

THE COMFORT, STRETCH, PANIC- MODEL. (RYAN, A. AND MARKOVA, D., 2006)

Ryan and Markova developed a theory concerning learning processes. Within learning processes we can discriminate 3 different zones: the comfort zone, the stretch zone and the panic (or stress) zone.

The **comfort zone** is the zone in which an individual feels comfortable. There is no fear or discomfort. The person feels at home, comfortable and safe. All things are familiar. Within this zone there are no challenges to start a learning process. There is little reflection or learning in the safe zone as individuals are unchallenged. Things stay the same, often unquestioned.

In the **panic zone** a challenge is so far away from the zone in which we feel comfortable, that it becomes overwhelming. In this zone we experience stress, fear and challenge in a way that learning is impossible (for instance our fight or flight reaction). All our energy is spent on managing and controlling our fear and panic. When a person stays too long in this zone there is the possibility that they cease to explore their boundaries and instead prefer to stay within their comfort zone.

The **stretch** zone is the zone in between the previous zones. In this zone things (activities, situations,...) feel somehow awkward and unfamiliar. In this zone learning can occur. It is the zone where you can enhance your possibilities, where you can work towards your personal development, where you can explore your boundaries. When a person feels he cannot control or handle the situation, he can retreat to the comfort zone. However, operating in and learning in this zone can expand your comfort zone, becoming familiar with new situations, activities.



<https://authorbeckyjohnten.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/comfort-zone-comfort-stretch-panic.jpg>

GENERAL ASPECTS OF THIS MODEL:

- Every person's threshold for the different zones is individual and may differ in different situations.
- Don't try to push a learning process. Don't try to push a person into a certain zone because you cannot know a person's individual "stretch".
- It may happen that you need to organize several learning situations to make learning happen.

RELEVANCE OF THIS MODEL WHEN TEACHING ABOUT SEXUALITY:

Dealing with relations, intimacy and sexuality in care, comes very close to a person's own stance concerning the theme. One's reactions are often steered by the way an individual experiences the issue and this can be framed within the model described.

When trying to develop skills and attitudes of students and professionals, the trainer must take into account the zone in which the trainee feels comfortable or -- more importantly -- in which the trainee gets panicked and will freeze. When working in a group of students/professionals there will certainly be differences between the participants in which zone they feel comfortable, challenged or feel stressed. You have to accept this difference and be sensitive to these individual differences. When working with a group you may express this conviction, and emphasize that there is no judgement. The trainer can use the piccasoll tips (see piccasoll).

Within a professional context, within a team of professionals (or a group of students), it is also important to accept those differences, but not in a way that you reconcile with the discomfort a professional feels towards certain situations. The trainer rather will search for experiences within the stretch-zone. This may be facilitated by asking the trainees to reflect where they consider themselves in the three zones described.

Through this link, one can find a useful presentation: <https://www.slideshare.net/chanbingruikenneth/the-learning-zone-model> (created by Kenneth Chan).

Further information can be found in: Ryan, A. (2006). *This year I will...* Broadway Books, New York.

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