

From Comfort Zone to Performance Management

Understanding development and performance

Alasdair White

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From Comfort Zone to Performance Management

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Introduction

This paper seeks to take the established behavioural models relating to comfort zones, group and individual development, and managing change and use them to create a methodology for understanding and managing performance. It seeks to provide a reliable approach to getting the best out of people that is firmly based on sound behavioural and psychological principles backed up by observational data and practical field research. It is not, however, a 'scientific' paper full of detailed research data, complex theories, and high-flown rhetoric, but rather it is a practical guide based on twenty years of consultancy in the field and eight years of teaching university students in a business school.

In understanding and managing performance, the key is the management of the stress. Both motivation and anxiety are, behaviourally, sub-sets of stress and, consequently, they are tools to assist in performance management – there will be times when motivation will be the most useful tool, while at others the introduction of anxiety will be more appropriate. However, too much motivation or anxiety will result in too much stress and this will result in performance being disabled.

The correct management style needs to be applied in each phase if performance is to be maximised. Applying the incorrect style has a negative impact on performance. In situations in which a series of performance-enhancing steps need to be taken, it is imperative to start the new performance cycle at the point at which the old performance cycle develops a slowing performance trend.

In Section I, the author reviews the principle working models. This is followed in Section II by the development of the TPR Life-cycle Model – a composite working model that can be used to understand and manage performance, development, and change.

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Section I – the working models

The Comfort Zone

The origin of the phrase ‘comfort zone’ is very hard to track down and everyone has a personal definition and understanding of the term. The earliest usage in relation to performance is in the title of Judith Bardwick’s 1991 work ‘*Danger in the Comfort Zone: From Boardroom to Mailroom – How to Break the Entitlement Habit that’s Killing American Business*’¹ but, although the book explores performance and behaviour, the author does not even use the term ‘comfort zone’, let alone define it.

Expressions such as ‘being in one’s comfort zone’ or ‘I’m comfortable with that’ exemplify the extent to which the concept has become accepted in the English language. Psychologists and behaviourists have their own meaning of the term but when it comes to performance, it is relatively straightforward to construct a definition that encapsulates the principle elements:

The comfort zone is a behavioural state within which a person operates in an anxiety-neutral condition, using a limited set of behaviours to deliver a steady level of performance, usually without a sense of risk.

This implies that, providing there is no change in the ‘anxiety’ or the skills applied, the level of performance will remain constant. Equally, if there is a change in the ‘anxiety’ or the skills applied then a change in the level of performance will result – either upwards or downwards.

Yerkes and Dodson² were the first to investigate the impact of ‘anxiety’ on performance in their ground breaking 1907 experiment with mice in which, as quoted in Bardwick (op. cit.), they found that “Anxiety improves performance until a certain optimum level of arousal has been reached. Beyond that point, performance deteriorates as higher levels of anxiety are attained.” This result points directly to the conclusion that increasing the anxiety will boost performance and that too much anxiety will decrease performance but that either case will cause the subject to move out of their comfort zone. McClelland, Atkinson and others³, when researching into motivation in 1953, found a similar correlation between performance and motivation and their findings, as quoted in Bardwick (op. cit.), were that “...motivation to achieve and level of effort keep rising until expectancy of success (or level of uncertainty of success) reaches 50%. Then, even though the expectancy continues to increase, motivation falls.” The question here is whether motivation and anxiety have extensive commonality – this question will be addressed in Section II.

¹ Bardwick, J. – *Danger in the Comfort Zone: From Boardroom to Mailroom – How to Break the Entitlement Habit that’s Killing American Business*, 1991, American Management Association

² Yerkes, R., & Dodson, J. – ‘The Dancing Mouse, A Study in Animal Behavior’, 1907, *Journal of Comparative Neurology & Psychology*, Number 18, pp. 459-482

³ McClelland, D.C., Atkinson, J.W., Clark, R.A., & Lowell, E.L. (1953) – *The achievement motive*, 1953, Princeton: Van Nostrand.

Carnall supports this in his 1995 work on managing change⁴, in which he establishes a direct correlation between how people feel about themselves (self-esteem) and their performance. When this is compared to the stress they are under – a term Carnall uses interchangeably with anxiety as used by Yerkes & Dodson – he too found that performance increases with stress until a certain level is achieved, after which, as stress increases, so performance decreases until it reaches a level at which behaviour may become volatile and performance can go into free fall.

Since a performance-boosting increase in anxiety is, in performance management terms, a good thing, we can define this state of arousal as being the ‘optimal performance zone’, while we would define a level of anxiety that causes deterioration in performance as being a bad thing or a ‘danger zone’. From this we can develop the simple model illustrated in *Figure 1* in which the off-set positioning is to indicate that, in some areas of behaviour in a comfort zone, a small increase in anxiety can tip the subject into the danger zone, while in other areas there has to be a large increase in anxiety before a deterioration of performance occurs.

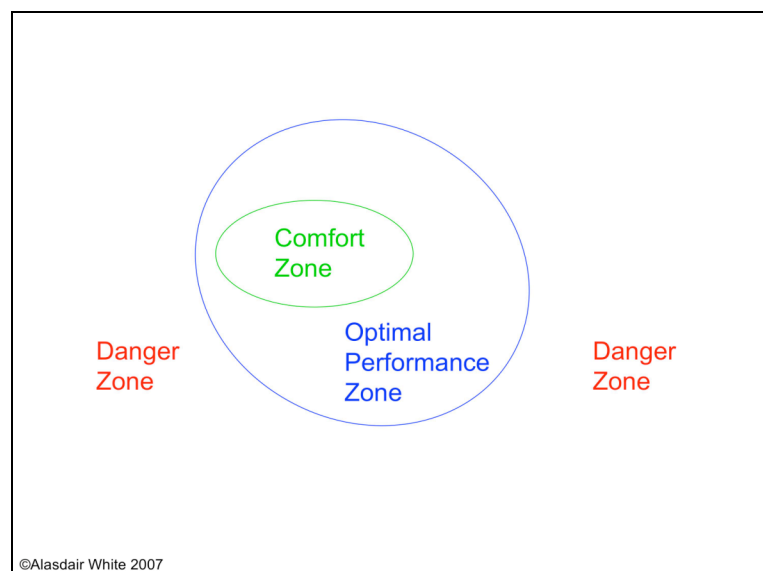


Figure 1 – Comfort Zone Model

This representation of the comfort zone model is not new and similar models can be found in a variety of locations – especially amongst materials that deal with team and individual development.⁵ The general principles in each case remain the same – there is a comfort zone surrounded by a discomfort zone and these are together surrounded by a danger zone. In all cases, the objective is to push or lead the subject into the optimal performance zone so that their skills are increased and they become comfortable with the level of anxiety, thus enabling them to consistently deliver an increased level of performance. In other words, holding the subject in the optimal performance zone for a long enough period for them to reach a new and expanded comfort zone.

⁴ Carnall, C. – *Managing Change in Organizations*, 1995, Prentice Hall

⁵ e.g. <http://newsletter.rapportleadership.com/July2006/process.html> (accessed 11 March 2008)

The three phases involved in this process form a transition between one steady performance state (comfort zone 1) through a performance phase to an enhanced second steady performance state (comfort zone 2) as shown in *Figure 2* below. These phases are fully discussed in Section II of this paper.

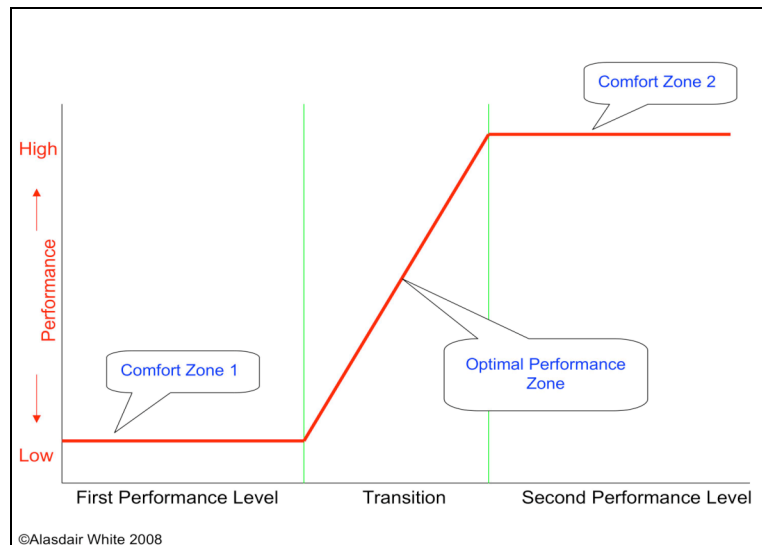


Figure 2 – Transition between Comfort Zones

Because, in the first performing phase, we are disturbing the steady state, we can expect the initial performance to decline as the subject adjusts to the enhanced anxiety levels, and then for performance to rise sharply. As the anxiety levels reach what Yerkes and Dodson, as quoted in Bardwick (op. cit), called the “optimum level of arousal” the performance enhancement will start to decelerate before settling back at a new steady performance level. This performance follows what Charles Handy calls a ‘sigmoid curve’⁶ as shown in *Figure 3*.

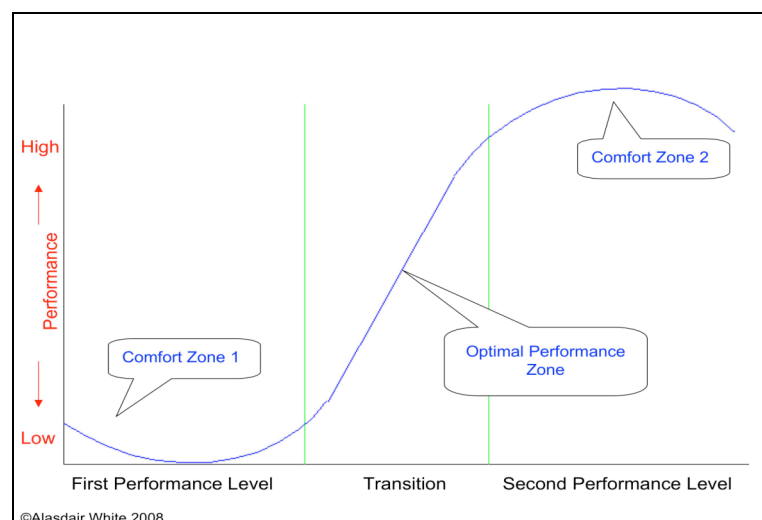


Figure 3 – Transition between comfort zones showing the expected performance curve

⁶ Handy, C. – *The Empty Raincoat*, 1994, Hutchinson

There is plenty of empirical evidence that this performance curve is a true reflection of what happens – when first asked to do things differently, people need instruction in the new process and, during the time they are learning, their performance will be below the original performance. The reasons for this can be found in two other models: Tuckman’s development theory and Carnall’s coping cycle.

Development theory

From a behavioural point of view the most useful starting point for development theory is Bruce Tuckman’s 1965 work on group development⁷ in which he focused on the stages from inception to performance and, originally, created a four-phase sequence: forming, storming, norming and performing. His work focused on the behaviours of team members as the group developed and these can be summarised as in *Table 1* below.

Forming	Unwilling to undertake the work and unable to do so. Lack of knowledge and lack of skills. Tendency to focus on themselves rather than the team.
Storming	Willing to attempt the work but still unable to do it as the skills are missing. High conflict potential with team members. Challenges ideas.
Norming	Unwillingness returns, possibly due to lack of self-confidence in newly acquired skills, but they are able to do the work. Focus tends to be on rules and procedures, processes, and the ‘how’ of the work.
Performing	Willing and able to do the work and to act as an effective team. Focus changes to delivery of the objectives.

Table 1 – Summation of behaviours in the Tuckman sequence

Over the years, various researchers⁸ have investigated and modified Tuckman’s original model and in the mid 1970s Tuckman himself added a fifth phase which he described as ‘adjourning’ in which the group disengages. Tuckman’s hypothesis has stood the test of time as a suitable behavioural model for understanding group development – to the extent that few practitioners involved in training in the leadership or team-building field do not use it. What is particularly interesting, though, is that few have seen the potential to apply the Tuckman sequence, with suitably modified behavioural descriptors, to the development of individuals. This absence led the author to establish a series of empirical observations to test the hypothesis that the Tuckman sequence can be applied to the development of individuals. The result of this was a behavioural grid that bears close comparison to that which can be derived from the Tuckman sequence, and the conclusion is that a similar sequence could be constructed for the development of individuals. However, a second conclusion was also drawn: that a strict adherence to the Tuckman sequence was not sustainable when performance (output), rather than process, was taken as the

⁷ Tuckman, Bruce W. – ‘Developmental Sequence in Small Groups’, 1965, *Psychological Bulletin*, Volume 63, Number 6, pp. 384-99, American Psychological Association

⁸ e.g. Runkel, P. J., Lawrence M., Oldfield S., Rider, M., & Clark, C. – ‘Stages of group development – an empirical test of Tuckman’s hypothesis’, 1971, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, Number 7, pp. 180-93

dominant measure. In this case, some modification was seen as necessary which has resulted in the development of a new model that will be discussed in Section II.

The coping cycle

Carnall's coping cycle arises from his work on managing change in organizations in which he observed that, when people are subjected to 'change', this has a significant impact on their self-esteem.⁹ He further states that "linked to this impact on self-esteem will be an impact on performance" (Carnall, 1995, op. cit.) and that rebuilding self-esteem is essential to rebuilding performance after major change has taken place. The author considers this finding significant since, in the first phase, we are disturbing the steady state and thus causing change to occur.

Based on the work of de Vries and Miller (op. cit.) and Adams *et al.*,¹⁰ (1976), Carnall has constructed a five-phase coping cycle, as shown in *Figure 4*, from which behavioural descriptors can be derived.

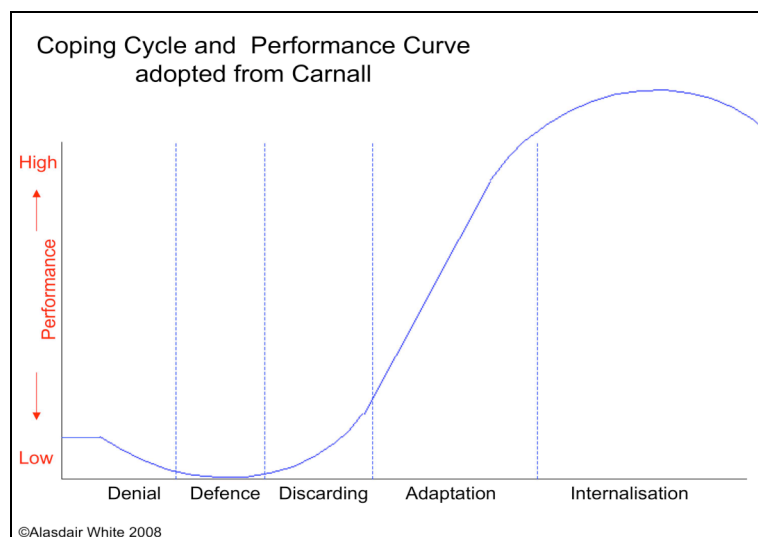


Figure 4 – The expected performance curve associated with the coping cycle
(Adapted from Carnall, 1995)

Stage 1: denial – as Carnall puts it “when significant changes are first mooted the initial response may be to deny the need for change” (op. cit.). People suddenly find that the current comfort zone is really ‘just what they are happy with’ and change invokes fear and anxiety. A sudden increase in anxiety may well push people towards the danger zone and this, instead of enhancing the performance, may well have a detrimental effect. Carnall suggests that the initial response does not always cause an immediate decline in performance but it does generate resistance. However, eventually performance does decline well below previous levels.

⁹ Carnall quotes the work of Cooper, 1981; de Vries and Miller, 1984; and Kirkpatrick, 1985 in this respect

¹⁰ Adams, J. et al – *Transitions – Understanding and Managing Personal Change*, 1976, Martin Robinson

Stage 2: defence – people in this stage demonstrate defensive behaviours and try to force the new reality into the old model that has allowed them to continue to perform in the current comfort zone. But, defensive behaviour channels effort and energy into resisting change and not into performance and so there is often a severe decline in performance. Carnall has noted that ritualistic behaviour emerges as people try to defend the old ways and postulates that such behaviours have the effect of allowing the person space in which to come to terms with change. Part of these rituals may be a demonstrable willingness to attempt the new but with the objective of ‘proving’ that the new ‘won’t work’ or is simply ‘wrong’.

Stage 3: discarding – Stages 1 and 2 are focused on the past but in Stage 3, people discard and abandon the old ways of doing things and either commit to new work methods or invent new ways of acting. A fatalistic attitude often accompanies this discarding – ‘if things have got to change I suppose we’d better go along with it’. Behaviours emerge that suggest that people are able to undertake the new actions but that considerable unwillingness exists and that they want group support. This suggests a lack of confidence. But, in discarding the old ways and committing to the new, their self-esteem returns and with it a renewed performance that results in a definite upward curve.

Stage 4: adaptation – as people adapt to the new realities of their situation, they expend significant levels of energy on finding ways of making things work. They are attuning and aligning themselves with what they have to do.¹¹ This boosts self-esteem and, as Carnall observed, performance starts to recover at a significant rate. This stage produces acceleration in performance and people are willing and able to do what is being asked.

Stage 5: internalization – Carnall uses this term to describe how the people involved have adopted and adapted the new working methods and made them their own – they have internalised the new procedures. But this very process, which has resulted in high levels of anxiety, is now ‘running out of steam’ and the growth in performance is decelerating as the people involved settle towards a new and sustainable level of performance: a new comfort zone.

The working models: conclusions

Carnall’s coping cycle is a valuable approach to understanding how people deal with change, but change is an ongoing event and every time a modification of behaviour or performance is requested, then a new change process starts and a new coping cycle begins. The behavioural patterns exhibited in each of Carnall’s coping cycle stages have strong parallels with those observed in the Tuckman group development phases. This leads the author to conclude that the underlying behavioural processes are the same: indeed, that, behaviourally, ‘development’ and ‘coping with change’ are, essentially, the same thing in that both lead from one reasonably steady state to another. The comparison carried out in this section also leads to the conclusion that the ‘comfort zone’ model is also just another way of describing the same process.

¹¹ According to the author’s colleague, John Fairhurst, “Attunement is a process, similar to synchronisation, wherein previously diffuse systems come into alignment, often spontaneously.”

If the Tuckman development behaviours and the Carnall coping strategy behaviours are grouped as in *Table 2* then a clear pattern emerges which, the author contends, demonstrates a close similarity and leads to the conclusion that development and coping with change are effectively the same thing.

Forming	Unwilling to undertake the work and unable to do so. Lack of knowledge and lack of skills. Tendency to focus on themselves rather than the team.	Denial	Constant reference back to previous performance and previous models. As they find the work hard, their self-confidence collapses precipitating a dramatic decline in performance. Signs of extreme stress
Storming	Willing to attempt the work but still unable to do so as the skills are missing. High conflict potential with team members. Challenges ideas. Defensive.	Defence	Tries to force the new realities into the old model. Energy spent resisting change. Sharp decline in performance. Ritual behaviours apparent. Energy spent trying to prove the new model is wrong. Signs of extreme stress
Norming	Unwillingness returns, possibly due to lack of self-confidence in newly acquired skills, but they are able to do the work. Focus tends to be on rules and procedures, processes, and the 'how' of the work.	Discarding	Abandoning the old way and developing new ways of working. In need of group support. Performance picks up as self-esteem returns. Reduced stress evident
Performing	Willing and able to do the work and to act as an effective team. Focus changes to delivery of the objectives.	Adaptation	Find ways of making things work. Aligned and attuned with the requirements of the work. Acceleration in performance

Table 2 – Tuckman and Carnall behaviours

The performance curve that is suggested in each of the above models, that of a sigmoid curve, is based on observational data rather than mathematical analysis, although the work of McClland *et al.* (op. cit) provides empirical evidence to support the contention. Handy (op. cit.) and Carnall (op. cit.) also propose the same shaped curve as representative of performance, but neither offers empirical evidence. However, if we were able to measure performance of humans in the same way as we can of machines, then it is very probable that a similar performance curve would result and that it would be 'sigmoid' in shape. The author concludes, therefore, that as the literature and working models cite the sigmoid performance curve so extensively, it is acceptable to use it as a good representation of the performance described.

Section II – the new model

In 2006, the author began a review of the various models relating to performance, development and the management of change. The result of this review was the selection for further analysis of the working models discussed in Section I with the objective of establishing whether they were in fact versions of the same thing and, if so, to develop a new and simplified working model. Section I provides a detailed overview of the analysis carried out and the conclusions reached.

During the analysis, it became apparent that in behavioural terms Carnall's coping cycle stages and Tuckman's group development phases overlapped to a very large degree and the pairings shown in *Table 3* were established. Although the behaviours described are not exactly matched, the closeness of the correlation leads the author to the conclusion that they are virtually the same.

Tuckman – group development phases	Carnall – coping cycle stages
Forming	Denial
Storming	Defence
Norming	Discarding
Performing	Adaptation
Adjourning (added in 1975)	Internalization

Table 3 – Comparison of the Tuckman Phases and the Carnall Stages

When these pairings were reconsidered in the light of the comfort zone model, and particularly when the performance curve was taken into account then a further set of correlations becomes evident and these are shown in *Table 4*.

Development Phases	Coping Stages	Comfort Zone (Fig. 3)	Performance Model
Forming	Denial		
Storming	Defence	First Performance Level	Transforming
Norming	Discarding		
Performing	Adaptation	Transition	Performing
Adjourning	Internalization	Second Performance Level	Reforming

Table 4 – Correlation of Development Phases, Coping Stages and Comfort Zone transitions (Fig. 3) and the Performance Model

In 2007, the author worked with a colleague, John Fairhurst¹², to develop a new simplified working model: the TPR Life-cycle Model shown in *Figure 5*. They based their work on the analysis given in Section I and subsequently developed a matrix of behaviours and appropriate management styles which can be used to help assess the

¹² Fairhurst was, at the time, working for an international technology company and was involved in the management of change.

development phase of individuals and groups and thus determine the correct management style necessary to obtain the best performance.

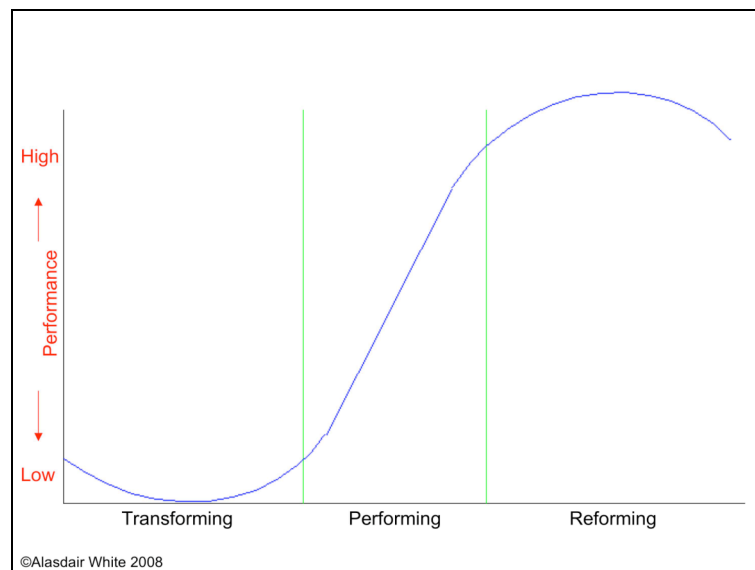


Figure 5 – The White-Fairhurst TPR Life-cycle Model

The choice of names for the phases is, on the one hand, very arbitrary, and on the other, based on the characteristics experienced. We have to raise the anxiety level and transform the subject from a passive steady state into an active and dynamic state before allowing the subject to reform into a second passive steady state at comfort zone two.

Stress, Anxiety and Motivation

Before we can consider the management approaches appropriate to each phase, it is necessary to determine the relationship between stress, anxiety and motivation. Yerkes and Dodson (op. cit.) talk about anxiety in relation to their experiment. Carnall (op. cit.) talks about stress and anxiety almost interchangeably, while McClland *et al* (op. cit.) talk about motivation.

Hans Seyle, considered by some as the ‘father’ of stress theory, defined stress as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it”,¹³ while the Medline Plus website of the US National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health¹⁴ says that “stress can come from any situation or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, or anxious” and goes on to suggest that “what is stressful to one person is not necessarily stressful to another”.

The same website¹⁵ also says: “Stress is a normal part of life. In small quantities, stress is good – it can motivate you and help you be more productive.” It also puts forward the view that anxiety is “a feeling of apprehension or fear” and is a response

¹³ As quoted in www.mental.health.wa.gov.au/one/resource/46/Stress%20document.pdf (accessed 24 March 2008) no author attributed

¹⁴ <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003211.htm> (accessed 24 March 2008) no author attributed

¹⁵ *ibid.*

to stress. Clearly, then, at a psychological level, stress is a causation factor that can produce anxiety and motivation (which can be defined as the stimulus or incentive to initiate a behavioural response).

The corollary is that ‘anxiety’, as referred to by Yerkes and Dodson (op. cit.), and ‘motivation’, as used by McClland *et al.* (op. cit.), are both responses to the overarching concept of ‘stress’. This also correlates with the comfort zone theory in which an increase in anxiety can and will cause the person to leave their comfort zone and enter the transition or discomfort zone which is the optimal performance zone (see Section I).

The author has written elsewhere on the subject of motivation¹⁶ and there are numerous theories and approaches to the subject¹⁷ but in simple terms, if a person is to be moved out of the comfort zone and into the optimal performance zone, then an increase in stress is needed and the person’s manager must find the most appropriate way of achieving this.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that to move a person out of their comfort zone and so enter the optimal performance zone, it is necessary to increase the level of stress they face, either by increasing the anxiety or increasing the motivation, but, at the same time, ensuring that the increase in stress does not become disabling.

Phase Management

The author has written extensively elsewhere¹⁸ on the subject of management styles and their application to the various phases of development and the reader should consult the reference for a full explanation: however, a summary is provided below in *Table 5*.

If the desired objectives are to be achieved, the correct application of the appropriate management style is essential and observational evidence suggests that using the wrong style (i.e. a style inappropriate to the development phase) can and usually does result in the person or group remaining ‘locked’ in that phase. Tuckman, in his original 1965 work (op. cit.), observed that moving through the first or ‘forming’ phase is usually a matter of time, but development can come to a standstill in the second or ‘storming’ phase and that some groups never emerge from this phase. Similarly, in this second or ‘defence’ stage of the coping cycle a recognition of reality occurs but the challenges faced may be so overwhelming that the stress/anxiety may reach a level that disables and the group or individual enters the danger zone. Again, this is a result of using an inappropriate management style – either continuance of the ‘commanding’ style or the too early introduction of the ‘motivational’ style.

Field observations by the author show that the other place at which groups get ‘stuck’ is the third or ‘norming’ phase. Here the groups are involved in ‘discarding’ the old methods of working before developing and agreeing new methods. They tend to

¹⁶ White, A. – *Managing for Performance*, 1995, Piatkus Books

¹⁷ e.g.: needs theory (Maslow, Hertzberg); drive reduction theory; affective-arousal theory; cognitive theory; and others.

¹⁸ White, A. – *Managing for Performance*, 1995, Piatkus Books

spend a great deal of time discussing and documenting their new methods and developing procedure manuals – and much of this is displacement behaviour to cover their insecurity and lack of self-confidence in moving forward. There is enough of an upward performance trajectory to convince them and their managers that things are going well, but little evidence that the actual performance is above that of the comfort zone. This willing blindness to reality probably explains why most companies think they need motivational management training and most workers are frustrated because they are never allowed to ‘perform’. It probably also explains why many academic institutions fail to achieve exceptional academic performances from their students and are content with the average.

Development Phase	Key Characteristics	Management Style	Key Characteristics
Transforming			
Forming/Denial	Unwilling/unable, defensive, fearful, resentful	Commanding	Clear goals, clear delivery methodologies, fairness, firmness
Storming/Defence	Willing/unable defensive, challenging, aggressive, argumentative	Cooperative	As above, plus encouraging participation, calmness, recognition of concerns
Norming/Discarding	Unwilling/able, finding solutions, lack of self-confidence	Motivational	Encouraging, confidence building, clear goals, performance monitoring
Performing			
Performing/Adaptation	Willing/able, works independently, confident	Directive	Clear goal setting, monitoring, strategic preparation, seeking innovative approaches, empowering team members
Reforming			
Adjourning/Internalization	Disengaging, seeking new comfort zone, needs new goals	Collaborative	Establishing new goals, solving confusion, managing risks

*Table 5 – Correlation of management styles and development phases
(Adapted from White, A. – Managing for Performance, 1995)*

Finally, the performance life-cycle curve shows clearly that performance growth will eventually slow and then actually decline towards a new steady state – however, research suggests that in fact this steady state is only achieved through careful management of the end of the performing phase. If the transition to the second steady state is delayed, possibly because managers still see growth occurring, then a real decline is likely, leading to a collapse in performance.

Managing the performance curve

For most organizations, a one-step improvement in performance is simply not enough and they are looking for a maximization of potential through a series of performance enhancements.

When researching and writing his 1995 book, *Managing for Performance*, the author conducted an experiment within a major US bank spread across nine countries and

found that by using a series of 90-day targets, each being a minimum of 10% higher than the previous, performance of a group could be doubled in 18 months and, with the right management, this doubling could be repeated more or less indefinitely assuming market conditions and competitive advantage remain constant. This seems to ignore the findings of McClelland, *et al.*,¹⁹ as quoted in Barwick (op. cit.), that "...motivation to achieve and level of effort keep rising until expectancy of success (or level of uncertainty of success) reaches 50%. Then, even though the expectancy continues to increase, motivation falls." However, what the author found was that the 90-day goal cycle allowed targets to be set in such a way that (in terms of McClelland *et al.*) the "expectancy of success" (or failure) was unlikely to reach 50% until very close to the end of the cycle. These targets or 'stretch goals' were always a significant challenge but were always achievable (although not always achieved).²⁰ In the experiment, the author allowed no incentives or rewards (except praise) but made a major point of commitment to a common cause during the first phase of each cycle. The experiment was successfully repeated in a major Greek bank and in a Belgian marketing company and in all three cases, the author found that the key to the success of the approach was less in what happened in the transforming and performing phases and more to do with how well the managers handled the transition between the performing and reforming phases.

In his 1994 book, *The Empty Raincoat*, Charles Handy explores this idea and suggests that it is vitally important that, as performance growth starts to slow, the assets of the first performance life cycle (the people, their skills, and other resources) need to be partially allocated to the development of a new transforming phase, the end goal of which is a further enhancement of performance. Thus, for a while, the group's assets are split and some will be part of the old performance cycle and some will be part of the new. This leads to what Handy calls a time of great confusion, which must be carefully managed using the appropriate management styles. Handy's hypothetical approach makes a very important point: the time to start the new transforming phase is as soon as the trend in performance growth starts to slow.

In conducting an assignment with a parastatal organization in an Indian Ocean republic, the author concluded from observation and behavioural reporting that the organization had already 'gone over the top' and the performance was about to collapse. It was particularly interesting to discover, therefore, that when the senior management team was asked to determine where they thought the organization was on the performance curve, the CEO placed the organization close to where the author had, and the rest of the managers were split between being in the early reforming phase and at the start of a transforming phase. Putting wishful thinking aside, the argument was that, having recognised the situation, change was already underway and that the CEO's/author's positioning was the start of a new transformation. The author considered this as reasonable and, given the subsequent problems of turning the organization round, feels it reinforces the need to start a new transforming phase as soon as performance slows rather than after performance has started to decline.

This process of starting a new performance life cycle is shown in *Figure 6* and can go through any number of iterations providing always that the targets set are achievable

¹⁹ McClelland, D.C., Atkinson, J.W., Clark, R.A., & Lowell, E.L. (1953) – *The achievement motive*, 1953, Princeton: Van Nostrand.

²⁰ This concept will be explored further in Section III as it underpins the academic assessment process.

in current conditions utilising the new skills developed during each new transforming phase.

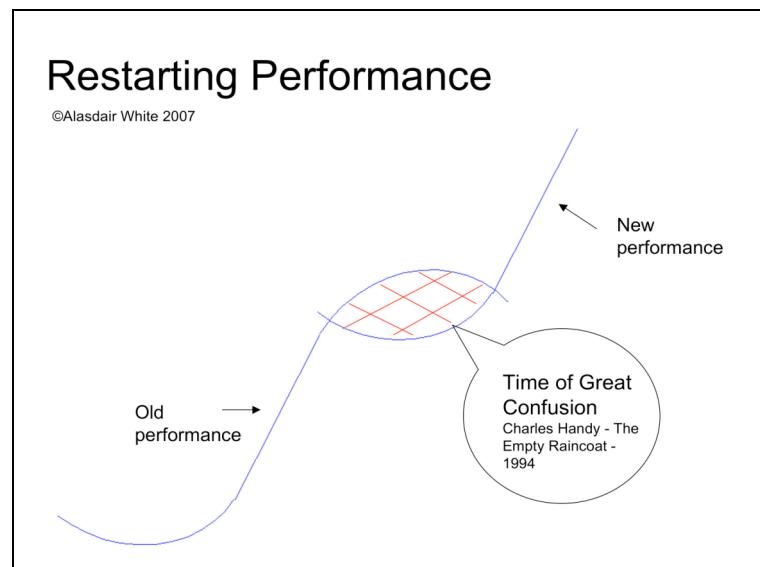


Figure 6 – Restarting performance (adapted from Handy, 1994)

The new working model: conclusions

The analysis of the behaviours exhibited in the working models leads to the conclusion that each model is essentially a different way of looking at the same thing and that this can then be simplified. This leads to the development of the TPR Life-Cycle model as a working tool for understanding performance. In each phase, the key is the management of the stress the person is under to ensure that it remains a performance enhancing condition rather than becoming a disabling one.

In understanding and managing performance, the key is the management of the stress. Both motivation and anxiety are, behaviourally, sub-sets of stress and, consequently, they are tools to assist in performance management - there will be times when motivation will be the most useful tool while at others the introduction of anxiety will be more appropriate. However, too much motivation or anxiety will result in too much stress and this will result in performance being disabled.

The correct management style needs to be applied in each phase if performance is to be maximised. Applying the incorrect style has a negative impact on performance.

In situations in which a series of performance enhancing steps need to be taken, it is imperative to start the new performance cycle at the point at which the old performance cycle develops a slowing performance trend.

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Biography of the Author

Alasdair White is a consultant and university lecturer specialising in performance management, managing people, and leadership. He is based near Brussels in Belgium and has an international practice with clients throughout Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the Far East. He is on the Faculty of the United Business Institutes in Brussels, where he teaches Information Systems at undergraduate level, and of the European Management Development Institute. He is a visiting faculty lecturer at Lotus University in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and is a guest lecturer at the University of Winchester in the United Kingdom.

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Educated at King Alfred's College (now the University of Winchester), Winchester, England, where he studied education and physical science, Alasdair White spent time teaching in Spain before becoming a business journalist and newspaper editor in the UK. He became a management consultant in 1984 and moved to The Netherlands in 1987. He has been in Belgium since 1993. He is a Fellow of the International Napoleonic Society.

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