

Transition (Part 2)

By Professor Jan Willem de Graaf

Professor of Brain and Technology, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Deventer, Netherlands

Last week I wrote about the major transition domains: climate, environment, forest, demography and labour market. Although all five of these domains are vital to our survival, the labour market transition is most closely related to my chair. We hardly need to talk about the dangers of climate change in the week after the climate summit in Glasgow. Directly related to this is the decline in biodiversity, making the environment in which we live and from which we feed ourselves dangerously polluted and/or scarce. However, more hopeful is the demographic transition, which occurs spontaneously when prosperity increases over a longer period of time.

As a region becomes more prosperous, a decrease in (child) mortality occurs, resulting in an increase in young people, after which, mainly due to the emancipation that usually follows an increase in prosperity, the number of births per mother/family decreases sharply. Population growth comes to a halt at a higher number of inhabitants and is therefore not infinite. It has been calculated that if all countries of the world achieve a reasonable standard of living (including emancipation, that is full access to education for all women), the world population will stabilize at 13 billion people. However, this is only possible if we drastically reduce meat consumption globally and stop and even reverse deforestation in favour of agricultural land to feed the animals for slaughter. The forest transition shows that with prosperity, forests (and other natural areas) are initially given up in favour of industry, urbanization and agriculture, and then space-consuming activities are moved to less prosperous parts (low-wage countries). As a result, nature in the prosperous country is given room to run wild again. If there are no more “less prosperous” regions, this move won't be possible, so we have to stop factory farming!

There is evidence that labour plays a key role in these five vital transitions. Since the Corona pandemic, especially in the US, there has been the so-called Great Resignation, a total reconsideration. According to Klotz (2021), four factors lead to resignation: 1. burnout, 2. re-evaluation of the priorities in life, 3. wish to continue working from home after corona and 4. a combination of these. It turns out that the Corona crisis has become a moment of reflection for many employees: “Is this the work and life I can look back on proudly when I'm old?” Corona thus marks a tipping point, in a process that was already underway, which also included “downshifting” on the career ladder, towards less responsibility. The ILO (International Labour Organization, part of the United Nations) defines decent work from the Sustainable Development Goals: employees as human beings are at the heart of development towards a future that is inclusive and sustainable: youth, women and men. The core values are dignity, equality, a fair income and safe working conditions.

This is less trivial than it seems. For example, safe working conditions can no longer be guaranteed for a manager or administrator, especially due to smart technology: every step that is taken is visible and there are always several voices, for example on Twitter, who immediately magnify everything and if they do not agree sometimes try to influence with threat and terror. In companies too, there are so many rules and potential threats that deviating from the norm is on the one hand very welcome and at the same time totally unacceptable. As a result, creative and powerful managers are pushed hard. Managing a company or country is further away from decent work than ever, as a result of (former) managers sometimes “downshift” via the Great Resignation to e.g. courier work and thus escape all (indecent) attacks on personal integrity. However, if you are being tracked by the second with “smart” tracking & tracing technology, things go from bad to worse (next week part 3).

Klotz, A. C., Swiper, B. W., Shao, Y., & Prengler, M. K. (2021). The paths from insider to outsider: A review of employee exit transitions. *Human Resource Management*, 60(1), 119-144.