

Round Pegs in Round Holes ... Matching Worker's CycloPraxis to the Job

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INTRODUCTION

Your job was once the perfect match.... Everyone pulled together.... People shared a common goal... Great results were motivating.... There was some kind of magic. Then slowly the magic disappeared. Many longed for the old days. But the magic seemed gone forever. You began to wonder if you were in the right job -- round peg round hole / square peg square hole. Maybe you thought about switching functions: manufacturing to sales, operations to marketing, development to operations. No doubt you still felt like a round peg but in an even square-er hole.

Or perhaps as a key executive in one of the business units* of a top company you are facing a growing challenge with one of your top contributors. He/She was once the focal point who helped lead the team to top results. You wouldn't be where you are without him/her. But now they are getting in the way as often as they are adding value. Your business unit has grown and they haven't. They just haven't adapted their work to today's pressing needs. Either the peg or the hole changed shape. Maybe you called in human relations consultant to examine and tune work styles, cultures, and communications. No doubt this didn't change the peg or the hole, rather it just made everyone more uncomfortable.

There are more 'textbook' examples where a once perfect match between style and job disintegrates:

The founder of the operating unit had to be replaced because he/she was not leading or constantly interfering with the focused commercialization of the most promising ideas.

A most successful marketing go-getter is not working out in his/her newly earned management position. Their energy and drive is irritating those who are chartered to deliver on the well-designed plans.

The once top ranked operations team's -- both managers and contributors -- reluctance to accept responsibility for customer satisfaction and to be highly flexible to customer needs is driving even long term customers to competitors.

Round pegs are most successful in round holes.

The traditional match between worker and job has been function: operations, manufacturing, marketing, finance, sales, development, legal, nursing, teaching, plumbing, retailing, etc. There are plenty of professional self-administered tests of employment functional fit and employment propensity. With these tools, one can learn whether they are suited to be an electrician, a chemist, an engineer, an educator, a lawyer, etc. Business schools organize their classes this way, help wanted ads are organized this way, and career ladders are designed this way. Still, round pegs wind up in square holes.

The next step for many business units* is to build a culture around compatible social and communication styles. The thinking is that similarities in social styles will harmonize workers and improve team productivity. Many an operating unit sees excellent results. Still, round pegs wind up in square holes.

* *Business Unit* is a term used in this article and may mean company, division, branch, store, practice, class, clinic, floor, or other similar profit or resource center. Individual business units might combine together to form medium or large organizations. Elsewhere the term *Customer* can also be interpreted more broadly as patient, client, student, etc.

There is a third and equally important dimension to the fit between workers and their jobs: CycloPraxis. CycloPraxis gives us a way to understand this unsolved dimension of fit between workers and their jobs. “Praxis” is one’s “customary practice or conduct” meaning the way a worker naturally does things. Prefacing with “Cyclo” aligns a worker’s praxis to the stage in a *business unit’s** overall evolution: *Authoring, Building, Capitalizing, Diversifying, and Extending*. In the following sections of this article you will see how:

- The Author praxis works best initially and only initially;
- The Builder praxis works best during the ramp-up of a business unit or project;
- The Capitalizer and Captain praxes work best during a business’s profit making or resource optimizing years;
- Diversification is simply a re-application of Authoring and Building; and
- The Extending praxis of Experts, Empathizers, and Educators is essential for continued customer success.

CycloPraxis principles apply regardless of whether we are looking at marketing, sales, development, manufacturing, operations, or finance. By adding an understanding of CycloPraxis there should be far fewer round pegs in square holes.

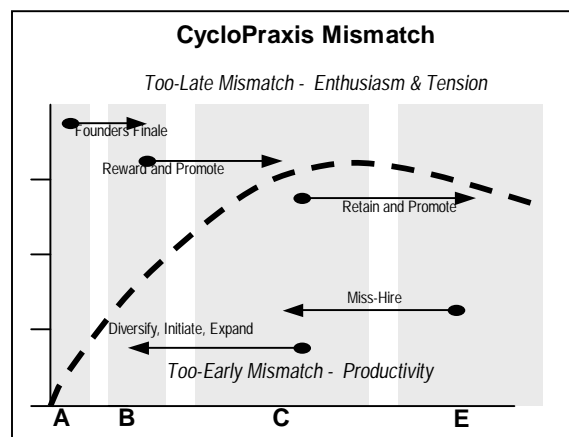
It is assumed that the reader is already familiar with the principles of cyclopraxis. For the reader new to the subject or desiring a refresher, please refer now to the appendix at the back of this article.

THE PRAXIS MISMATCH

A praxis mismatch can be of the Too-Late or Too-Early variety. Too-Late mismatch happens when an employee with early stage praxis takes a later stage assignment. Picture an author in a builder, capitalizing, or extending role; a builder in a capitalizing or extending role; or a capitalizer in an extending role. Too-Early mismatch happens when an employee with late stage praxis takes an early stage assignment. Picture an extender in an authoring, building or capitalizing role; a capitalizer in an authoring or building role; or a builder in an authoring role. Too-Late mismatch happens when an employee initiates a job change into the other praxis, when the business unit naturally matures to a later lifecycle stage, or when a new leader transitions the company to a later stage. Too-Early mismatch happens when an employee initiates a job change or when the business unit initiates a diversification and staffs the authoring and building with later praxis employees. Occasionally a Too-Late and frequently a Too-Early praxis mismatch will occur when hiring new employees. New employee mismatch can be minimized through careful interviewing. Any mismatch will feel like a round peg contributing in a square hole.

When a praxis mismatch occurs, there are frequent signs including loss of morale/enthusiasm, loss of productivity, and tensions between employees. Disappointing productivity is predominant in Too-Early mismatch.

Enthusiasm issues and tensions are predominant in Too-Late mismatch. Sometimes, the Too-Early or Too-Late mismatch results from a transfer or change in assignment. The same ineffectiveness will occur if a new employee joins the business unit in an incorrect position.



We have identified 9 common praxis mismatches and now explore each:

1. The Initiative
2. The Expansion
3. The Diversification
4. Rewarding with a Promotion
5. Retaining with a Promotion
6. Founders Finale
7. Hanging On
8. Proprietorship Evolution
9. Miss-Hire

For the first 3 cases, consider a previously top rated worker who suddenly becomes far less effective in a new assignment than can be explained by normal learning cycles. Said more specifically, capitalizers are less effective at building than a builder; and extenders are less effective at capitalizing, building, or authoring than a capitalizer, builder or author. The most frequent cases are the initiative the expansion and the diversification.

THE INITIATIVE. ‘Initiatives’ can range from small evolutionary adjustments of a process to major re-engineering efforts. ‘*The Initiative*’ being referred for this praxis mismatch is of the large re-engineering scale and occurs in the mid to late capitalizing or extending lifecycle stage of the business unit. Examples might be a new accounting system, changes to order tracking or billing, off shoring, or a major change to a product’s architecture. The operative requirement is that a major change is involved in some heretofore large and stable part of the business unit’s process machinery. Since the ‘initiative’ is occurring late in the firm’s life, most workers with which to staff the ‘initiative’ will have capitalizer or extender praxes. The most knowledgeable and efficient will be selected, placed on a task force, and asked to design and implement the ‘initiative’. Results are rarely as expected. Many ‘initiatives’ never complete.

When faced with such major ‘initiatives’ the best round-peg contributors suddenly feel like they have been placed in a square-hole assignment. Such an ‘initiative’ requires excellence in meeting deadlines, learning from prototype experiments, big picture understanding, first time organization of a project, quick decisions on tradeoffs, persuasive communications, multitasking, and most of all a delight for the unknown. It’s hard to get those qualities from a population that for years has been rewarded for attention to detail, excellence in following established processes, and their penchant for steady improvement. This is a group that appreciates structured environments, established processes, relative predictability, and low risk. Indeed the adjectives used to describe these two roles have so little overlap as to make a side-by-side comparison difficult. When the capitalizer is faced with an ‘initiative’ their first instinct is to map the process by which the project will proceed. This is almost always a futile effort since there are too many unknowns and too many hypotheses to test; and depending on tradeoffs made, the process by which the project will proceed could take an almost infinite number of paths. Faced with such a dilemma, many capitalizers simply stare at the challenge not really sure how to begin.

‘Initiatives’ are best designed by builders [implementation however is better left to capitalizers and extenders]. The builder approaches the same unknowns by simply jumping in, forming hypotheses, running experiments, making mistakes, backing up, and starting again. To the capitalizer this seems very inefficient and unstructured [which it is]. But the builder is learning with each step and miss-step. After many weeks and dozens of tries, the builder has lots of information on what is working and not working and is actually quite close to being able to design the solution. At the same point in time, the capitalizer is often still mapping the process options by which the project could proceed.

THE EXPANSION. During the capitalizing lifecycle stage, business units frequently seek to grow into additional facilities or related markets, territories, and customer opportunities. An expansion occurs when a

growth program has specific goals, is specially focused, and has the endorsement of the leaders of the business unit. Adding a new building or moving to larger quarters are common facility expansions. Servicing new customers in an un-served geography – from across town to across an ocean – is a territory expansion. Taking existing products and services into a new market is a business expansion. Key to success is applying workers with the right praxis to the expansion.

If a territory expansion were considered to a culturally different geography such as between East and West, it would be natural to select managers and participants with appropriate backgrounds and skills. Logically, the same principle should apply for any expansion. The need to accomplish something out of the ordinary in a specific time with a tight budget suggests this is a spot for the builder praxis even while the business unit is in the midst of its capitalizing life cycle. Regrettably, assignments of expansions to builders rarely occur. Instead, successful capitalizers are tapped to lead the effort. Business results often disappoint and the would-be contributor – now a victimized capitalizer – is left with an unfortunate grade in their personnel folder.

To illustrate this point, consider business unit in the capitalizing life cycle stage wishing to expansion from customers in a core market to customers in a related market. The story line could vary widely: perhaps a business unit expanding computer sales from engineering to financial customers, or a small rug cleaning business expanding from middle class to upper class neighborhoods, or a power tools maker expanding from hardware shops to mass retailers. Generally, the business unit will take a top sales performer -- a capitalizer -- selling to the existing market and appoint them to lead the effort. This salesperson is successful in existing accounts in part because they have an excellent rapport, in part because business unit's values for the customer are well understood and appreciated, and in part because the salesperson and customer are following an accepted and repeated sales/purchase process. Likely this successful salesperson has also landed a few new accounts in the traditional market where reference-ability is very effective. In reality, this sales person is more 'servicing' the accounts than 'selling to' the accounts. When expanding to a new market, nearly everything [except the product/service] changes. There is no rapport. There is no appreciation for the business unit's product/service value in the new market. There are weak or absent references in the new market. And potentially most challenging, the sales/purchase process may be different. What's necessary is simply jumping in, trying a few sales tricks, making mistakes, learning quickly from those mistakes, backing up, and starting all over again. Results may fall far short of expectations until values and processes relevant to the new market are discovered. Old sales quotas are not achieved. To the capitalizer this seems very inefficient and unstructured and it's easy to lose the motivation to continue. The capitalizer thinks "wouldn't it be easier to just return to the traditional market segment and continue to service traditional customers." The capitalizer feels like a round peg in a square hole.

DIVERSIFICATION: Diversifications are the capitalizing business unit's defense against the inevitable decline in revenues that will occur for existing products and services. The urgency with which to pursue the road to diversification varies greatly from industry to industry. Diversifications can be as simple as line extensions or as profound as the creation of new markets. Line extensions are likely to be designed and implemented successfully by capitalizers. New market initiatives require 4 key ingredients:

- Authors and builders;
- Complete and separate organizations to assure minimal interference from existing structures;
- Patience to start small;
- And of course ... that new idea.

Diversification has been carefully researched. For more on this topic please see the companion paper "Applying Worker CycloPraxis to the Paradox of Why Large Firms Fail to Innovate". The purpose of this paper is to describe what happens when the capitalizer or extender are assigned to a diversification project.

Successful new market diversification calls for starting in a startup type environment with an attitude of "just do it", where deadlines take precedence over traditions, where 95% done may be good enough, and rapid learning

from mistakes – however inefficient – is cherished. Furthermore every existing process in the business unit will be challenged for its applicability in the new market. Each of these elements of praxis is foreign to the values of the capitalizer. For instance, a capitalizer holds dear the processes of a business because achieving excellence against these processes is the capitalizer's fundamental reward. Now, the capitalizer is being asked to abandon the very foundation of their excellence. Making mistakes – even if done in order to learn – is inefficient in the near term so making mistakes is opposite the capitalizer's efficiency value. Instead the capitalizer praxis prefers to study the situation and or wait for more information in order to avoid mistakes. As the capitalizer follows their natural praxis instincts, they run up against diversifier leadership that admonishes, "jump in and try something". Diversifiers [authors and builders] routinely score capitalizers less productive at this startup diversification job activity. The once excellently rated capitalizer is now left with a sub-par grade in their personnel folder. And the individual feels like a round peg in a square hole.

The next 2 cases are situations where an excellent worker in their primary praxis moves to a later praxis with a promotion. [Usually workers won't take a lateral transfer to a later praxis; frequently they decline those opportunities]. When an employee transfers to a position more matched for someone with a praxis that is later in the business life cycle, they are prone to losing enthusiasm and simultaneously creating tension in others.

REWARDING WITH A PROMOTION: The builder who finds they have to perform as a captain/capitalizer or extender will be unhappy and will likely cause tension with peers, subordinates, and supervision. Yet a common practice is to place a builder praxis in a captain/capitalizer role as a reward for a job well done – "you did so getting it going, how about this promotion to run it". The builder turned captain will be challenged to be successful, will experience frustration and loose enthusiasm, and will be the source of considerable tensions in others.

Builders are task and achievement-motivated people and usually have difficulty as managers of large organizations. They set high standards, so high that others rarely meet them. They become impatient and see the structure getting in the way. This makes them critical and demanding of subordinates – neither supportive of people nor process. Next the builder in a captain role will follow their instincts and call for multiple changes to drive output more aggressively to the high standards. Tension will mount with capitalizer praxis workers whose natural instincts are to protect the structure and minimize change. Only the goal of improving output is in common between the builder/captain and the capitalizer. How that goal is achieved, how quickly that goal is achieved, and what is sacrificed in order to achieve the goal all differ.

As, the builder/captain's frustration grows they frequently look to personal accomplishment as a way to satisfy their achievement hunger. A fraction of a worker is added to the effort. The consequence is that it makes it hard for the builder/captain to let go or to give others credit for their contribution. The capitalizer praxis workers who previously saw their builder/captain as simply demanding now view them as ungrateful and meddling. The paternalistic leadership model unwinds [10]. Tensions rise, morale sinks, frustration grows – many fractions of each worker are lost. Round Peg, Square Hole.

The best captains feel good when their influence works to make their people grow and be effective. As long as they feel in control, they do not need the constant feedback achievement-motivated builders crave. True captains can live with not knowing how big a contribution they are directly making. Builders may possess some of these qualities, but by the very definition of their praxis these qualities are subordinate to others.

RETAINING WITH A PROMOTION: The capitalizer who is retained into the extending life cycle stage may likely loose enthusiasm. And if the retention is accompanied with a promotion tension with peers, subordinates,

and supervision is almost assured. Yet a common practice is to retain the best and most knowledgeable of the capitalizer praxis in extending roles as the business unit's market enters its final stage.

Any capitalizer or captain is inherently less excited by an extender role. The opportunity for improving efficiency is secondary to the need to enhance customer satisfaction. The opportunity to grow in power and stature is severely challenged since the business volume is declining. The very structures which made capitalizers and captains successful are frequently put aside in the name of customer service [in this lifecycle stage it is just not acceptable to tell a top customer "our policy is to ..."; the customer will simply go elsewhere]. The capitalizer's individual emotion will be a loss of enthusiasm which when combined throughout the workforce will appear as declining morale.

The capitalizer or captain newly promoted to additional captain responsibility will also look to maximize efficiency of resources thinking that will improve financial measures. Not only is this inappropriate for the desires of the late stage customers, it will alienate the new captain from the extending praxis workforce. A effective captain manages by controlling and enhancing the structure [processes, methods, environment] in which people work. This tactic works throughout the capitalizing life cycle stage where capitalizers respond positively because such tactics are in alignment with the capitalizer's sense of reward. But now the captain is managing extenders. And an extender feels rewarded when a customer is graciously assisted to customer's satisfaction – regardless of how much time it takes [ignoring the captain's efficiency metric] or whether procedures are completely followed [disregarding the captain's structure]. Most captains respond by tightening the structure and making efficiency goals more visible. Tensions between workers and the captain mount; the extenders grumble; all of which jeopardizes customer satisfaction. Surely the captain feels the mismatch and reacts feels like a round peg in a square hole.

The scenario of the previous paragraph can be used to explain the continual low morale in the nursing [and to a lesser degree the teaching] professions. Nurses and teachers are by definition called to their profession for extending praxis characteristics. Yet they function in environments where the resources that can be applied to any particular customer centric situation are capped at levels well below what the customer might consume. Patients could readily use more care, and the nurse would gladly provide all that is requested. Yet care giving organizations are quick to set limits on time spent [efficiency metric] and to thinly staff nursing departments so that coverage is divided among many patients [managing through the structure]. As a result, nurses – looking at the situation through their lens -- continually feel challenged to provide sufficient care. On the other hand, the captains who administer the care providing business units know that just enough care is being provided to operate medically sound, profitably, and competitively. Nursing and other professions are discussed in more detail in the soon to be released companion paper "CycloPraxis insights for the Small Business Owner"

The next 2 cases are situations where a worker who contributes greatly in a role aligned with their primary praxis stays with the business unit as it moves to a later praxis. In reality, these workers should have transferred out as the company's praxis was maturing. But for various reasons they elect to stay and inevitably wind up working outside their praxis. At this point they prone to loosing enthusiasm and simultaneously creating tension in others. Related to these two cases is the case of the sole proprietors who might find themselves involved in a business as it transgresses all praxes.

FOUNDER'S FINALE: Another common cause of praxis mismatch occurs when the business unit moves from one lifecycle stage to another and employees elect to remain with the business. [In previous generations, this was rarely an issue since lifecycle stages moved much more slowly than they do today.] A classic example of this praxis mismatch is the author/founder who finds their business unit has matured to the building phase and is suddenly expected to contribute as a builder in no-nonsense, time-pressured, accomplishment-oriented building stage. At a minimum, the author becomes frustrated [at builders who are no longer accepting new ideas].

Equally common the praxis mismatch causes tensions in the business unit between the newcomer builders and author founders.

Getting first products to market is highly stressful for authors and builders. When under stress, any praxis reacts by emphasizing what they do best. In an author's case this means suggesting and championing another idea. This is highly contrary to the focused execution and rapid experimentation strategies of the builder. Only by following the builder's recipe can author's original ideas be honed for commercialization. Each new idea geometrically expands the builder's problem and significantly delays the builder's final accomplishment. So builders are not receptive to new ideas.

When the number of author and builder praxes is roughly equal, builders will spend almost full time debating away or chasing down new author ideas. Left to this scenario, new ideas would never make it to market. But soon there are more builders than authors and building becomes the norm for the business unit. Now, the author's ideas are falling on deaf ears. As the authors' frustrations mount, they champion ideas with ever more passion. Tensions build between authors and builders. Even if the author is the founder of the business unit it feels like they are losing control – which in effect they have. The author/founder may have the majority of ownership, but the builders [who outnumber authors] have set the company culture. The only way the author/founder can positively contribute is to execute with builder praxis.

As time continues, the author/founder contribution becomes increasingly irrelevant to the business unit's success. The author still feels like a round peg, but the hole has changed to square. In the limit when an author fails to make a complete enough transition to the newer builder or capitalizer praxis they are ultimately replaced as leader and offered an honorary position out of harm's way. This is usually an unhappy event in the founder's life and a source of major tension for the startup business unit. This topic is discussed in more detail in the soon to be released companion paper "Applying Worker CycloPraxis to the Founders Finale in the Startup".

HANGING-ON: All business units mature from authoring, to building, to capitalizing, through some diversifying, and finally extending. Many times workers will align themselves to the business unit and fail to let go at the appropriate time. The preceding case of the Founders Finale is one example. The same however can occur with builders as the business unit enters capitalizing and with capitalizers as the business unit enters extending.

Sometimes the change from stage to stage can be gradual. When the change is gradual, workers will normally transfer or leave on their own accord – some early, some late. Frustration and tension issues are only a problem when there are no alternatives for the working population due to limited appropriate praxis choices in nearby geographies. In those cases workers will feel disillusioned like round pegs in square holes.

Other times a maturing business unit will make a change in senior leadership in order to be more effective in a subsequent praxis. For instance, a true captain may replace an earlier builder leader. Or an executive with extend stage skills may replace one more tuned to the capitalizing stage. The resulting change in leadership will most often precipitate a series of adjustments in processes, practices, environment, and structure. As these adjustments ripple through the organization, builders may find themselves gradually immersed in a capitalizing organization. Similarly, capitalizers may find their work has taken on the extender praxis. Morale suffers as the hanging-on workforce longs for the 'good old days' when the work was more closely aligned to their individual praxis. Some may never adapt and may subsequently be labeled passively insubordinate.

PROPRIETORSHIP EVOLUTION: Every business unit goes through lifecycle stages – even the local franchise, the professional practice, and the small business. Changes in lifecycle stages can make for difficult adjustments for the proprietor-owner. The difficulties are most acute for capitalizers and for extenders.

Some authors who choose to be proprietor-owners quickly understand their place in the business world. They enter and exit startup business units with amazing speed and resiliency. They call themselves ‘serial entrepreneurs’. This subgroup of authors deftly avoids the ‘founder’s finale’.

Builders look at small business opportunities and only see the ‘get-it-going’ accomplishment phase. Of course they excel at launching their chosen business unit only to discover disinterest in continual day-to-day operations. Before long, the builder assigns themselves another task – this time to sell the business. Upon sale, the builder goes happily on their way looking for some new idea that can become a fresh new challenge.

Capitalizers are challenged on the front end of starting a business and on the transition to extending. To minimize startup difficulties, capitalizers frequently look for opportunities to buy an established practice or small business or to get started through a franchise scheme. Mitigating the extending phase challenges is more difficult. Capitalizer proprietor-owners can find it difficult to make the transition to away from efficiency centric to customer centric core values for the small business. And, once business revenues start to recede there are few outside purchasers. Most often the capitalizer proprietor-owner simply loses energy and soon afterwards loses interest in the business. They spend fewer hours. The revenue decline accelerates. One can only hope that customers have other options and that the proprietor-owner is investing in another career or in retirement.

Extenders also find the front end of starting a business a challenge. Once underway the capitalizing phase is also problematic since they have difficulty making expense and revenue targets. The extender is more interested in having a place to belong and in helping customers toward satisfaction than in the bottom line. If however, the extender’s proprietor-ownership has a strong enough business model to survive, they will enjoy many years of satisfaction. There are no subsequent lifecycle stages to introduce new disappointments.

The final mismatch in praxis to consider is that of a miss-evaluated new hire. All preceding mismatch cases occurred because of internal staffing or external evolution changes in the business unit. Miss-hires occur because the candidate is interested in a job with the business unit [at any cost] or because the business unit is interested in filling an opening [at any cost]. Both make an uninformed choice. Likely neither knows how to apply cyclopraxis to see if there would be a good fit.

MISS-HIRE. Too-Early praxis mismatch occurs when a capitalizer takes a builders job or when an empathizer takes a capitalizer’s job. Productivity disappoints in both cases. Too-Late praxis mismatch occurs when a builder takes a capitalizer job or when a capitalizer takes an extender job. Enthusiasm falls and tensions rise in both cases. It is also possible for builder and extenders to mismatch in both directions. However a builder-extender mismatch is rarely cause for concern. Both builder and extender enjoy problem solving and can be effective in each other’s role for the lifetime of a job assignment.

Capitalizers frequently apply for and are awarded builder praxis jobs. The capitalizer is unknowingly attracted to the position because it is easy to glamorize the job description. And most firms are ill prepared to run an interview process that specifically seeks and identifies the builder praxis. Once in place the capitalizer’s performance in a builder’s role plays out like the ‘initiative’, the ‘expansion’, or the ‘diversification’ scenario discussed earlier.

Extenders on occasion apply for and are awarded capitalizer praxis jobs. The extender is unknowingly attracted to the position because there is a reputation for good pay and nice working conditions. And most firms are ill prepared to run an interview process that separates a capitalizer praxis candidate from an extender praxis candidate. Once hired, the extender’s performance in a capitalizer’s role will likely be on the low end of the productivity spectrum. The extender lacks the capitalizer’s drive for quota achievement and for efficiency. The

extender seeks out opportunities to be helpful at the expense of continual attention to output. The extender wants 100 percent perfect when 99.9 percent may be good enough. The extender has a high need for frequent social interactivity which again detracts from productivity per shift. And finally the extender looks for less structure even while the captains and capitalizers are planning more. Each of these style mismatches contributes bit by bit to lower productivity. The other capitalizers will think the extender is a square peg in their round hole.

On rare occasions builders apply for and are awarded a capitalizer praxis job. This situation usually happens when the builder is in NEED of a job for financial or other reasons. To remain in a capitalizing job for very long, the builder must demonstrate versatility through self controlled suppression of builder praxis traits. With out suppression, tensions caused with the rest of the workforce will quickly grow out of proportion. Even with suppression, the builder may have difficulty staying enthusiastic about the repetition and structure of a capitalizing praxis position.

More commonly a capitalizer may apply for and be awarded an extender praxis job. The capitalizer is usually unknowingly attracted to such a position based on the reputation of the extending stage employer [many of the surviving companies in a late stage market have excellent reputations]. The capitalizer will create tensions in the company as they encourage efficiency, organization, and structure – qualities not appreciated by the other extender praxis workers. The situation will be similar to the ‘retaining with a promotion’ scenario discussed above. The lone capitalizer will notice all the inefficiencies – poor utilization of time, lack of following procedures, disinterest in budget -- elsewhere in the business unit and loose enthusiasm for doing a good job themselves. They will feel like a round peg in a square hole.

KEY PRINCIPLES: PERCEPTION AND REWARD

Exploration of two key principles will help strengthen the appreciation why praxis mismatch can have such notable consequences. The first principle is that of perception. Everyone sees the world through his or her particular lens. Scan back through the previous 9 examples and in all cases the person sees their peg as round and the hole as square. It’s always the praxis of the company that is the issue [the square hole]. It’s never the praxis of the person [the round peg]. The second principle is that of reward. Whatever rewards each praxis values most is the definition of roundness. All other reward options – even if those options are best for the company – are square. Of course the mismatched worker is not consciously trying to sub optimize the company. Quite the opposite, the mismatched worker looking through their lens has the strong perception and belief that their reward recommendations are the optimum choice for the company. Only when viewed through the lens of the appropriate praxis does a different reward picture become apparent.

Each praxis has a different reward that around which they are passionate. For the author it is the freedom to create and pursue new ideas. For the builder it is the achievement of difficult tasks that make lasting and leveraged contribution to the business unit. For the capitalizer it is exceeding a gradually more difficult work quota that improves profitable results. For the captain it is seeing their influence make people grow and become effective. For the extender it is hearing thank-you – said in any number of ways – for assisting someone with a difficulty. Cross rewards have little effect. The author is not at all energized by the capitalizer’s reward of quota, the captain’s reward of influence, or the extender’s reward of thank-you. The capitalizer is not at all energized by the builder’s reward of achievement or the extender’s reward of an individual thank-you. The lens of each praxis is only sensitive to the reward of that praxis. The lens of each praxis is opaque to the rewards of all other praxes.

The lens of each praxis is not opaque to perceived faults of the other praxes. This principle was nicely articulated by Brooks Mitchell, professor of business at University of Wyoming in a article published by the Northern Colorado Business Report:

Entrepreneurs don't function well in structured situations. They feel most organizations are too stifling, too limiting, and too slow to react effectively to situations they feel must be dealt with immediately and decisively. This perception [which is reality to the entrepreneur] eventually gets them in trouble ... They are often seen as uncooperative, arrogant, and overly impatient. People within the organizations frequently refer to them as mavericks, lone ducks, and rebels. They are not good team players unless they can be the captain and run things.

They sometimes don't understand the strong opposition to them because their own behavior seems so natural and logical.

Brooks Mitchell, The Northern Colorado Business Report, Nov 26, 2004 page 11.

The builder's behavior seems natural and logical to other builders. When seen through the lenses of other praxes, builders are described as insensitive, impatient, overbearing, over-focused on task. They are considered poor team players. The extender's behavior seems natural and logical to other extenders. When seen through the lenses of other praxes, an extender appears uninterested in the important elements of accomplishment, efficiency, or power; wasteful of time and resources; slow, motivation-less, and behind the times. The capitalizer praxis represents nearly half the worker population, but they too are criticized by other praxis. Authors and builders see them as unimaginative, plodding, and robotic. They cannot at all understand the capitalizer praxis' requirement for structure and predictability nor the capitalizer praxis need for equality, teams, and organized social time. Extenders on the other hand see the capitalizer praxis as power hungry, money hungry, insensitive, and pushy for results.

LEADERSHIP VISIONS EXAMPLE

With the rise in popularity of quotes, it's likely everyone has seen a quote with which they did not quite connect. Others however may have found it profound. Here are 4 quotes about leadership – one for each praxis:

Extender

"Good leaders make people feel that they're at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization. When that happens people feel centered and that gives their work meaning."

Warren Bennis

Captain:

"A Leader's greatest obligation is to make possible an environment where people can aspire to change the world."

Carly Fiorina, CEO of Hewlett Packard, Reported in The Radical Leap, A Personal Lesson in Extreme Leadership, by Steve Farber, Dearborn Trade Publishing, 2004

Builder:

There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.

From the tomb of Machiavelli

Author:

"Leaders are visionaries with a poorly developed sense of fear and no concepts at all of the odds against them. They make the impossible happen"

Dr Robert Jarvick, Inventor of the first permanently implement-able artificial heart

SUMMARY

Four natural working styles – called CycloPraxis – are identified that map to lifecycle stages in the evolution of a business unit. The concept of lifecycle stages of a business is not new and has been extensively researched over the past 30 years. However no prior work was discovered that suggests an individual worker's style [CycloPraxis] might align better with one or more stages. Each of four lifecycle stages -- Authoring, Building, Capitalizing, and Extending -- has a unique mix of challenges and activities that appeal to different workers with different CycloPraxis.

When the praxis of workers aligns with the lifecycle stage of the market, the business unit will run at maximum effectiveness. It is rarely possible however to achieve this optimum staffing. In the natural course of a business unit's growth some early stage praxes will overstay their usefulness. And in the course of hiring workers not everyone will be effectively evaluated for a praxis match. As a result all firms will have some mismatch of worker praxis to lifecycle stage. These cases may be unavoidable.

In addition to unavoidable cases there are a number of classic situations that can be identified and should be avoided wherever possible. 9 common praxis mismatches are identified and discussed:

1. The Initiative
2. The Expansion
3. The Diversification
4. Rewarding with a Promotion
5. Retaining with a Promotion
6. Founders Finale
7. Hanging On
8. Proprietorship Evolution
9. Miss-Hire

Too-Late praxis mismatches [when a early stage praxis worker continues with the business unit into later stages of evolution] generally cause tension in other workers and lack of enthusiasm in the mismatched worker. Too-Early praxis mismatches [when a later stage praxis worker takes an assignment in an early stage of evolution] generally results in poor results and low productivity by the misplaced worker.

Each praxis has a differing perception of reality each with a strong distortion shaped by their specific rewards. Indeed the business unit's needs change as life cycle stages evolve. Yet most praxes fail to adjust their perceptions and see situations through their fixed lenses. This failure to adjust explains why tensions, missed expectations, and sub optimum results are so common with praxis mismatches.

Other papers on CycloPraxis available at www.cyclopraxis.com include:

- CycloPraxis in the Business World
- Applying Worker CycloPraxis to the Paradox of Why Large Firms Fail to Innovate
- Author, Builder, Capitalizer, and Extender CycloPraxis Work Preferences
- Prior Research Related to Company Life Cycles and its application to the Study of CycloPraxis

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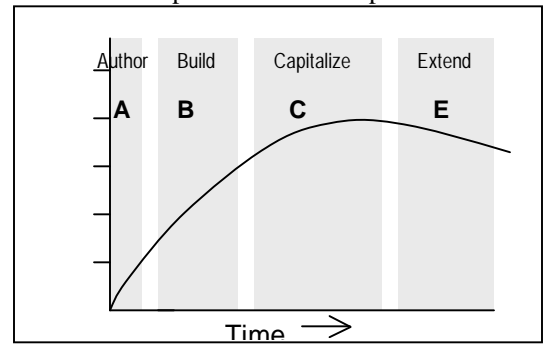
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CYCLOPRAXIS OVERVIEW

Adapted from the paper “CycloPraxis in the Business World”, Doug Johnson, 2005, www.cyclopraxis.htm

The classic match between worker and job is function: operations, manufacturing, marketing, finance, sales, development, legal, nursing, teaching, plumbing, retailing,. Business schools organize their classes this way, help wanted ads are organized this way, and career ladders are designed this way. There is another and equally important dimension to the fit between workers and their jobs: CycloPraxis. “Praxis” is one’s “customary practice or conduct”, meaning the way we naturally do things. Adding “cyclo” aligns a worker’s praxis to the stage in a business unit’s overall evolution: start-up, growth, maturity, and decline.

The first lifecycle stage is Authoring [A – for short]. This is where an innovative idea is championed and developed and where the business is initiated. The second stage is Building [B]. This is when innovations become products, early customers partnerships form, markets explode, operations begin, finance and quality and human resource functions begin, first processes are initiated. Next comes the need to maximize output in a stage called Capitalizing [C]. In this stage the business unit reaches its full potential, generates the most substantial profits or best resource utilization, repeatedly wins customers and delivers maximum value. Since all contributions someday diminish in value, the smart business will begin Diversifying [D] by leveraging the rewards of capitalizing business units. In effect, diversification is simply starting the authoring and building all over again in what will eventually become another business unit. Finally, every business unit reaches its peak and begins a long and slow Extending [E] stage. Marketplace rewards erode as demand falls and remaining competition intensifies due to standardization, saturation, and better performing alternatives. The business unit focus shifts from customer acquisition to customer retention. Knowledge experts and appreciative customer service are key volume drivers for sustained business.



Each of these four lifecycle stages of a business unit inherently attracts employees with different cyclopraxis. What entrepreneur would apply to work in a declining business unit where opportunity identification is sharply curtailed, where cash is siphoned off to other ventures, and where the principle activity is strong individual customer intimacy? Conversely, what customer-loyalty oriented employee would tackle a new venture without any customers? In between, one finds project managers who are not normally the initiators; they do better with an idea or initiative that is already past the napkin stage. On the other hand, project managers quickly tire of the repetitive work of the middle market. And the most efficient at repetitive production would look at early growth challenges and exclaim “how do I get started, where are the processes?”

There is nothing new about the concept of the lifecycle of a business and the organizations that participate in birth, growth, profits, and decline. The new concept around CycloPraxis is the connection around a worker’s natural semi-conscious work style preferences and the business lifecycle. Observations of hundreds of workers in wide ranging disciplines suggest 4 meaningful praxes. The first praxis is made up of a small percentage of people that always having fresh new ideas. A smaller percentage of those idea people go on to champion those ideas year after year until they are proven correct. Further observation identifies a second group of people who seek challenging new assignments around unsolved problems and who see them through to completion with unwavering focus to task. This second praxis thrives upon getting-it-done, whatever ‘it’ is. Upon completion of ‘it’, they simply look for another assignment. The second group rarely has the original idea and if called upon to propose the new idea might struggle to muster the appropriate spontaneous creativity. A third praxis – and by far the majority -- thrives when there is predictability and a defined structure in which they contribute to the profitability or effective resource utilization of the business unit. They enjoy situations where their output is measured and often tied to pay. Key players are often making incremental improvements in processes, products, efficiencies, yield, and costs. A fourth praxis enjoys work environments where they can apply their expert knowledge, solve the problems of customers, or engage in training. This last praxis creates lasting value with their contribution.

The preceding lifecycle discussion is optimized around the manufacturing corporation. Nevertheless, the same lifecycle concepts can be found in many other business types. Consider a professional practice. The Authoring phase is trivially short; Building – practice startup -- must still occur. Then the professional settles into a long career of capitalizing. The extend phase may be short [sale of practice] or long [services offered part time for little or no fee while in active retirement]. Or consider a Main Street USA business that is a franchise of some established chain. Generally the business owner goes the franchise route because they have anxieties about the building phase and the franchise package permits capitalization to happen sooner.

AUTHORS: The authors’ – entrepreneurs, architects, and visionaries -- greatest strength is the ability to conceive and champion an idea. Authors are risk takers, relatively unstructured, revolutionary, bold, and hold a stubborn persistence to their own ideas. Authors are most fruitful when they and their idea have little organizational grounding. Many feel more comfortable working outside the processes of the large firm; consequently they initiate many startups with VC help. Those

authors who do remain in large firms are the idea originators of most new business units. Others see, authors as overconfident and unrealistic about the business appeal of their ideas. Authors are most happy being creative and are constantly offering hypotheses and ideas to everyone around them. Authors are most unhappy when they are not permitted to express their creativity or when others fail to rally to their ideas.

But the same personality traits that are strengths in the author-praxis work against success later in the evolution of the business unit. Authors generally disdain details, financial controls, and aggressive marketing. They often are poor at leading, communicating, and delegating. Authors are frequently disruptive to teams due to narcissist driven competition for best idea. As a result the classic challenge facing many business units – startup or large firm -- is the succession plan of the original author-entrepreneur.

BUILDERS like authors are strong initiators. They play an absolutely fundamental role in the growth of new business units. In product development, they are responsible for commercializing the author's idea. Builders institute the quality control, the first operations, the delivery, the support, the financial controls, the value proposition, the sales recipe, and the first marketing collaterals. Builders are highly organized, energetic, excellent problem solvers, very pragmatic, prolific communicators, and able to simultaneously work on a phenomenal number of tasks. Builders fearlessly run lots of experiments looking for the right recipe and learn rapidly from their mistakes. They work long hours and hold accomplishing the goal above all else [even above employee relations]. The builder-praxis is driven by achievement of goal, and once achieved they need something else to build or they become unhappy.

Unlike the author, a builder needs to be better grounded either with someone else's idea or affiliated with an organization. Builders are strong drivers and push organizations hard, and so once again the same personality traits that make a builder-praxis successful in the expansion stage also limits its effectiveness later in the evolution. Builders are seen by others as impatient, insensitive to people, and overly type "A". They are poor leaders of the large number of effective capitalizers because the builder drives the capitalizer with endless urgent improvements rather than focusing on people management, team motivation, and predictability. The builder's narrow pragmatism – a strength during the building stage – not only inhibits their effectiveness at authoring new ideas but also limits their sensitivity to the motivation needs of the large sales, marketing, and manufacturing populations to follow.

CAPITALIZERS -- due to their attention to detail, excellence in following established processes, and their penchant for steady improvement -- are key to a business's profitable existence. Capitalizers appreciate a structured work environment and delight in repeatedly executing the plan with constant gradual improvement. The setting and meeting of work quotas energizes the capitalizer-praxis. Capitalizers have a stronger people and profit/resource orientation than either the author or the builder. Taken together, these traits increase the business unit's efficient use of resources. During the capitalizing stage, firms gain pay back on the initial investments of authoring and building the new business unit. Business revenues and operational efficiencies reach their peak. And happily, the motivated capitalizer will enjoy growing personal their financial reward.

Working together with capitalizers in this middle stage are *Captains* who fill the role of people management, strategic leadership, and continual improvement of the process and structured work environment. Captains have strong regard for hierarchy and may go by the titles of foreman, supervisor, manager, and vice president. The captain's primary responsibility is continual stewardship of the successful work output from the business unit's capitalizer population. There are lots of straightforward management and leadership tasks [planning, organizing, delegating, controlling] and tools [quality circles, continuing education, ...] associated with the captain's role. Efficiency improvement, quality improvement, automation, and cost controls are all examples of standard measures. Success is dependent upon the captain's motivational skills, management and leadership savvy, and achieving targeted profits. Success is rewarded with visible perks [corner office, company car] and formal promotions. The captain is happy when things are trending up and to the right.

The author and the builder sees the capitalizer and captain as resisting change, unimaginative, unable to identify and solve problems, and too comfortable with 'average'. On the other hand, the capitalizer/captain sees the builder as disruptive, brash, and threatening to the predictable productive environment. Authors in the eyes of the capitalizer/captain are just frivolous idea guys who will likely never amount to anything. Perceptions aside, capitalizers and captains are less effective at authoring or building because neither stage is predictable, because there are no processes, and because of less developed imagination and problem solving skill. Capitalizers are reluctant to deal with the unknown. On an individual's level, capitalizers who draw building or authoring assignments frequently under-perform against management expectations. At the business unit level, the Capitalizer's traditionalism traits can scuttle important diversification. The capitalizer doesn't want their comfortable status quo to change and they frequently resist adjusting to changing market conditions. Unfortunately when the landscape makes a shift and capitalizers don't adapt, decline begins.

DIVERSIFIERS: Diversification is simply the re-application of authoring and building.

EXTENDERS: To maximize profits and resource utilization as the lifecycle extends the business unit should employ workers with appropriate praxes – one we call extenders. During this last lifecycle stage, retaining existing customers is the key strategic principle. Customer retention is accomplished through a combination of expert assistance, sympathetic

customer care, ongoing education of the product/service’s values, and of course just enough value at the right price. The extender praxis is comprised of educators, empathizers, and experts who are all energized by top customer satisfaction. When presented with a customer satisfaction challenge, the extender will show tenacity and creative problem solving skills in pursuit of a solution. The resulting course of action will frequently achieve a great deal with very little invested; often the personal 1:1 attention has significant impact. Extenders are also personally rewarded from both the ‘thank you’ they get from the customer and from the knowledge that their efforts are allowing the firm to build a new business somewhere else. Extenders are helpful, trustworthy, sociable, structured and enjoy the variety that comes with each customer’s unique problem. The expert-extender is passionate about reusing the knowledge they already have about products, markets, and customers. The empathizer-extender lives for the satisfaction of making a positive difference in the day of someone else. Most extenders prioritize providing their special brand of care over maximizing company profits and personal income.

An author, builder, or capitalizer working in the extend stage will not perform well. Customers of mature products look for assistance and understanding, not an author’s new ideas. Builders fare poorly often appearing unhelpful due to impatience and insensitivity to the needs of others. Capitalizers struggle with the unpredictability of the extender workload and an inability to fully recover revenues for all the time invested. Captains are uninspired because the trends will inevitably continue downward. Extenders are seen by other praxes as lacking key traits that they – from their author, builder, or capitalizer vantage point – deem important. And the extender’s interest in closure, continuity, and completeness over deadlines and quotas is the source of frustration for the other praxes. For instance, the capitalizer is especially frustrated by the extender’s apparent disinterest in efficient delivery. Where the capitalizer organizes work according to a predictable schedule, the extender extends each engagement thinking that more assistance is better.

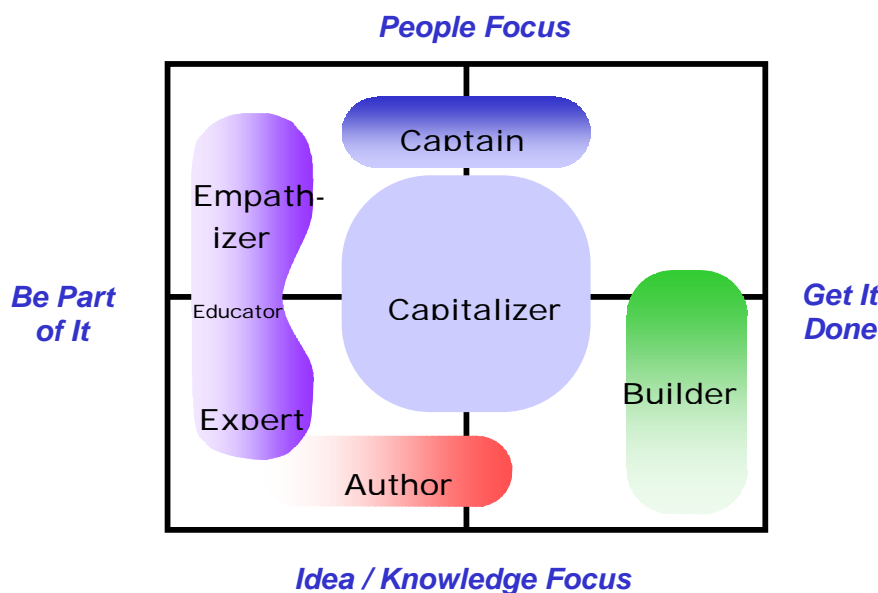
PRINCIPLES: 4 simple principles of cyclopraxis assist in applying the concepts to business situations.

- #1: Workers are happiest and most productive when their praxis matches the business unit life cycle. Each stage – A, B, C, and E -- is best staffed by employees whose cyclopraxis [natural way of working] aligns with the nature of the work required in that stage.
- #2: A mismatch is as challenging to a worker’s productivity as a function [Development vs Sales vs Human Resources vs Finance vs Etc.] mismatch.
- #3: The praxes do not get along very well with one another and this leads to employee turnover. The reason for discord between the praxes is that they each have their unique means of dealing with any specific business problem. These unique approaches are grounded in their strengths
- #4: The culture and operating style of any business is set by the CycloPraxis of the employees

SUMMARY: The preceding sections use a large number of adjectives to describe authors, builders, capitalizers/captains, and extenders. By doing so, everyone is sure to connect in some way with the overall paradigm of cyclopraxis. The downside is “descriptor overload”. Absent is a simple model for visual learners. Therefore the accompanying diagram is offered as a visual aide for the subset of the general population for which the chosen adjectives are meaningful.

One dimension is the subject of our work attention: ‘People \leftrightarrow Idea/Knowledge’. The other dimension is sense of urgency which has surfaced as a key business driver in this modern age. ‘Get-it-Done \leftrightarrow Keep-it-Going’. Other continuums were explored including ‘risk’, ‘attractiveness of pay’, ‘customer service’, and ‘predictability’. None yield as clean a visual aide as those chosen.

PRAXIS People / Task



Authors concentrate on ideas and tend to avoid translating those ideas to performing businesses. As a result, they predominantly fall in the ‘Keep it Going’ range. Builders have a strong ‘get it done’ focus and generally subordinate the interests of people in pursuit of task accomplishment. Captains have a strong ‘people’ focus and generally defer task completion until their capitalizers can be lead into accepting. Extenders have a strong drive to ‘Keep it Going’ and may apply this drive around people [empathizers] or knowledge [experts]. Capitalizers are the best rounded of the praxes; and without the need to satisfy any of the previously discussed extreme behaviors the Capitalizer is best suited for mainstream contribution.

SIDEBAR: SELF EVALUATION OF ONE'S CYCLO-PRAXIS

By now, many readers will have identified their cyclopraxis amongst the descriptions provided. You may have gained a new appreciation of your optimum stage in the evolution of a business. If not, a tool exists on www.cyclopraxis.com. Simply take the survey and review your score. Please note that in order for your score to be calculated, you must supply valid identification and permit your results to become part of our database. Privacy of information is assured.

For those not inclined to the online method, this simpler -- yet less precise -- quick example is provided below. Suppose you have the opportunity to work in one of the following positions -- each at the same company. Without putting too much emphasis on the pay ranges, which position[s] sound most appealing?

1. Opportunity to excel in making our customers satisfied so they return to buy more of our products. Considerable freedom and responsibility to solve individual customer problems with answers to their questions and occasional marketing or development special efforts. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that you work in an extraordinarily profitable and stable business. Reasonable hours. Starting pay: 40K: Max pay 80K.
2. Opportunity to work in a predictable people-oriented team voted one of the top 10 work environments in the Nation. Your work is well defined and will be carefully scheduled to match your capability and interest. At our company people are our most important asset. Help make our company #1 in its market. Starting pay 40K plus overtime plus profit sharing: Additional rewards are offered for meeting goals and for ideas that improve the way our business is conducted. Max pay upon 1 in 10,000 chance of promotion to VP is 400K.
3. Opportunity to contribute on a highly visible brand new project that is in the top 10 for the company. Our CEO will know you personally, and you will be closely supervised as you solve tough problems. There will always be plenty of challenge in your in-basket and you will have a high interrupt level due to the special nature of this project. You and your teammates will work long weeks -- perhaps 60 to 80 hours -- in order to finish on time. But rest assured, our company's normal workday -- practiced by 90% in this office -- is 9-5. Starting pay: 50K. Max pay 100K. Bonus if satisfactorily completed: 50K -- 150K.
4. Lifetime career opportunity with guaranteed employment to freely explore your ideas. Very little to no supervision. You are free to come and go as you please, but your pay raises and consideration for future opportunities will be dependent upon how visible you make yourself as a result of your innovation and developments that stand out against your peers. One in a hundred chance that one of your ideas will be acknowledged for further consideration within the company. Starting pay: 50K. Max pay: 100K.

The author-praxis will choose job #4 because it offers the ongoing independence and opportunity to explore ideas with the possibility that one of your ideas may become the backbone of a new business. [Note that this job description would have been written very differently if this were for a startup company operating outside the large firm context]. The builder-praxis selects job position #3 that is extreme with challenge, problem solving, visibility, and new-ness. Job description #2 is most appealing to capitalizing-praxis that wants to be part of the team that realizes the business's full potential. Notice the emphasis on following the process and on working with people. The cyclopraxis that is most suited to managing a business through its extending stage will appreciate the job category #1 that is rich in customer satisfaction and stability, yet still offers plenty of autonomy and responsibility.