

MOVE ON, BUT MOVE DIFFERENTLY

“The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it and join the dance”

- Alan Watts

In the heart of *Benue*- a state situated in the middle belt of Nigeria, known as the food basket of the nation, dwells *Otukpo*, a metropolitan town. Known for its rich culture and hardworking people, the *Otukpo* town is also notable for its main market. The *Otukpo* central market commonly referred to as *Olihi*- the native name for ‘market’, supplies a variety of goods to both inhabitants of *Otukpo* and visitors from both remote and neighbouring towns. There is hardly a thing you seek to purchase that you would not find within its nooks and crevices. The market stalls appear innumerable as you begin making your way through the entrance of the marketplace. These stalls are mostly owned by men and women from different tribes who are now inhabitants of the town. This possibly stems from the fact that the *Idoma* people- the indigenous tribe to *Otukpo*, are majorly farmers.

Another important mention is that the main market is so structured in such a way that traders who sell similar items occupy a particular section of the market. For example, those who sold perishable items such as grains, fruits, vegetables etc. have their stalls located right at the center of the market. At the far left of the market, you would find those who sold clothes and foot-wears. Dealers in cosmetic products of different kinds occupied the stalls just adjacent to where clothes were sold. Sellers always made sure that they made an appealing display of their goods. The goal was to ensure that every potential customer was attracted to what was being advertised and the advertisement almost always, never fell short. Either it was merely the display of goods, or the sonorous sometimes baritone voices beckoning at you, any buyer (a newcomer or old timer) could be easily convinced to purchase every item exhibited. It is vital to state also that due to the fact that traders who sold similar items did so at the same arm of the market, as you may have rightly predicted, there was always competition. Was it always a good thing as is often said? Did it push the growth of the

businesses? Maybe not for every Tom, Dick and Harry, but for me, it was. After all, a horse never runs so fast as when he has other horses to catch up and outpace.



The picture above shows a section of the *Otukpo* main market where foodstuff including grains such as rice, beans, cassava flour, etc are sold.[1]

I came to *Otukpo* five years ago. I had just finished my tertiary education and bagged a degree in Accounting and as was the culture in my village, once your parents had sponsored your education to the tertiary level, that was your cue to realise that it was time for you to stand on your two feet and find yourself a consistent, hopefully thriving means of livelihood. It was the time you truly gained independence. I had always dreamed of being a highly successful woman, part of which meant that I wanted to be very wealthy. I grew up in a home with humble beginnings and I had seen what it was like, living a hand-to-mouth lifestyle. I had always told myself growing up; "when I get older, I would become a very rich business woman." How that was going to come

about, I never really knew, however I was sure, somehow somehow that it would happen. So I set out to travel that morning to seek “greener pastures”. I had thought about my travel several times, sought counsel from people of experience that I knew, I had prayed and eventually made up my mind; I was going to *Otukpo*. It was a much bigger town than my village and so it had to be more promising, I thought. I had only been there once, many years ago as a five year old child. That year, I came alongside my cousins to our Uncle's house to spend the Christmas holidays. I only had a faint memory of what the town looked like but I didn't know exactly what to expect. It was going to be a long drive as I had researched, a five-hour drive from my village to *Otukpo*, all things being equal.

Once we approached *Otukpo* town, I began to notice the people that I saw walking past as our vehicle drove into the town. They mostly shod their feet with flip-flops- a casual type of footwear. The town had only a few vehicles- most of which were motorcycles. The indigenous inhabitants were mostly farmers and they usually trekked to and fro their farms wearing their flip-flops. I thought for a second to myself while on the bus, I could sell footwear of different kinds to these people, there and then, my business idea was launched! I had begun to see myself living the dream I had always dreamed.

Launching my business idea of selling footwear to the *Otukpo* community was not quite as burdensome as I had expected it to be. Although my startup cost was high, I had acquired capital via a bank loan with which I secured a stall at the far left of the main market next to where about three other people also sold footwear (or ‘slippers’ as was commonly termed by most customers). All four of us who sold slippers were often supplied via the same means. We would purchase bags of slippers from the supplier and would in turn sell to the retailers. Sales started slowly but surely. However, sales moved sluggishly for a little too long, and then I decided to get innovative. I thought; how do I reinvent myself? Like one of Charles Handy’s sayings; I decided to think differently and not think more. It was time to move on, albeit, to move differently.[3]

I had two employees at this time and we decided as a team to ask for feedback from our customers. Our supplier often sold slippers to us in bags that each contained

four dozens of footwear. The problem however was that each bag had the same size and the same design of slippers all through. Our customers who were also retailers had given us report when we requested for feedback, that this limited them from being able to purchase a variety of slippers. This informed our next move, we decided to repackage the bags. This time around, each bag now contained slippers of different sizes and different designs. We could now sell variety to retailers much more easily. A break-even point this was for my business! Sales began to increase rapidly and I started making profit.



The photo above depicts the variety of slippers in different colours, sizes and designs at *Olihi- the Otukpo* main market, Benue state Nigeria.

In my third year of establishing my business, sales continued to increase however at a much slower rate. This was especially due to the entry of new competitors to the market. My business was in the shake out phase, although sales still increased,

profits began to decrease. I got hungry again and I was not going to leave the table satiated.[3] It occurred to me that we only sold the same type of footwear- *Dunlop* flip-flops, because we had wrongly assumed; “that was what our consumers liked, those were the kind of footwear they mostly wore”. We however soon discovered that the *Otukpo* people who were mostly farmers could not enjoy wearing the *Dunlop* flip-flops for long. They wore out easily, plus they did not adequately protect their feet from the dangers and hazards their feet were exposed to, while working on the farm. Sometimes they slid easily while wearing the flip-flops because of the poor grip it provided when walking. It was then we introduced rain boots, sandals and other protective footwear made from rubber. Once again, we had a variety to offer, we now had supplies from different companies and our business curve began to peak again.

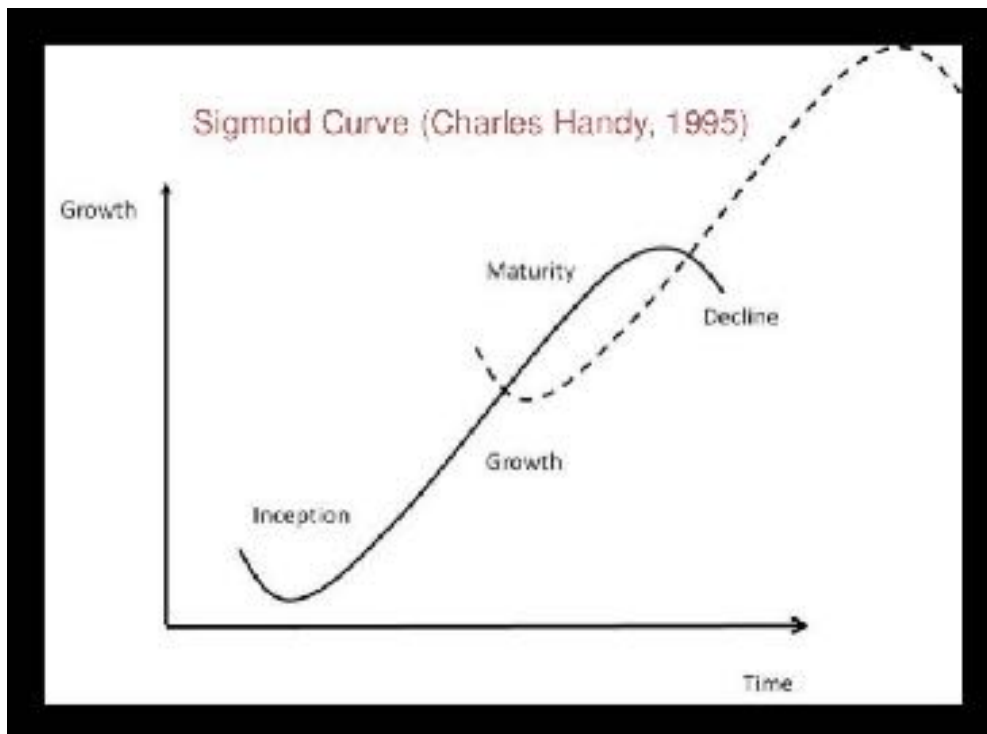


Figure 1- an illustration of The Second Curve by Charles Handy

The Second Curve, written by Charles Handy, (visually illustrated as two s-curves as shown in the diagram above) elaborates on the importance of recognizing

opportunities in the future. A crucial observation about this illustration is that the second curve begins before the first curve climaxes. In other words, as Karen Slupinsky describes it, the Second Curve encourages change when business is good and motivation is high, rather than in a decline stage when desperation and complacency might influence decision making.[5] The second curve concept depicts that there is a right moment for introducing a change to a system, for both the individual and the organisation. Handy explains that such change is best introduced at the growth phase, when the system is thriving, this being a way of keeping the current momentum going. [2] In an interview, Handy expounded that navigating the cycles of growth in life and business begins with thinking differently rather than thinking more. He quotes: "always be hungry, never leave the table satiated. Have unachieved ambitions".[3]

A Change Readiness Process Model developed by Cioclov et al., sets the basis to approaching any change in a strategic way, making sure an organisation is continuously prepared for a change, and always aware of its direction regardless of the confusion that may be associated with changes. The model was founded on pillars of understanding context, good timing, careful planning, a correct execution and a thorough assessment.[2] It explained that embracing change would begin from a deep analysis of the environment in order to understand both the current state of a system and the desired mode of operation. Organisations can thereby determine the phase of business they are in and flag off change especially when in the growth phase. This does not rule out that change can begin even when a business is already in a state of decline. However, it pushes for creative thinking at all times, embracing that change should be a constant move, even when the ovation is loudest.



The figure 2 above illustrates The Change Readiness Process Model by Cioclov et al. 2017.[2]

Handy in his book; "The Second Curve: Thoughts on Reinventing The Society" stated that growth should always be the means to a greater purpose rather than an end itself.[4] Running an organisation should not be solely based on making profits but also founded on creating positive impacts within the society. Great organisations have a purpose that is beyond themselves.[3] Understanding that the ultimate success of any organisation depends on its influence on the society also helps to shift the perspective of an organisation on the underlying need for innovative thinking. This creative thinking is fueled by observing problems in the society that can be addressed via solutions provided by the organisation. This ultimately stewards the growth of the second curve.

Change also inevitably occurs in the daily life of the human being. A baby grows to become a man and so does his needs evolve with growth. As the Change Readiness Process Model depicts, a man must understand himself well, have an established sense of identity before change can truly occur which would begin first from his mind, his thinking. He must dream, have ambitions, stay curious and have a vision of his desired outcome and the numerous possibilities that his future holds. As mentioned earlier, he must look for problems that exist or are foreseeable in his society and provoke his mind to create solutions that would stand the test of time.

My business is thriving now, however, rather than glorying in accolades and inevitably giving room for a decline, I think to myself; how about introducing a renewal? How about consistently reinventing myself, evolving and always baking new sometimes absurd ideas at every chance I get? How about staying hungry for more and not settling for complacency? This principle is also inculcated into our employees. We endeavour to stay updated and fresh of ideas by attending seminars on business management, creativity, etc. where we are coached and mentored, so we not only match but also predict the rhythm our community dances to. Now when you come to *Otukpo*, at the far left arm of the main market, we sell footwear. We have grown from one stall to fourteen stalls, but before our first or perhaps second curve peaks again, our third curve would begin!

Bibliography

1. Benue Market & Advert Hub. "Otukpo Main Market" [photograph]. 2018. [cited 2025, May 23] Available from: <https://www.facebook.com>.
2. Cioclov, R. Lala-Popa, I. The Second Curve. Driving Individual and Organizational Change. Expert J. Bus. 2017, Dec 31. [cited 2025, May 23]. Available from: <https://business.expertjournals.com/23446781-516/>
3. Handy, C. Interviewed by A. McCullen. "The Second Curve: An Evening with Charles Handy". 2020, Jan 30. [cited 2025, May 20] Available from: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=-HxtnwdEL3g>.
4. Handy, C. The Second Curve: Thoughts on Reinventing Society. NY: Random House Business. 2015.
5. Slupinski, K. "What is The Second Curve and Why Does it Matter?" [LinkedIn], 2019, September 17 [cited 2025, May 20]. Available from: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-second-curve-why-does-matter-karen-slupinski>