Reluctantly abandoning your educational project

You may feel that your world is coming apart: a final failure or exclusion from EPFL is forcing you to abandon the study track on which your heart was set. If you are in this situation, we strongly advise you to talk about it to a professional or someone you trust. Indeed, this type of situation is difficult to handle alone. If you would rather think for yourself, however, this document could serve as a basis for your reflection. It draws on the work of researchers investigating attachment and separation processes.

Attachment, separation
Attachment is a natural need to establish links, be it with a living being, an object or a goal. You committed yourself to a study plan and this choice brought you satisfaction:

- Attachment to a PROJECT
  - Enables one to develop SKILLS
  - Leads to a feeling of SUCCESS
  - Develops SELF-ESTEEM, A COMFORTING FEELING AND A FEELING OF COMPETENCE IN RELATION TO YOURSELF AND TO OTHERS

Sooner or later all attachments – be they for an hour or for 50 years – end in separation, leading to the loss of related aspects. The stronger the attachment, the more necessary a “grief process” becomes. This is a healthy process which is part of life. It enables the grieving person to establish new links.

Stages in the grief process (based on the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross):

- **Denial**
  (refusal to accept the current situation)
- **Rationalisation**
  (resorting to logical arguments to explain the situation)
- **Fear**
  (together with the feeling of being abandoned)
- **Anger**
  (at the loss of the project. Attempt to recreate the project)
- **Sadness**
  (deep pain)

But also, at a later stage:
- **Acceptance**
  (feeling in agreement with the new situation)
- **Satisfaction**
  (in particular by contemplating a new project)
- **Forgiveness**
  (ability to say goodbye to your former objective)
- **Gratitude**
  (drawing something positive from this experience in life)

These “moments” in the process may be felt for a variable period of time. You go from one to another until such time as you have completed the grief process and manage to think back on it in a positive way.

警告! If you feel trapped in one of the four initial stages, this may give you a strong feeling of loneliness which may cause problems (depression, headaches, overeating…). If you are in this situation you need to seek professional help.

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