

Change is more like adding milk to coffee

In the given Harvard Business Review, the author talks about how spilling a small amount of milk creates a new pattern and a permanent change in coffee. This concept is then related to organisational change, the idea being that change is ever-occurring, through minute alterations or by flippant decisions. We are further provided with five major insights that reflect on how a profound transformation can be obtained or the alternatives to '*planned change*'. At large, there are points in the article I do not agree with or partially agree with. Even so, there are points that resonate with me. Following is a drill-down of the same.



One insight I find most disagreeable is *"there is no such thing as resistance to change - only smart response to dumb method"*. Speaking from some first-hand internship experience and some case-study knowledge, it is conclusive that change is often met with resistance if not always. Jason Little in his book called 'Lean Change Management' mentions that *"change doesn't begin on the start-date written on your gantt chart. It begins when people are whispering at the water cooler"*. When behavioural patterns are a part of transformation, they cannot be left out of resistance. I believe that similar to change, resistance to change can be a resultant of the smallest events in the organisation. Say, in a company moving from location A to location B, twenty employees are reluctant to relocate, for, the daily commute is too hectic for them. They end-up quitting the company and now both, the employees and the company are impacted by this. In this case, there is no '*dumb method*' met with '*smart responses*'. All there is, an on-going change, people resisting it and the change cycle ending up in the chaos phase as seen in the Satir model. This chaos will then be resolved and a new status quo will be formed.

Another closely related insight is that *"the problem is in the system - almost always"*. It is further mentioned in the paragraph that 94% of the business problems are system driven. Business organisations are not binary systems, therefore attributing business problems majorly to one party is unfair and inaccurate. Viewing business organisations as diverse

systems brings me to the insight *“org change is socially dense - the technical side is (almost) trivial”*. I agree that catering to building relationships in the organisation is crucial. Individual adaptation, group adaptation and non-conventional change drivers are all the factors that burgeon a sincere transformation. However, seeing technical side as a non-trivial aspect is an off-key part of this insight. Technology, in present times is equally important to derive accurate discretions. If we look at the earlier example, analysing employee demographics through analytical tools could help find out the distance between the new work location and the employee residences. This can further be mapped on Google Maps to discern the optimal mode of transformation. That is why technology is one of the driving force in organisational change.

I find that all of the insights discussed above steer away from the premise that was set by the title. I only found two of the following insights to be correlated to the title. First one being *“there is no such thing as transformation - instead, everything’s an intervention”*. Everything being interpreted as an intervention is a plausible argument. Any progression towards a new phase, be it personal or professional is a series of trial and error. I correspond those iterations of trial and error to what the author calls interventions. The other one is *“change is not a journey - instead, it is constant flipping”*. Even though I do not agree with the part that change is not a journey, I am choosing to focus more on the latter part. In quite a literal sense, a barista making latte art adds milk in espresso in different amounts to create different designs. Therefore, the transformation of espresso to latte is not a rigid one rather it comprises of steady alterations.

While reading this article, I found the underlying idea to be analogous with agile methodology. Organisations adopting an agile approach develop their projects in short cycles, analyse them and make revisions if needed. This approach is more realistic and caters to what we call an always-on transformation era. Take a simple example, say, a person wants to paint their wall blue. That person may have a certain shade of blue in mind but instead of painting the entire wall, they will paint a patch on the wall to match the colour. Upon painting the patch they might find out that a particular shade does not go well with their furniture. So they will keep mixing paints to achieve the desired stage. Hence we can see that the transformation was an ever-changing one, may be a family member did not like a certain iteration of the color and that way resistance was introduced. Maybe at some time in the transformation process the person decides to change the colour entirely to green and many such possibilities. Therefore, we can say that the said person painted a wall using an agile method and with small but supervised alterations just like adding milk to coffee.

