

A Guide to Doom – reloaded

It's generally known that our intellectual and emotional equipment was made for the stone age, not for today's complex world. Increasingly the same has to be said about many management methods, too, including the reflexes that are triggered in times of crisis, as reliably as when you hit against the patella tendon with a hammer. Unfortunately, it reads like a guide to organisational suicide:

- You immediately seal oneself off, similar to the body, which in the case of a shock concentrates on supplying the vital organs. Unfortunately, this can lead to the extremities dying off, which can also be observed in organisations: by barricading yourself, you lose contact with the outside world, you lose sight of your partners, your ability to react decreases – not what is commonly recommended for dealing with complexity.
- Projects are deprived of resources, the remaining activities no longer generate sufficient, and create frustration instead. Actions slow down, the organisation stands still, which means regression.
- Staff is cut back, combined with brain drain and emotional upheaval. Nobody cares about those who stay behind. Then when the slump is over the company finds itself with an understaffed and overtired workforce – not the best prerequisites for top performance.
- Training activities are suspended, which very efficiently turns off the tap for enriching impulses, the organisation stews in its own juice which eventually begins to smell rancid.
- External people who could help with upheaval situations are kept out because, we're sorry, we just don't have time for this due to upheaval situations (I actually heard people say this seriously).
- Austerity programs are launched, risk tolerance drops to zero, and so does innovation power. Later your market is back and ready, but your pipelines are empty. Too bad.
- In your despair you begin doing things that you never wanted to do and are against your values. This leads to disapproval in your staff and does not help to build trust, internally or externally.

The thing with the knee is a so-called monosynaptic reflex: it involves only one single synapse. Simple, coercive, reliable, and it doesn't care about anything else, for example about the possibility that it might actually not make sense to bounce your leg right now...in a business context, this is fatal. Let me put it this way: monosynaptic management is not the tool of choice.

Delayed effects in complex fields can cause organizations with the wrong reflexes to build themselves up into a rollercoaster ride like a badly adjusted thermostat that keeps overshooting. Around companies that oscillate in such a manic-depressive manner, a whole range of specialised accompanying industries have formed: burnout clinics, outplacement companies, recruiting providers, communication agencies, internal counsellors, temporary employment agencies, etc.

They all have a perfect right to exist; it's just that they could be used in a different way. Smarter. More preventative. More proactive.

Monosynaptic management will become extinct, voluntarily or involuntarily, and rather sooner than later. So, we need to move to more contemporary and far-sighted forms of corporate management.

My recommendation: Think about the upswing and invest in it. It'll pay off.