

VITALOGY!

THE WAY TO ACHIEVE
MORE ENERGY AND SELF-DIRECTION
FOR YOU AND YOUR TEAM

KLAAS KOSTER

COLOFON

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PREFACE

SUDDENLY I HAD DOUBLE VISION ...

“Your vitality is something you take for granted, until you can no longer take it for granted!” I experienced this PERSONALLY in the summer of 2015. I got up in the morning and found that I had developed double vision overnight. That, aside from being very impractical, was quite frightening to say the least. My wife is an oncology physiotherapist and all kinds of alarm bells immediately started ringing for her. My GP, who confirmed this “diplopia” (sudden double vision), immediately and urgently arranged all kinds of tests in hospital to find out what caused the complaint.

It was not normal for a healthy young man to have such spontaneous complaints and could indicate a TIA, an autoimmune disease, a brain tumour, or another neurological disorder that you really don't want, especially not at the age of 40. Fortunately, the doctors were able to discount all of these, but to this day, it remains unclear what was wrong with me. By the way, after a few weeks I gradually started to regain my normal vision. And I was completely symptom-free a few months later.

Two questions occupied my mind: what caused this double vision and how can I prevent it in the future? I soon came to the conclusion that my complaints might be psychosomatic and stress-related... The cause being an accumulation of stressful situations in a short time: a house move, rigorous renovation and burglary, providing family care and losing two loved ones, terminating employment and starting my own company, the attempted suicide of a loved one and, on top of all this, a long-term fertility process.

When I look back on it now, I recognise some more symptoms of a lurking burnout. For example, I no longer enjoyed parties as much as I used to, and I preferred to see people one-on-one. Or even not at all.

What eventually helped me get back on track quickly is the loving support from those around me, in combination with my optimism and my ability to stay true to myself when making choices (something I learned during my master's degree in NLP). This meant that I sometimes had to disappoint the people around me, which is no easy task for an out-and-out pleaser. But it was exactly what was needed to be able to feel good about myself again and be able to be part of society.

Burnt-out, worn-out employees pose a serious problem for businesses. The amount of burnouts has been increasing in alarming numbers for years. In addition to all the personal suffering, this also means reduced productivity and availability of people. Sustainable employability? A utopia if we keep doing what we are doing now and continue on the same path.

Achieving sustainable behavioural change requires compassionate managers with guts. Leaders who dare to ask questions about the health, lifestyle, fears and desires of their employees. People who set a good example themselves and thereby inspire others.

You can be such an inspiration. By reading this book you are taking an important step towards a more energetic and vital life. For yourself and for your team.

KLAAS KOSTER

PS Even if you are not a manager, you can still be a vital leader and inspire others through your behaviour. The most important thing is that you act!

WHAT IS LEARNT IN THE CRADLE, LASTS TILL THE TOMB

More and more people are affected by burnout and at an ever-younger age. Currently, one in three young people (aged 16 to 24) is concerned that they will eventually burn out! In the age group of 25 to 35 years, 16% experience burnout complaints. These percentages are more than 10% above the national average (source: CBS).

It troubles me greatly that more and more young adults are stuck at home with burnout complaints. I see it as my personal mission to do something about this. My plan? Expand the existing education programme of primary and secondary schools by including the subject of vitality. Anyone who, at a young age, learns to manage their energy well, who dares to make choices and accept the consequences, will benefit from this for a lifetime. I will use all royalties from this book to help make this dream come true.

What's in it for me? Working on fulfilling my life mission gives me a lot of energy. Knowing why you are in this world is an important success factor for a vital life.

*“Everything is energy and
that’s all there is to it.”*

ALBERT EINSTEIN

INTRODUCTION

VITALOGY – THE STUDY OF LIFE ENERGY

“Oh, no!” George, an ambitious, hard-working project manager, looks at the back seat of his car in despair as he gets out. There is his daughter, fast asleep in the car seat. In itself a sweet picture, but also a problem. George was supposed to have dropped her off at day care on the way to work. With two tough projects on his mind and ten deadlines breathing down his neck, he's completely forgotten about that!

You probably have them too sometimes: those moments when your head is so full that you can no longer think about yourself and your surroundings. Or periods when life leads you, instead of you leading your life. You don't feel fit and vital, you sleep less and worry more. After a hard day's work, you don't go to the gym, but plop down on the sofa. In every way, you feel that the energy is not flowing.

We also see this happening in companies. The shortages on the employment market and the speed with which technology is developing mean that many people experience enormous work pressure. The number of exhausted employees is still increasing. Some are already at home with burnout complaints, some are barely holding on due to the huge amount of pressure, and others perform their tasks in the workplace without motivation.

You may also see this happening in your own organisation. Do you feel like you have to drag people along? Do they take too little responsibility

or ownership? Do you feel that you, your company and your employees deserve better? Then it's great that you're reading this book. It will help you with the questions and challenges you face. For example, how do you ensure that the older employee no longer counts down the days until their retirement? How do you change their mindset so that those last years of their working life become the most inspiring of their career, which they can look back on with pride and satisfaction? How do you help young parents like George, who don't know how to keep all the plates spinning, to obtain a healthy work-life balance? How do you bring successful behavioural change in yourself and your colleagues? How do you give your team a big energy boost using small adjustments?

The key to success is vitamin A: (conscious) Attention. Be mindful of yourself and your environment. And then help your colleagues with that. In short: you have to become proficient in vitality.

VITALOGY, WHAT IS THAT?

First, let's take a look at what vitality actually is. If the word were in the dictionary, the meaning would be as follows:

Vitalogy

› Latin: vita (life) + Greek: logos (teaching)
teachings of the vitality of living beings and life forms

A practitioner of vitality is called a vitalogist. The word "vital" means: pertaining to the vitality of living beings. So it has to do with life energy.

Vitalogy is the teaching of the human physical and mental life force that is governed by conscious and subconscious behaviour. Vitalogy helps people to gain insight into the factors that make them feel strong and fit and have mental resilience and perseverance.

Vitalogy is about personal leadership and self-direction. It's about (re) taking control and responsibility over your life. It takes guts and a

healthy dose of self-love (“I’m worth it”). It also requires confidence in yourself: that the choices you make are good for you, regardless of what others think.

Vitality is therefore a broad concept. It affects not only the physical body, but also the mental, the social and the spiritual. These elements are inextricably linked and have a direct influence on each other. The vitality wheel (see Figure 1) makes this clear at a glance; it represents a holistic view of vitality. To feel energetic, you need a cadence of the body (physiological), the mind (psychological), the environment (ecological) and meaning (philosophical). What matters is that you learn to analyse your energy – or lack thereof. And that you become aware of which button you have to press to let the energy flow (again).



Figure 1 – Vitality wheel: the five focus areas for obtaining and preserving life energy

A PERMANENT BALANCE DOES NOT EXIST

Do you strive for a good work-life balance? Between being strong and daring to be vulnerable? Between going along with others and defining your own path? Then there is bad (or perhaps excellent) news for you: there is no such thing as a sustainable balance. Balance is a brief moment of balance that quickly veers back to one side or the other. So do not try to maintain that balance, it will only lead to stress.

Life is like a heartbeat on an ECG monitor: it has ups and downs. There are plenty of beautiful moments, but you will also find challenges on your path. There is a continuous alternation between moving and standing still. When you realise that there is no such thing as permanent balance – and you therefore do not strive for it – relaxation occurs. There is nothing wrong with putting your foot on the gas every now and then, as long as you let go of the accelerator afterwards. Helping others achieve their goals is fine, as long as you continue on your own path afterwards.

It's the same with the vitality wheel. The comprehensive approach on which it is based sees people as a whole. Their body and all their feelings, emotions, thoughts, their environment and their concerns and desires are connected and influence each other. If something happens on one level, it has an immediate effect on another level. Keeping all energy sources permanently in balance is a utopia. Life simply doesn't work that way. The trick is to regularly reflect on how you score in each area (you'll find a handy test for this in Chapter 1) and take action if necessary.

Don't strive for balance, but for a healthy, natural rhythm. Go for cadence!

The vitality wheel contains the four basic human needs, as described by Stephen Covey in his book *The 8th Habit*. In it, he signals “the paradigm of the complete human being”. At our core, we are four-dimensional beings, with a body, head, heart and soul. In almost all Western and Eastern philosophies, you will always find the same physical, mental, social-emotional and spiritual dimension. Although these are referred to by different terms, they mean roughly the same thing. They represent the four basic human needs, which are: to live (physical), learn (growth and development), love (relationships), and leave behind (contributing, making a difference). If we manage to fulfil these needs, we arrive at a “balance” with ourselves and we can develop and use our talents.

Because awareness plays a crucial role in the whole, this has been included as a separate part in the vitality wheel, under the denominator “vitalogical”. It offers a logical framework in which the necessity and usefulness of vital life are key. Because... no change without necessity!

SUCCESSFUL CHANGE

The vitality wheel helps you to make successful interventions. With yourself and your team. This entails four energy sources, within these five focus areas:

- 1. VITALEGICAL**
the necessity and the choices you have to make to live a more vital life
- 2. PHYSIOLOGICAL**
your body and your lifestyle
- 3. PSYCHOLOGICAL**
your mindset and your emotions
- 4. ECOLOGICAL**
the interplay between you and your environment
- 5. PHILOSOPHICAL**
your inner why, your talents and your motivations

What you want is for the energy to flow. That way, you'll feel comfortable in your own skin and get a lot done. The reverse can also happen: you don't have the energy to commit to a really good result and you feel lethargic. If you observe this in your employees, it's important you initiate a dialogue with them. This book will show you how to do that. On the basis of a well-thought-out theory, grounded in scientific insights, and with plenty of practical examples. A vital leader is aware that their positive energy is contagious. And knows this is true for their negative energy as well.

The trick is to establish a connection with the other person from the connection with yourself and let the energy flow between you. A vital leader encourages self-direction among their team members, encouraging them to take responsibility for their own vitality. Chapter 6 will reveal how to shape vital leadership in practice.

The formula for successful change can be found in Chapter 1. The same goes for the self-transformation model, which starts with self-reflection (dwelling on what moves you) and leads – through self-connection and self-love – to what it's all about: self-direction. Chapters 2 to 5 each deal with an energy source of the vitality wheel (physiological, psychological, ecological, philosophical). If you know which button to press, being fit and vital becomes a lot easier. A small change in one of the four areas can make a huge difference. A little more exercise, slightly healthier food, sleeping a bit better, some more relaxation, a slightly more positive mindset – everything is related. If you exercise more, you are more relaxed; if you sleep better, you often eat better. A small change often leads to another change and soon healthy decisions feel better than unhealthy ones. This puts the flywheel of the vitality wheel into operation!

Start with yourself, experience what it does to you when you start working with the tips. It's the best way to help your colleagues move forward. If you are more aware of your own vitality, you get to know yourself better and you are also more connected with yourself and your environment.

SLOW DOWN TO SPEED UP

In addition to the exemplary role you have as a manager, sustainable change requires ownership from your employees, so that decisions are widely supported. The OED Process (also known as the three-phase theory, developed by social psychologist Robert Freed Bales) is a useful tool for this. In three steps – Orientation, Evaluation, Decision making – you work towards more energy and self-direction within your team. You can go through the same process to increase your own vitality. The most important questions per phase are:

1. ORIENTATION

What is vitality? What common language do we use?
What information do we collect? What sources do we use?

2. EVALUATION

How is my vitality and that of my team members and the organisation doing at the moment? What do we think of this and how would we like it to be?

3. DECISION MAKING

What are the goals? What does it take to achieve them?
Which small step leads to big change?

In practice, the process often looks like this:

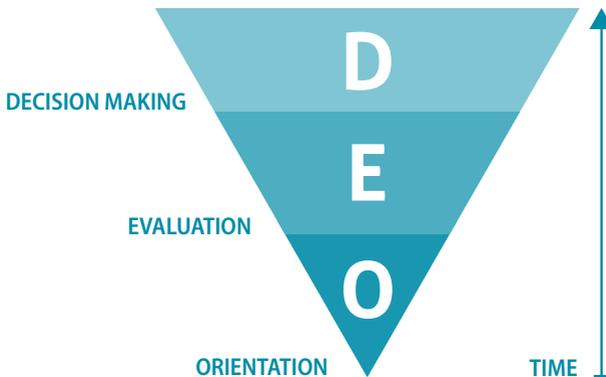


Figure 2 – The OED Process in practice:
little time for orientation, a lot for decision making

Little time (approximately 10%) is spent on orientation, slightly more on evaluation (approximately 30%), but most attention is devoted to decision-making (approximately 60%). We tend to make decisions before the problem is actually clear. That's not helpful, because if we think we understand things too early on, there's a good chance we're missing something. In companies that spend little time on orientation, it is often difficult to form an opinion, because new, additional information is constantly being introduced. Gaining support in the decision-making phase then becomes quite a task, and also takes a great deal of time.

It is therefore much smarter to flip the pyramid and spend most of your time on orientation (Figure 3). Sometimes you have to slow down to speed up. When you have a complete picture of the problem, you can make decisions that address the real cause. And because everyone agrees with the analysis, the decisions are supported by the entire team. In addition to better results, this approach also saves time.

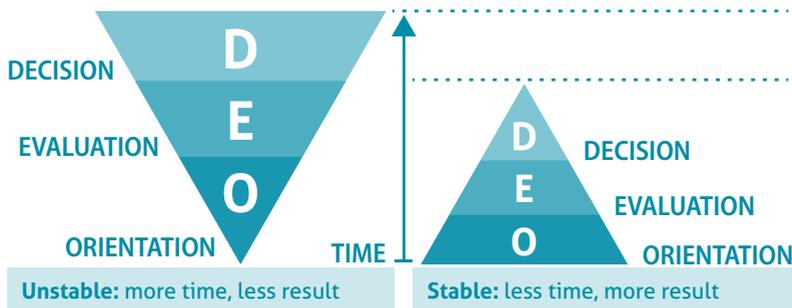


Figure 3 – Reversal of the time spent in the OED Process:
a stable base and more result in less time

The importance of such a complete picture is beautifully illustrated in the Indian parable “The blind men and the elephant” (translated into English by John Godfrey Saxe). Six blind travellers encounter different parts of an elephant on their way through life. One feels a tusk and concludes that an elephant is a kind of spear. Another accidentally touches

the moving trunk and finds that an elephant resembles a snake. A third compares the animal to a rope because he's holding the tail. Thus, each blind person creates their own version of reality, based on their personal, limited experience and perspective. And not on the complete picture.

This often occurs when you map vitality within yourself, your team or within the entire organisation. A lot of the time, only one part of the concept of "vitality" is considered. As a result, decisions are made that are not supported and therefore do not lead to a sustainable change in behaviour. It is important to see "the complete elephant". Make sure that everyone takes the same image as a starting point and make agreements in advance regarding the criteria you use to form an opinion. The decision will then follow naturally.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A COMMON LANGUAGE

We all see reality from our own point of view. Everyone has their own, often limited, idea of the problem and its solution. We put a lot of energy into convincing the other of our own perspective and that we are right. Does this lead to the desired result? No, you can only achieve the ambitions of your organisation if you use a common language. A clear language with which you create energy and a healthy drive. About 80% of people only think of healthy food and exercise when they think of 'vitality'. But as the vitality wheel shows, it's much more than that. In fact, providing a fruit basket or facilitating a lunch walk is not enough to keep your employees fit. Your task as a manager is to explain to your people how broad the concept of "vitality" is and to find out which button needs to be pressed. A common language is necessary in order to be able to address others on their behaviour. Such a framework prevents everyone from continuing to look at the situation from their own limited view, which quickly leads to discussion about decisions taken. In the orientation phase, therefore, take plenty of time to collect all data, facts, opinions, and perspectives. Structure them for yourself and with each other and consider them from all angles. Together, also decide how you will reach a decision later in the process. This results in better decisions, which also cost you less energy.