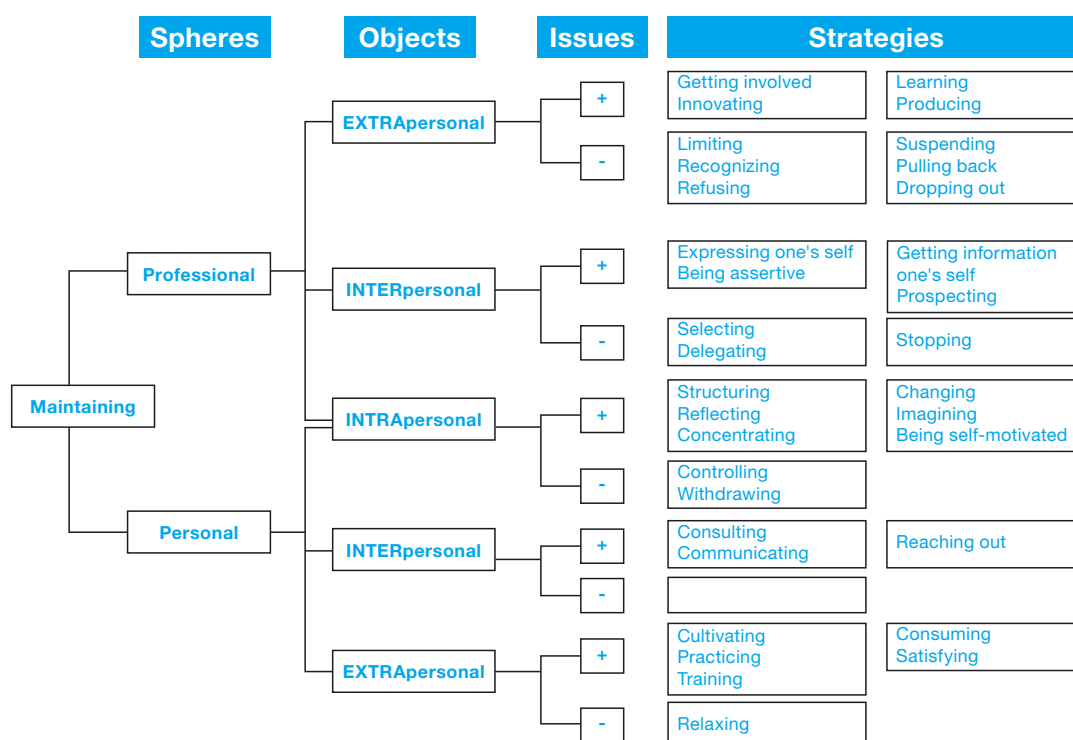
THE KEEPING ON PARADIGM AND THE CAREER STRATEGIES

The best way to do so is to refer to the Keeping on paradigm which allows avoiding, at the same time, burnout and obsolescence, its opposite¹. A by-product of the paradigm is an effective work-life balance. Why in work settings suited for both burnout and obsolescence such as health, education, justice and, most likely nowadays, finance, 20% of the workers exhibit signs of burnout, 16% show signs of obsolescence, 12% indicate a need of a significant change, but –usually without support or reinforcement– 52% of them stay out of these two awful pitfalls? What a benefit at all levels (physical, psychological and economical) for all parties: employers, employees and society!

As shown in Figure 1, our review of literature indicates that over 30 career management strategies have been evaluated, half of them referring to work or professional balance and maintenance and, the other half, to life or personal balance and maintenance. In both spheres, the relational object of the interaction with the given environment can be extra-, inter- or intrapersonal. Finally, each time the issue can be to add (+) or to subtract (-).

In this overall picture, it appears that burnout candidates invest only in the professional sphere with about 5 strategies involving most of the time + issues without considering intrapersonal objects. The obsolete candidates use around 3 strategies, all within the professional sphere where they also avoid (-) extrapersonal objects and overuse intrapersonal ones. As for the good maintainers, they are the only workers investing in both human spheres and, each time, covering all the objects at stake with a little bit more + than – issues. By and large, these workers use an average of 15 strategies and they are the only workers that achieve a successful work-life balance! So, who said that work-life balance and management are dull?

Maintenance Strategies Used by Subjects



CAREER MAINTENANCE

This understanding leads to maximize the Keeping on paradigm, by regularly doing –informally or formally– a three-step check up:

1st step: Retrospective on the quality of this balance so far, which means to look at facts objectively; 2nd step: Prospective about the reason and the pertinence of this balance, which means reviewing goals, dreams and aspirations, and 3rd step: Action in order to fill the gap between the two preceding steps.

For instance, if the check-up exercise is about the actual motivation at work, the retrospective will inevitably lead to consider the seven work spinoffs which are: income, status, time and space management, interpersonal relations, achievements, key life role and meaning of life. Which important spinoff is lacking, weak or overused? The next step, prospective, will lead to look at ideal about work or how the person would like to do it. In other words, what is his/her intrinsic motivation at work? Finally, the last step, action, will manage to get closer and closer to this ideal situation. Back to the work-life balance issue, the recommended actions would be, for instance, those presented in figure 2 depending on the situation identified at the retrospective phase.

Work-Life Balance: Subjective and Objective Visions - Recommendations

Subjective visions	Objective visions	Situations	Recommended according to situations
I ↔ E	Capacities < Tasks	Burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Break up continuous people contact - Know what stress your job entails - Learn to say no - Delegate responsibilities - Break large projects into smaller parts
I ↔ E	Capacities = Tasks	Optimum maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain prof. and pers. relationships - Keep establishing goals - Continue managing well your time - Maintain sound health - Know your stress points
I → E	Capacities > Tasks	Obsolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Get to know new people - Develop other interests - Take as many risks as possible - Avoid isolating yourself - Aim for success - Get out of routines

THE THREE CAREER CYCLE PERIODS AND THE KEEPING ON PARADIGM

In the early 80's, the career cycle was pictured as a trip through a vocational universe made of three planets: School, Work and Retirement². At each stage of this trip, some tasks had to be performed, otherwise it would mean immaturity. Of course, back in these years, the largest planet was work. Nowadays, the lengthening of educational requirements and the multi-employability measures enlarge the school planet and a similar fattening phenomenon occurs with the retirement planet due, this time, to early retirements and to the increase of life expectancy. Besides, my own research indicates that, finally, "retirement" is not a planet but rather, a natural satellite doing a double ellipse around the two other planets. These brand new data make career development and management, particularly the keeping on issues, more complex.

FIRST PERIOD OR 1ST CAREER THIRD

Hence, at the first career period, the young worker has to achieve a double acculturation, that is to acculturate to his/her first job and to the actual work world. At this time of a career, the school planet is still very visible and attracting because quite familiar. It is so particularly for females. It would be rather easy to escape and go back to school! Besides, having no tenure, no contract and no experience, the young worker has no real temporality dimension and, therefore, has no other choice than to focus on spatiality: do things differently or with a different attitude, etc.



Left to right: Paul-Michael Schonenberg, Jacques Limoges, Marie-Brigitte Bissen

To do so, I suggest a tactic (action requesting an immediate response), strategic (combining tactics) and stratified (not to reveal all his/her secrets to the same person because of high backlash risks) approach to zigzag in order to get his/her most significant spinoffs at this moment and to overcome the emotions specific to job insertion that is: confusion, sadness, anger, fear, strength, boldness and happiness.

SECOND PERIOD OR 2ND CAREER THIRD

Once the first period is completed, the worker is more or less half way in his/her career. The two other poles, that is the school planet and the retirement satellite, are too far away. Paradoxically, this worker has no more time to loose in making mistakes but he/she has enough time to make a move, even a drastic one. If this move remains within the present job assignment, it means essentially managing his/her work-life balance in order to avoid burnout and obsolescence, the best way to remain motivated. If the move is more drastic and implies quitting the present job (mobility, outplacement, etc.), it means a three-phase transition: ending, neutral and new beginning. At this 2nd third, career managing is like a triptych painting, both sides (Retrospective and Prospective) are relatively well sketched; it is time to decide what will be (i.e. Action) on the main panel.

THIRD PERIOD OR 3RD CAREER THIRD

With this last career period, appears the retirement satellite that may look like a planet! Therefore, two new learning situations occur: learning to stay and learning to go. A large part of the answer to these questions is in what is called the professional legacy and in order to well wrap this legacy fully, a colleague and I have developed the Champagne method. Trough systematic one-at-the-time turns, that is through a tilted ascending spiral of enunciations and announcements, the professional legacy issue is decanted from resentments and harshness to reach a sparkling and crystalline state, perfectly reflecting the entire career. This comprehension brings more than half of the concerned workers to stay longer on the work market to transfer in different ways.

As I like to say as a conclusion: "My career is too important to be left in the hands of my employer".

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1. Limoges, J. 2001. *Stratégies de gestion de vie au travail et dans d'autres situations de vie*, Québec, Septembre. For this book and other related publications, see www.tq16.be.

2. See D. Riverin-Simard.