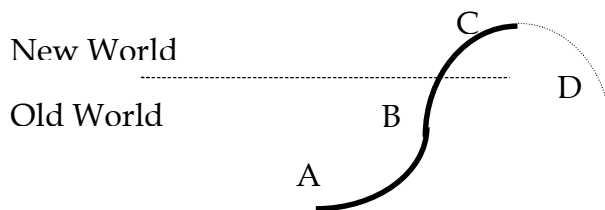


The "S" Curve By Will Phillips

The "S" curve depicts a paradox of growth. A paradox which sets a trap for the unwary.

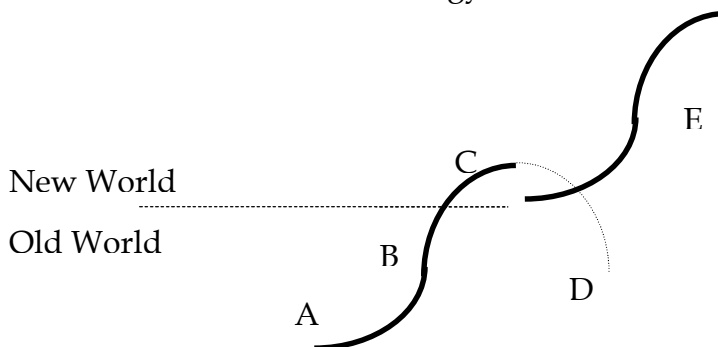
The dynamics of the "S" curve are as follows. In the beginning of growth (A) the growth is slow because that which is growing is unsure of itself and its relationship to the environment which supports it. When this relationship matures, the growth is fast (B).



The very phenomena of growth now leads the growing entity into a new world which has new operating principles, new problems and new opportunities. The skills and knowledge which led to the growth (B) are now inappropriate for continued growth (success) (C). But the growing entity finds it difficult to let go of the old skills, concepts and knowledge which led to its former success (B).

Like the successful fish which learned to move out of the water onto land, it must give up its old ways in order to further succeed on land. Failure to do so leads to decline (D).

Transition to a new set of knowledge and skills is necessary for further success. This transition requires letting go of the past and learning new ways. Although this is effective in enabling the transition, it is inefficient. This inefficiency shows up as confusion, frustration, demand for increased energy, time and other resources.



This inefficiency is symbolically shown as a descent from the top of the first growth curve at (C) to the second growth curve labeled (E). The hesitancy or fear of dropping down in order to go forward often prevents the transition which then leads to (D). While on the dotted line of decline towards (D), the natural strategy is to resist change and support the status quo.

The “S” curve appears to describe a paradox of growth in physical systems like the hysteresis curve explaining why magnets and electrical coils behave, to biological systems of population growth, to the nature of organizations and interpersonal relationships.

Ichak Adizes book “Corporate LifeCycles” expands the “S” curve concept into a series of five curves in the successful growth of any organization—corporate, non-profit or government. A parallel set of pathological or declining parts of the “S” curve are also described. Qm² has developed a methodology for assessing where your organization falls on this model and the implications for the future of your organization.

Michael Gurian in his book “Love’s Journey—The Seasons and Stages of Relationship” has written a parallel description of the various stages and transitions in a marriage.