

**Office Orientation Course & Workshop**

**Life Cycles and Life Cycle Phases Article**

**AN OVERVIEW OF LIFE CYCLE PHASES**

**This article serves as an additional resource for Chapter 8 “Life cycles and life cycle phases**

The information in this article has been written by Alan Murray and is simply observations made during the course of his management consulting career concerning the subject of life cycles and life cycle phases as described in this article.

The article itself serves as advice only.

It can be said that when you look at a situation in life there may be many ways to deal with that situation. Sometimes you may observe a situation and do nothing further and this would be the right action. At another time you may look at the same situation, slightly changed, and feel you need to do something about it.

**Mother and Child**

Let us say you are walking through a shopping center and you see a mother and a child walking in front of you. You notice the mother is holding the child’s hand while she is window shopping. This seems pretty stable or usual. You do not get the urge to go up to the mother and discuss how she is caring for her child. This would be odd and the wrong thing to do! If it is stable and working well you generally do not do anything to change that situation.

Now you notice the mother has let go of the child’s hand and is distracted by something in the shop window. The child takes this as a sign to get going and runs off playing. You also notice that quite nearby there is a railing at the edge of the upper floor and a steep drop to the floor below, separated by this railing. You notice that the child is running close to the railing but may come back to the mother, or she may not.

What you have seen is the same scene as before when you saw it was stable and did not need to do anything about the mother and the child. That could be called a stable phase of the life cycle of a mother window shopping with her child. With the mother distracted and the child running off, the situation has changed and is not 100% stable. There is a slight element of risk in this situation because the child could get too close to the railing and possibly fall down to the lower level.

The above has shown us that so far we can see two different phases of this mini-life cycle. The second case could be called ‘slight decline phase’ and if you did do something like talk to the mother it would not be wrong and it probably would be understood by the mother. It is fine to do this now because the life cycle phase has changed. We can refer to this as a slight decline phase, because it is lower than stable or less than stable. A decline can be slight, or steep.

Let us now say that the mother is still distracted by her window shopping and the child gets to the railing quite quickly and you have not spoken to the mother yet but you see the child now climbing up on the railing thinking all is fine. You can see that this is very dangerous and the child could easily fall and become severely hurt.

It is interesting to note that this is now a different relationship between mother and child. It is not ‘stable’ and is a bit worse than the ‘slight decline’ phase that occurred earlier. This could be called a phase that required ‘urgent action’ in that the child could be hurt seriously. There is strong risk or even danger in this situation. The action you take would be different to that you could take in the previous two situations.

In this situation with the child climbing up on the railing and the mother not noticing, would you go over to the mother and talk to her about her child or would or go straight over to the child and get hold of her? You would go over to the child directly of course. Afterwards you would give the child back to the mother and she would be very grateful.

We can see that in each situation there were three different ways of dealing with the life cycle phase between mother and child.

In the first one all was well with the mother holding the hand of the child and this could be called ‘stable’ and you did not interfere.

The second one was called ‘slight decline’ and the child was running around, approaching a risky situation, and you could have spoken to the mother just to point out what was happening. The situation was different and the action you could take was different.

In the third case the situation was ‘steep decline’ requiring some kind of ‘urgent action’ and you did not talk to the mother first but went directly to the child and dealt with or sorted out the risk by getting hold of the child, and then went to the mother to let her know what was happening and gave her the ‘mother hat’ back again.

The above example simply tells us that we actually know instinctively that these different life cycle phases exist and that we instinctively know that the actions we take in these situations are different, depending on the situation.

It is clear that we have noticed at least three phases: stable, slight decline and steep decline. There are more phases than these three but that will be covered during the course you are studying.

**You and your Credit Card**

To make the point a bit stronger, imagine you were paying a credit card statement each month and you did not overuse the credit card and all was well. You paid on the due date and kept good records.

This could be called a stable relationship between you and your credit card company. The relationship you have with your credit card company is a life cycle. It starts somewhere and ends at some point. It is a life cycle. By paying on time and keeping things stable, you keep the relationship stable. No unusual actions are required.

Let us say you started to pay less often and overspent a little bit and these actions changed what was working and as a result of this, the life cycle phase changes.

This could be called a decline in your relationship. It is no longer stable. It now has *potential* risk or even danger in it. The company may call you and ask you to pay and they may note this late payment on their records. You pay eventually and continue on your way until the next late payment and so it goes on. This is not a stable situation any more. It is a slight decline from stable.

To take it one step down or worse, if you *stopped* paying the credit card company but still used the card and after many calls from your credit card company still did not pay, the situation would get worse and would be a steep decline in your relationship.

They may stop calling you and send you a legal demand and threaten you with the courts and list your name as a bad payer. The system is starting to ignore you and your control of the whole situation is becoming weak. To correct this, you need to take some kind of urgent action. [Similar to when the child was climbing onto the railing and was about to fall down].

It may go further and you lose your card altogether. Having no card at all is a different life cycle phase. We have a new phase here that goes further than the steep decline phase. It is called ‘potential growth’! This means it is no longer there and if you were to improve that situation, the growth is all future potential.

The above example shows us that even with a simple arrangement like a credit card these life cycle phases apply. Your relationship with your credit card company could be stable or declining slightly, or declining steeply, or if you no longer have a card, the phase is only potential growth.

Decision-Making

Knowing the right phase, means that you can make the right decision on what steps to take. What you will learn about these phases, and the actions you can take to correct them, all relate directly to decision-making and is a skill that is highly valuable in the workplace.

As a final point on life cycle phases, you will also be aware that these can exist in any area of life. It could apply to your relationships for example. You could be in a ‘stable’ or ‘slight decline’ or ‘steep decline’ or ‘potential growth’ phase with your closest friend. Is that not true?

For example, the same could be said for Zimbabwe’s relationship with some of the governments of the world. Or South Africa’s, or the USA and China. It could also apply to someone and their relationship with their family. In your case it will be most useful when you are working within your accounting, or banking firm or another organization, and later when you become more skilled you can use it to assist companies or individuals that deal with you professionally.

The information you will be learning in the next part of your course concerns these life cycle phases. These phases or stages can be improved and worked with but the *fact* of the life cycle phases is a normal part of the design of the world we live in.

Enjoy the course.