The Acceleration Trap

Dr Jochen Menges, University of Cambridge
Companies can burn out, too

It’s not just individuals...
Inside the Acceleration Trap
“It was relatively easy in the long early period of expansion by acquisition to integrate new companies into our company. But over time, the downsides outweigh the upsides... Companies lose energy – and create higher cost – through lack of cohesion. You know the story. We’ve lived it.”

Jürgen Dormann, CEO ABB
Employees not in accelerated companies

- 60% "We lack sufficient resources to get the work done."
- 80% "I work under constantly elevated time pressure."
- 75% "My company’s priorities frequently change."
- 14% "I regularly get a chance to regenerate."

Employees in accelerated companies

- 2% "We lack sufficient resources to get the work done."
- 4% "I work under constantly elevated time pressure."
- 1% "My company’s priorities frequently change."
- 94% "I regularly get a chance to regenerate."

N=92 companies, data collected in 2009
Patterns of Acceleration

Overloading
Multiloading
Perpetual loading
Overloading

Too much to do
Multiloding
Too many different things to do
Perpetual loading
No end in sight
Breaking Free

Stop the action
Be clear about strategy
Run A-B-C analysis
Use inverse suggestion schemes
Use simplification surveys
Declare the turmoil over
Stop the action
Get rid of unnecessary work.
Run A-B-C analysis

Force employees to prioritise projects
Use inverse suggestion schemes

Ask employees about activities that could be stopped
Use simplification surveys

Ask employees how to simplify products and processes
Be clear about strategy
Decide what’s important
Declare the turmoil over

Avoid constant change
Preventing Future Entrapment

Institute “spring cleaning”
Cap annual goals
Filter new projects
Bury projects
Institute spring cleaning
Check activities on regular basis
Cap annual goals
Reduce to 3 must-win battles
Filter new projects
Adapt project management system
Bury projects

It’s okay to stop a project
Changing the Acceleration Culture

Focus
Take time-outs
Slow down to speed up
Use feedback systems
Model Behaviour
Celebrate
Focus

Do one thing at a time
Time-outs

Pause to think and reflect
Slow down to speed up

Alternate high and low energy phases
Use feedback systems
Encourage learning
Model behaviour
Combine work and regeneration
Celebrate

Indulge in successes
How to get started?

Process model
Process model

An idea for what you could do

Analysis of Acceleration
- Detect acceleration patterns

Stop Doing
- Run ABC analyses

Avoiding Acceleration
- Institute ABC analyses
- Adapt project management system
- Change appraisal systems to limit number of goals

Changing culture
- Run time-outs
- Create business rhythms
- Monitor energy levels and give feedback

An idea for what you could do
More

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Harvard Business Review
April 2010, pp. 80-86
Reprint R1004G
(www.hbr.org)

TEDx talk, March 2014
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7G6L4dEpiTM

More to read...

More to watch...
Conclusion

“Your first and foremost job as a leader is to take charge of your own energy and then help to orchestrate the energy of those around you.”

Peter F. Drucker
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BACK UP
Energy in teams and organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Intensity</th>
<th>Low Intensity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Productive Energy</td>
<td>Resignation and Inertia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrosive Energy and Aggression</td>
<td>Comfort</td>
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Sources: Bruch & Vogel (2011); Bruch & Menges (2010); Menges & Kilduff (2015)
Energy traps

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- Negative VALENCE: Complacency Trap
- Positive VALENCE:
  - Corrosive Energy and Aggression
  - Productive Energy
Energy traps

High INTENSITY

Destructive Trap

Productive Energy

Low INTENSITY

Resignation and Inertia

Complacency Trap

Negative VALENCE

Positive VALENCE

Low INTENSITY

Resignation and Inertia

Complacency Trap

Positive VALENCE

Destructive Trap

Productive Energy

High INTENSITY
Energy traps

- **High Intensity**: Destructive Trap
- **Low Intensity**: Acceleration Trap, Complacency Trap

**VALENCE**
- **Negative**: Resignation and Inertia
- **Positive**: Productive Energy, Corrosive Energy and Aggression, Complacency

**INTEREST**
- **Low**: Destructive Trap
- **High**: Complacency Trap
Energy in teams and organizations

- **Low Intensity**
  - **Negative Valence**: Resignation and Inertia
  - **Positive Valence**: Comfort

- **High Intensity**
  - **Negative Valence**: Corrosive Energy and Aggression
  - **Positive Valence**: Productive Energy
Revitalizing leadership

Low

Negative

High

Productive Energy

Aggression

Low Intensity

Positive

Qualilty

Source: Bruch & Ghoshal (2003)
Revitalizing leadership

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<td>Low</td>
<td>Slaying the Dragon</td>
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Productive Energy

Source: Bruch & Ghoshal (2003)
Slaying the dragon

Focusing on a threat

Definition and interpretation of a threat

Realistic communication of the threat

Strengthening the trust in collective competence

Source: Bruch & Ghoshal (2003)
Slaying the dragon

Focusing on a threat
Revitalizing leadership

Source: Bruch & Ghoshal (2003)
Winning the princess
Leading with a vision

Development, delimitation, and definition of the vision
Inspiring communication of the opportunities
Strengthening trust in collective competence

Source: Bruch & Ghoshal (2003)
Winning the princess

Leading with a vision
Energy in teams and organizations

![Energy in teams and organizations diagram]

- **High Intensity**
  - Healing the wounds
  - Productive Energy

- **Low Intensity**
  - Resignation and Inertia
  - Comfort

- **Positive Valence**
- **Negative Valence**
Healing the wounds

- Listening to all parties
- Finding outlets for negative emotions
  - Using toxic handlers
- Identifying overarching goals
- Emphasizing common identity
- Highlighting interdependencies
- Tipping the emotional balance
- Addressing concerns immediately

Source: Bruch & Goshal (2003)
Energy in teams and organizations

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- Productive Energy
- Corrosive Energy and Aggression
- Resignation and Inertia
- Comfort