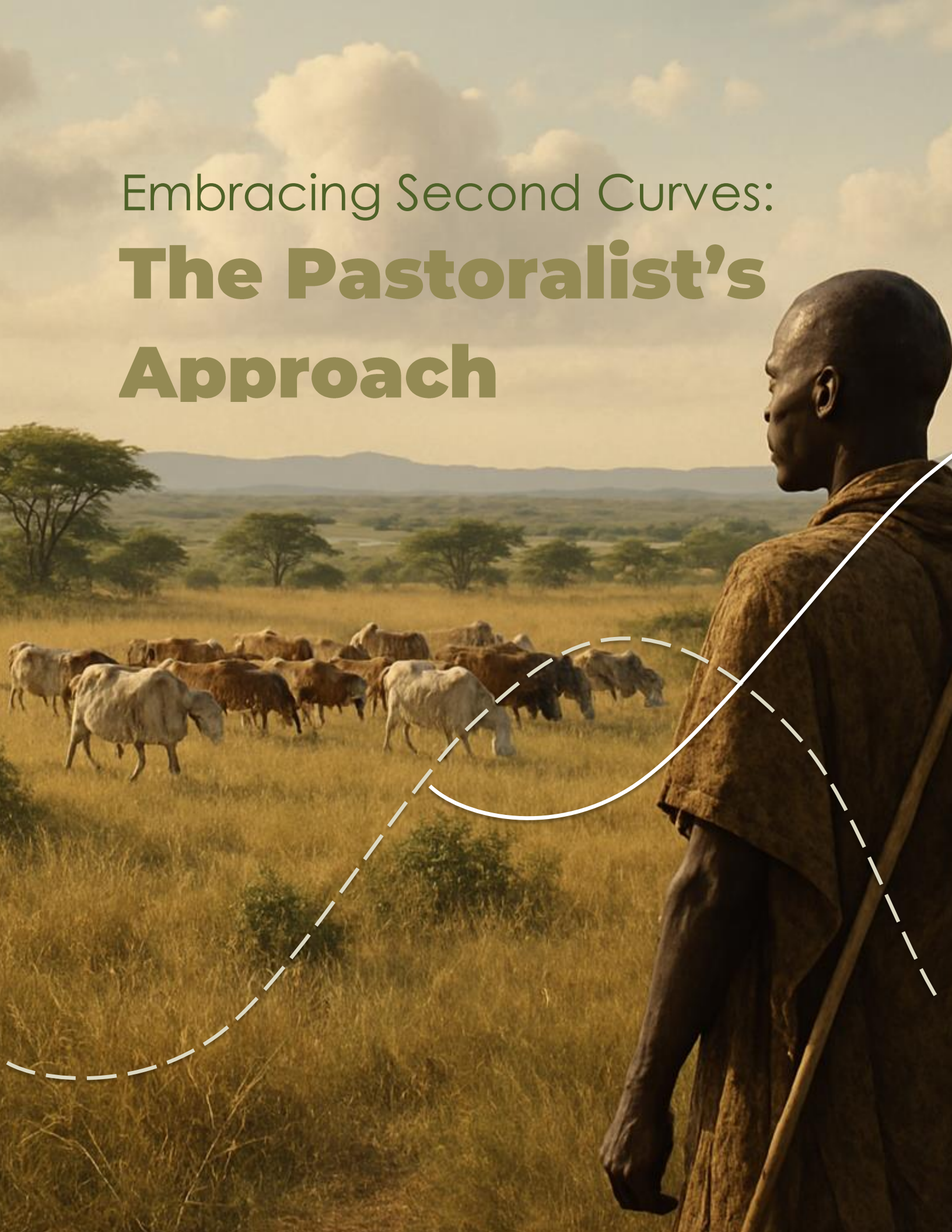


Embracing Second Curves:
**The Pastoralist's
Approach**



Embracing Second Curves: The Pastoralist's Approach

Lives and businesses will be deprived of our ancestors' wisdom if I put a conclusion to this discussion without acknowledging the significance of their early practice of pastoralism and shifting cultivation. I come from a farming community and when I was younger, we had an unfinished building behind our village house, where my siblings and I each had a room in it to ourselves where we planted maize seeds and vegetables given to us by our parents. Then, I often wondered why we had to wake up each morning during summer breaks and trek to our big farm that was kilometres away when we could just plant all we wanted in our makeshift garden. I never got a satisfying answer to that musing, and I never knew it would become significant until this moment.

Many would argue that the adoption of a sedentary lifestyle was the beginning of the best life for the early man as he could then farm, build houses and experience stability, but I argue otherwise. Unlike sedentary farmers, the pastoralist having secured the day's portion must not sit; he must venture out. He knows about the beasts that lurk in the wild. He knows of hunters that have ventured out but never returned. But he also knows that his cattle must graze, his next meal is just a hunt away, and in his venturing lies his survival. In this, I found the answer to my musing on why we could not stay at our makeshift garden but venture out to our bigger, farther farm.

So, even after a successful pastoring, he must venture out once again, and in his lifestyle can we truly see the portrayal of what embracing the second curve entails. Robert Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken* gives us an imagery of what the first and second curves are.¹ In the poem, the poet encounters two diverging roads. While one was grassy and wanted wear, the other was worn from frequent use. I believe the worn path is the first curve, Charles Handy's metaphor for the comfort zone. The less worn on the other hand, parallels the dreaded path of the second curve, the uncertain path of growth and renewal.

When Pastoralists Move.

Pastoralism is a livelihood system centred around the herding of livestock—such as cattle, sheep, goats, or camels—across vast rangelands, where communities rely on mobility, ecological knowledge, and adaptive strategies to thrive in unpredictable environments.² For them, there is no settled farming relying on stationary plots of land, like sedentary farmers. They trace out seasonal patterns of grazing and access to water, making marginal lands productive zones.

¹ Frost, Robert. "The Road Not Taken." *Poets.org*, Academy of American Poets, <https://poets.org/poem/road-not-taken>.

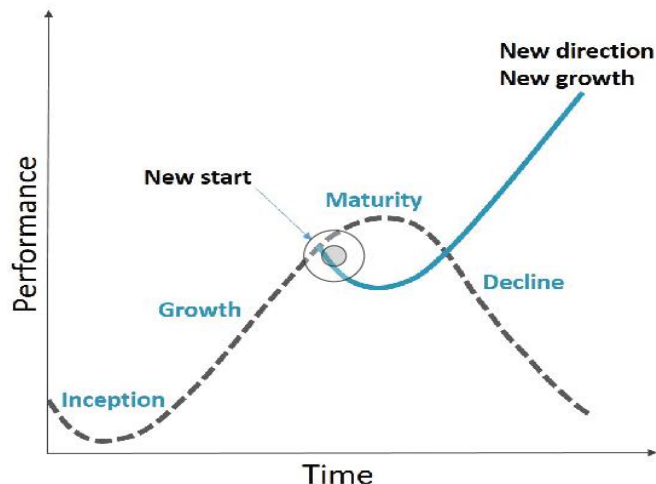
² De Leeuw, J., Osano, P., Said, M., Ayantunde, A., Dube, S., Neely, C., Vrieling, A., Thornton, P., & Ericksen, P. (2017). The pastoral farming system: Balancing between tradition and transition. https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/287612119/vrieling_pas.pdf

Embracing Second Curves: The Pastoralist's Approach

One of the prominent features of pastoralism is adaptability, in other words, the art of strategic mobility. To ensure that scarcity does not force change, pastoralists anticipate and pivot, this way, their mobility is not aimless, but a premeditated response to environmental cues.

So when do pastoralists move? Pastoralists' movement time is complex but they have a combination of environmental, climatic, and socio-economic factors as pointers, depending on the region, type of pastoralism, and local traditions.³

Similarly, knowing when to pivot is, in context, paradoxically simple, yet shrouded in complexity. Going by Handy's philosophy, the paradoxical complexity is because courage is sacrosanct at the zenith of the first curve (maturity stage in Fig.1), not its nadir, yet the fear of losing the *bird in hand* often paralyzes the allure of what lies beyond. This, to borrow the words of Milton Friedman, is the *tyranny of the status quo*,⁴ and here, survival eclipses transformation. However, this fear is understandable because as humans, we naturally express aversion towards the associated feelings that come with embracing change.⁵



[Fig. 1:](#) American Translators Association, 2016.

The attempt to determine the optimal moment for renewal sounds simplistic when we say “pivot in the maturity phase”. Handy admitted not being wise enough to know what the second curve should be in every case, and that he can make suggestions, but that surely there's got to be one.⁶

³ Snaibi, W., Mezrhab, A., Sy, O., & Morton, J. F. (2021). Perception and adaptation of pastoralists to climate variability and change in Morocco's arid rangelands. *Heliyon*, 7(11), e08434. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e08434>

⁴ Friedman, Milton, and Rose Friedman. *The Tyranny of the Status Quo*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984

⁵ Schroeder, B. (2021, October 19). *The fear of change keeps us frozen with respect to career or entrepreneurial Opportunities—Key Insights to Embrace Change*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernhardschroeder/2021/10/19/the-fear-of-change-keeps-us-frozen-with-respect-to-career-or-entrepreneurial-opportunities-key-insights-to-embrace-change/>

⁶ Kelly, E. J. (2015, June). *Charles Handy and the curves of life*. Integral Leadership Review. Retrieved from <https://integralleadershipreview.com/13191-616-charles-handy-and-the-curves-of-life/>

Embracing Second Curves: The Pastoralist's Approach

Inferentially, the strategic imperative is clear: pivot during ascent, not decay. Peter Drucker captures this beautifully by stating that “*success that has outlived its usefulness may, in the end, be more damaging than failure.*” Why? Akin to a youth’s prime, the maturity phase offers the needed resilience to endure transition, thus, what delaying until decline portends is that the odds of success diminish.

What about waiting for the right time? The nebulosity of the “right time” does not differ from that of seeking the “exact moment” of Buddhist enlightenment. To the query as to when one knows that he or she must initiate the second curve, Handy responded by saying that you know for sure only after having passed it. This is the exact paradox portrayed in Handy’s Davy’s bar account, where “*by the time you know where you should go, it is too late to go there; if you always keep your original path, you miss the road to the future.*”⁷ In essence, Handy’s position clarifies that reinvention is not an event but a process, one that must begin before the need is dire.

But it is not just to know when but also to prepare, and I believe it starts with the Socratic life-worth-living self-reflection. This typically entails having a roadmap or what theorists call the *Change Readiness Process Model*.⁸ Pastoralists move according to some cues such as seasonal changes and rainfall. Similarly, the readiness model begins by establishing an awareness of the change environment, establishing a time frame, prioritizing, implementing actions, and tracking progress. Therefore, while the exact moment to pivot is indeterminate, adequate preparation in the first curve is a major determinant of successful transition. In the words of Charles, “*The first curve is thinking and education. The second curve is doing and the third is being.*”⁹ So, how can the second curve be embraced successfully when its foundation which entails thinking and education is neglected? It is impossible. This is because “*We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change.*” as Peter Drucker points out.

Handy posits that the most successful transitions occur when the first curve’s competencies are not discarded but reapplied. In my second year of undergraduate studies, I dabbled in competitive essay writing, and then it was merely an academic exercise. But with each competition I entered and each prize I won, I was inadvertently embracing another significant second curve: scriptwriting for YouTube. A retrospective look shows that my transition from essays to scripts was not a leap but a natural evolution. This is the hallmark of Handy’s inception phase: a period of adaptation where the foundational competencies of the first curve are repurposed, refined, and redirected toward something new.

Having known when, we must also know why.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Cioclov, R. and Lala-Popa, I., 2017. The Second Curve. Driving Individual and Organizational Change. *Expert Journal of Business and Management*, 5(2), pp.155-165.

⁹ Kelly, E. (2015, June 19). *Charles Handy and the Curves of Life, Interview with Ed Kelly*. Integral Leadership Review. <https://integralleadershipreview.com/13191-616-charles-handy-and-the-curves-of-life/>

Why Pastoralists Move.

If, according to Drucker, “*The most serious mistakes are not being made as a result of wrong answers. The truly dangerous thing is asking the wrong questions,*” then persons who failed to embrace change may have asked questions, but not the existential question of “why”—the right question. Why do pastoralists move? Pastoralists move primarily to optimize grazing land, giving their animals green grass preventing overgrazing and enabling the ecosystem to rest. If we look at Yahoo, for instance, Yahoo's strategic paralysis becomes understandable when we examine how it failed to clearly ask three fundamental questions: “why grow”, “why survive”, and “why leave a legacy”. Thus, a company poised to pioneer the search engine and social media era, dipped into oblivion.¹⁰ I will further refer to its errors subsequently, however, it would be parochial to see this as a chronicle of a company's downfall, rather than as a lighthouse to guide us in shunning myopia, when we ask these questions.

Go to The Pastoralist.

Drawing from the biblical directive, “*Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!*”¹¹ likewise, we all must consider the ways of the pastoralist and draw wisdom. We must identify and break free from the shackles of the sedentary mindset. This is because sedentary agriculture's strengths are also its vulnerabilities as they give the illusion of permanence; farmers invest in land, infrastructure, and routines. This works until climate shifts or markets change. Moreso, because specialization is a double-edged sword, sedentary societies enable deep expertise but discourage lateral movement. This is why we have corporate silos where, for instance, Yahoo's engineers excelled at portals but missed social media's rise.

Nevertheless, certain challenges cause attempts at reinvention to fail. Pastoralists would call it environmental shocks but they are, in context, external pressures. Pastoralists face droughts; modern professionals face recessions, AI disruption, or pandemics. If we learnt anything from COVID-19, it is that those with pastoralist adaptability thrived while rigid industries floundered. Also, pastoralists face socio-political resistance because pastoralists are marginalized; in business, innovators face bureaucratic resistance just as Kodak's Engineers warned of digital photography's rise but were ignored.¹²

¹⁰ Rushe, D. (2012, January 20). *Yahoo: The rise and fall of an internet pioneer*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/jan/20/yahoo-rise-fall-internet-pioneer>

¹¹ Bible Gateway. “Proverbs 6:6–11 (NIV).” BibleGateway, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs%206%3A6-11&version=NIV>.

¹² Anthony, S. D. (2016, July 15). *Kodak's downfall wasn't about technology*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2016/07/kodaks-downfall-wasnt-about-technology>

Embracing Second Curves: The Pastoralist's Approach

Now, the way forward from the distillation of the pastoralist's guide to the second curve is that one, we read the wind (anticipate). Pastoralists track weather patterns; professionals must scan industry trends. Socrates declared an unexamined life as one not worth living, so annual skills auditing where we ask “*What’s peaking?*”, “*What’s declining?*” is essential. Secondly, we must diversify. Pastoralists diversify income (meat, milk, hides). Pastoralists keep goats, sheep, and cattle. Workers today must cultivate “side skills”. It starts by identifying our “herds” (skills and deficits). Lastly, we must move before the land dies, not when we come to obsolescence.

Having given pastoralists much exposition, let’s consider the nexus between shifting cultivation and the second curve. Shifting cultivation—also known as “slash-and-burn” agriculture—is a farming method where land is used temporarily, and then left fallow to regenerate. Farmers rotate crops, allowing old land to recover while new land is cultivated. When fields lose their fertility, skills and industries become obsolete. Consequently, clinging is not an option. We rotate, reinvesting in new “plots” before the old ones are useless. This is its link to the second curve.

Additionally, the “burn” in shifting cultivation is, beyond destruction, nutrient recycling. Similarly, we take the familiar and burn it in a bid to fertilize the unfamiliar. Upon Steve Jobs’ Return to Apple in 1997, he slashed 70% of products¹³ (burning deadwood) to focus on the iMac, iPod, and later iPhone (new fertile ground).

Also, there is the fallow period, which is a necessary pause. Pastoralists rest pastures; shifting cultivators rest land; modern professionals must rest skills. The worker in fear of AI takeover who learns prompt engineering during a sabbatical, becomes a regenerating field and through this example, we witness the compatibility of shifting cultivation with pastoralism. Pastoralists (spatial mobility) and shifting cultivators (temporal rotation) both reject monoculture thinking—the enemy of reinvention. We can see this in modern hybrids. For instance, Uber shifted from ride-hailing (first curve) to food delivery (second curve) before demand peaked.

However, we must be wary as “shifting” may soon turn into fleeing, because not all abandonment is strategic. Shifting cultivation fails if rotation is too fast. It also fails if burning is reckless. Yahoo’s constant CEO changes without strategic pauses led to erratic, unfruitful “plantings.”¹⁴ Taking the shifting cultivation lesson that growth requires release, we must then ask ourselves: What “field” am I overfarming? (e.g., stagnant job, outdated skill). What should I “burn” to fertilize the next plot? (e.g., comfort, sunk-cost bias). Am I leaving enough fallow time to learn?

¹³ Smith, D. (2016, December 21). *Apple is losing its focus again — and this time, there’s no Steve Jobs coming to the rescue*. Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/apple-is-losing-its-focus-again-steve-jobs-2016-12>

¹⁴ Hartung, A. (2015, December 6). *How bad leadership doomed Yahoo: CEO mistakes are costly*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/adamhartung/2015/12/06/how-bad-leadership-doomed-yahoo-ceo-mistakes-are-costly/>

Resistance to Change: Why The Unfamiliar Road is Not Taken.

Our pastoral ancestors had three primitive survival options when they faced predators: to confront it head-on (fight), flee from it (flight), or remain rigidly still in the hope that it would leave without attacking (freeze). These primitive reactions persist today when dealing with change and manifest themselves as anger, fear, and denial.¹⁵ While commendable and lending credence to how the organizers themselves have embraced the Druckerian approach to change, it was not unexpected to see the original thinking section for the rules of submission of this essay requesting for the declaration of the use of AI.¹⁶ The organizers of this essay are strategic enough to realize that change is inevitable and there is no gain in flight, fight or freeze. I say, idiomatically, that the Drucker Challenge itself has taken a cue from Drucker's assertion: "*The only thing we know about the future is that it will be different.*" And if one must thrive in this different future, one requires the abhorrence of resistance to change.

Approaching change impulsively rather than strategically is one of the primary reasons the unfamiliar road is not taken. I will share my humble experience. To any reasonable man, my decision to deprioritize a YouTube scriptwriting job—one that paid 150,000 Naira biweekly (a substantial sum for a student in Nigeria, equivalent to approximately \$200 at the time)—must have seemed like recklessness, perhaps madness. Why? Because, compared to menial construction jobs I previously did, it was less physically straining, yet offered greater monetary benefits. But having learnt from my experience with construction, having peered down both paths like the persona in Frost's poem, I realized that the scriptwriting job, while lucrative in the short term, was a means to an end, not an end in itself. It was this that led to asking a relevant question and according to Drucker, "*The relevant question is not simply what shall we do tomorrow, but rather what shall we do today in order to get ready for tomorrow.*" My choice to invest in my channel, even as I juggled schoolwork and scriptwriting, was my way of preparing for tomorrow and it led to six months of working assiduously and applying proven content strategies. To agree with Drucker, the only way one can truly predict a desired future is to plan it, and not just plan it but take actionable steps.

In addition, resistance to reinvention is not merely psychological but structural, a calculus best captured by Beckhard's *Change Justification Formula* (Fig. 2). This posits that people do not change unless there's a reason which surpasses the resistance. Going by this formula, for change to occur, the product of dissatisfaction with the present, a compelling vision of the future, and actionable first steps must outweigh the inertia of resistance.¹⁷ In my case, dissatisfaction was

¹⁵ American Translators Association, 2016. The ATA Chronicle. [online] Available at: <http://www.atanet.org/chronicle-online/cover-feature/translation-in-transition/>

¹⁶ *Global Peter Drucker Challenge*. (n.d.). <https://www.druckerchallenge.org/guidelines2025/>

¹⁷ Abbas, T. (2024, February 22). *Gleicher's Formula for Change Management – Benefits & Limitations*. CMI. <https://changemanagementinsight.com/gleichers-formula-for-change-management/>

gradually realizing that construction work misaligned with the future I desired, so the decision to venture into essay writing was my actionable first step.

$C = D \times V \times F > R$

Change happens when the products of...
Dissatisfaction with the current state, and a
clear Vision of a more compelling possible future, and
practical First steps towards a different future
are greater than the Resistance, the pain or cost of change

[Fig. 2](#) Becharde's Change Equation

Avoiding situations resulting in anxiety and worry is our brain's favourite thing, and when we take that career opportunity or create the startup, or do that thing that takes us out of our comfort zone, we are uncertain about its success, or if the same routines will be maintained. This is the psychological aspect of resistance. Though Drucker says "*Never mind your happiness; do your duty*", the issue appears to be that we have become mindful of our happiness instead of doing our duty, and our duty here is to embrace change. In the end, the essay competitions were, beyond winning awards, what Drucker terms a prediction of tomorrow. This is the essence of strategic reinvention.

Moreover, change can disrupt existing social structures and relationships within a group or organization, and for me, the support construction work offered my family gave me valid reasons to keep at it despite the inconveniences. So, there's a tendency to avoid all unknowns by clutching onto inertia, but the confluence of the sigmoid curve and Stoic philosophy is that growth demands discomfort. Now, because resistance to change is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon rooted in psychology, neuroscience, and sociology,¹⁸ it must therefore be approached holistically.

The Cost of Attachment to The Bird in Hand.

My first year in university was the epiphanic juncture foregrounding how much I had succumbed to the shackles of my first curve. Music, graphic design, poetry, and writing were at my disposal, but as Drucker puts it, "*The problem in my life and other people's lives is not the absence of knowing what to do but the absence of doing it.*" So, for six years, I chose the paltry albeit predictable benefits construction offered, because my family depended on it (or so I thought). Upon my mother's demise post-COVID, the very job failed to even shoulder her funeral costs—

¹⁸ Caliste, R. V. (2024, November 28). Why we are resistant to change - Change becomes you - medium. *Medium*. <https://medium.com/change-becomes-you/why-we-are-resistant-to-change-489a6f06d234>

Embracing Second Curves: The Pastoralist's Approach

the pangful irony of years spent holding on to nothingness. My life had just played out Peter Drucker's assertion that, indeed, "*There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all.*" I took my creative passions to the altar and sacrificed them for immediate security, trapped by the fear of the unknown.

Our stories will differ, but the complexities that kept me tethered to the job, I reckon, are why most people repudiate the second curve. They are what keeps us doing efficiently what should not be done at all. The attachments and the fear of losing what's already in hand—the certainty it bears, no matter how little—make the unknown appear a perilous gamble. Consequently, many a lip muster, "*A bird in hand is worth two in the bush.*". Whereas the path to renewal, the path to growth, is to, like the pastoralist, venture a little further into the bush and find more beautiful birds.

Although I have forged ahead, the price I paid for my six years of dedication to construction was lost time, stunted growth, and watching my peers achieve what I could have similarly.

I draw the curtains by emphasizing Handy's unequivocal warning that decline is inevitable for those who conflate continuity with permanence, and those who get too comfortable in their comfort zone. Truly, the road less taken is saturated with uncertainty, but it is the only path taken by the predictors of tomorrow.

Will we be the farmer, tied to dying fields? Or the pastoralist, that forever has his eyes on greener pastures?

Our choice defines our life and business.

Embracing Second Curves:
**The Pastoralist's
Approach**