

***READY OR NOT,
HERE IT COMES***

READY OR NOT, HERE IT COMES

The Room I Couldn't Speak In 2021

You stood stuck. Not metaphorically, as people often say when life stalls, but literally. Physically. Mentally too. "Africa..." was all you could say. "I can't help her if I don't hear her speak," the debate coordinator whispered. "Africa is..." Two words this time, but not enough to win a debate. "You can have your seat. Thank you."

You sat, ashamed, distant from your teammates. Your leader offered excuses, but shame had already silenced you. The debate practice moved on, filled with polished arguments that missed the point. At the end, you spoke. This time, one full sentence. "This is brilliant," the leader said. But the praise didn't comfort you.

Later, you watched from the audience as your team used your idea to win the debate. Afterward, one of your teammates said, "You know we won with your idea, right?" You nodded. You knew. You just weren't ready. Not then. Maybe next time.

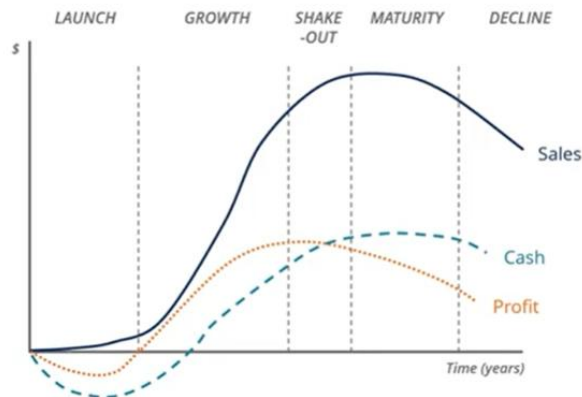
THE FIRST CURVE IS SAFE, UNTIL IT IS NOT

"What makes you succeed may not make you succeed again. There is always a limit to growth" - Unknown

I studied economics at a federal university in Nigeria. Beyond my parents' persuasion and cajoling to choose economics over accounting, I was drawn to the subject for its basic calculations and the promise of clarity of concepts through graphs. Some graphs made sense instantly. However, others required effort, and the rest? Just accept them as they are. Don't complicate things by trying to understand.

The Business Life Cycle was one of the clearer ones. Easy to understand, easy to draw, and seemingly free from controversy.

The business life cycle



The curve begins with a slow rise, capturing the struggle of launching a business. Then it shoots upward in the growth phase. Eventually, momentum slows in the shakeout stage. In maturity, profit levels off, sales taper, and cash flow plateaus. Finally, in decline, everything falls: sales, profits, relevance.

As CFI¹ puts it:

“In the final stage of the business life cycle, sales, profit, and cash flow all decline. During this phase, *companies accept their failure to extend their business life cycle by adapting to the changing business environment. Firms lose their competitive advantage and finally exit the market.*”²”

Back then, I thought it was just another helpful model in economics. Now I see it differently. That curve was a reminder that even success has a lifespan, unless it finds a way to reinvent itself. The lesson was there, hiding in plain sight: growth, no matter how promising, eventually plateaus unless you change direction in time. The problem is, the right time to change often hides inside the illusion of success. That success brought comfort. When everything is working, it feels unreasonable to pivot. But history tells a different story. BlackBerry once dominated the smartphone market but dismissed the touchscreen revolution. Kodak had digital photography technology before anyone else, but failed to act on it. Nokia built legendary hardware but was slow to adapt to the software era. They didn’t fail because they lacked innovation. They failed because they held too tightly to what once worked or delayed the change till the decline had already begun.

¹ Corporate Finance Institute

² CFI Team, “Business Life Cycle,” Corporate Finance Institute

2020, <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/valuation/business-life-cycle/>.

People fall into the same trap. They stay too long in jobs that no longer challenge them, in relationships that no longer nourish them, in beliefs that no longer serve them. Like companies, they wait for something to break before considering change. But by then, the cost of delay has already risen.

The Opportunity That Never Waited For Me To Be Ready
2022

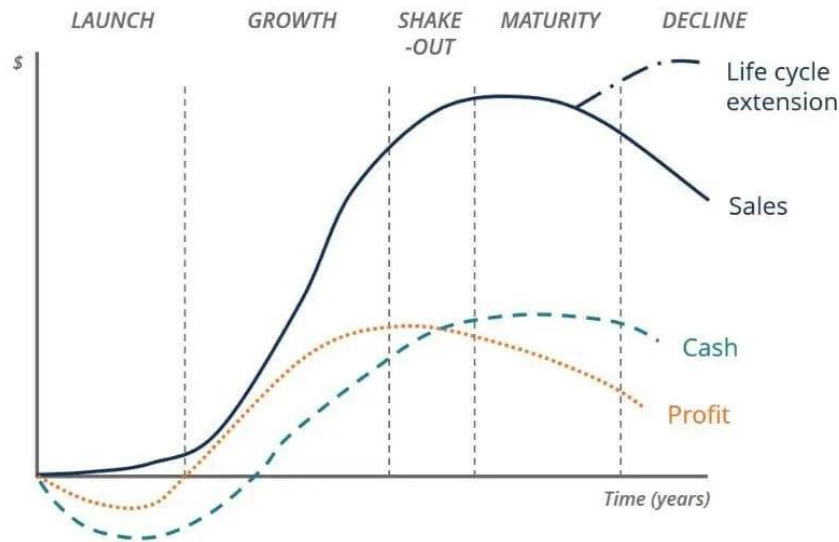
“The CFA³ competition is mainly for students in their penultimate year, but second-year students are welcome to try out.” Those final words from the leader of a student organization you belonged to were oddly comforting. You didn’t have to apply yet, and you wouldn’t feel guilty for choosing not to. After all, you were only in your second year. You weren’t ready. But then you watched the same debate teammate who spoke to you walk down to register for the tryouts. Why would she do that? You wondered. We’re just in our second year. Still, you were unmoved. You convinced yourself it didn’t matter. When the time was right, in your third year, you would try out. You would be ready. After all, it was an annual competition. There would be another opportunity. Another “maybe next time.”

But the next time never came. By your penultimate year, you made it through the tryouts and onto the team. Yet, you never got the chance to represent your school. That year, the CFA competition was put on hold. And so you learned, perhaps too late, that waiting to feel ready can hold you back just long enough for the doors to close.

THE SECOND CURVE: A SOLUTION

“The moment you have arrived is the perfect time to start out again.” — Dan Sullivan

³ Chartered Financial Analyst



The Business Lifecycle curve has a twist to it. At the maturity stage, the CFI succinctly explains, “many businesses extend their business life cycle during this phase by *reinventing themselves* and investing in new technologies and emerging markets”. Reinvention, a second curve, the start of something new, a new direction, is the solution to a decline.

Before the “second curve” became a business strategy or a life principle, it was a principle for the preservation of life itself. Forests embrace the principle of the second curve in the way they live. Old trees don’t wait to die before renewal begins; beneath them, seedlings take root, drawing from the filtered sunlight and rich soil. The principle is simple: before old ones die, new ones must come forth.

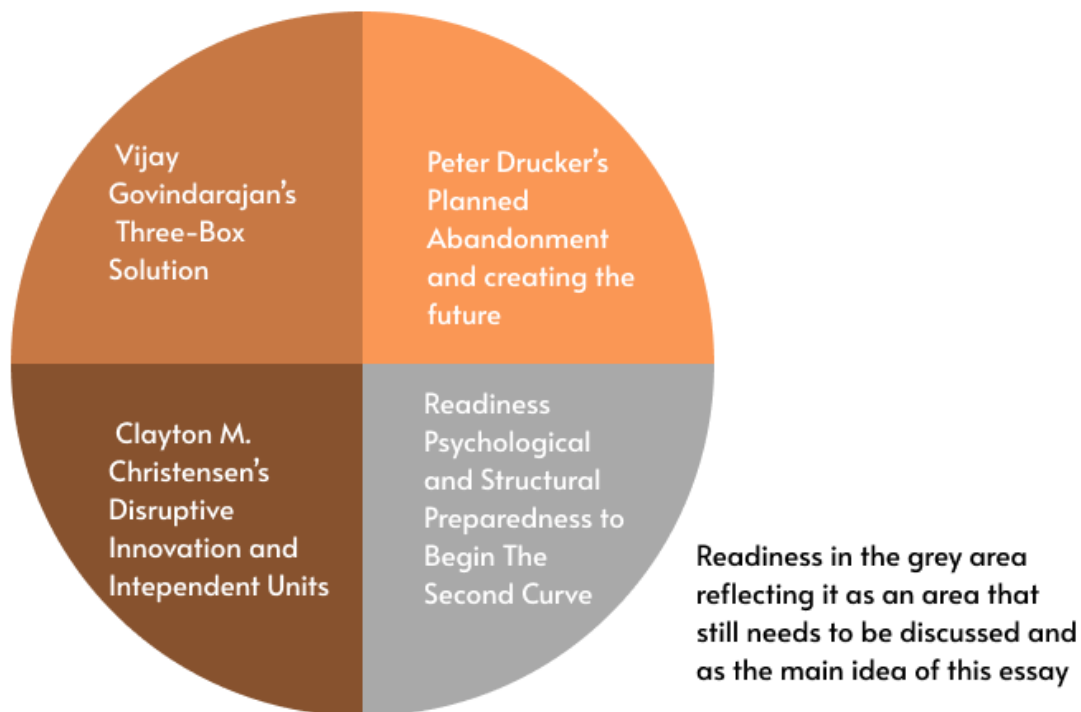
In Clayton M. Christensen’s work, particularly in *The Innovator’s Dilemma*⁴, he earnestly advocated for a similar kind of idea, urging organizations to nurture the seeds of tomorrow even while today’s successes still thrive. Specifically, he advised companies to establish independent units where disruptive ideas could take root without being choked out by the current growth. A Harvard Business Review article⁵ by Vijay Govindarajan proposes a similar idea, calling it “Creating the Future, and Managing the Present, and Selectively Forget the Past” - A Three-Box Solution to help organizations manage and innovate effectively. Peter Drucker was one of the earliest to stress that innovation depends not just on creating the new, but on intentionally letting

⁴ Clayton M Christensen, *The Innovator’s Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Review Press, 1997).

⁵ Vijay Govindarajan, “Great Innovators Create the Future, Manage the Present, and Selectively Forget the Past,” Harvard Business Review, March 31, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/03/great-innovators-create-the-future-manage-the-present-and-selectively-forget-the-past>.

go of the old. He called this “planned abandonment⁶,” urging leaders to systematically retire products, practices, or policies that no longer serve the future.

These thinkers converge on the same idea: the second curve must begin before the first has ended. The disruption must be initiated before change displaces us. But what many of these frameworks overlook is the **readiness** to begin that curve. This is a major hurdle that needs to be addressed. The best ideas, strategies, or ecosystems cannot thrive in cultures or individuals that are not prepared to act. And so, nestled among the ideas of major thought leaders, readiness becomes the missing component to catalyze the change needed.



⁶ Peter F Drucker, *Management Challenges for the 21st Century* (New York, Ny: Harperbusiness, 2001).

Campaigning Scared
2023

You disliked being in the spotlight. You did not like talking to people you did not know. You dreaded the “Hi’s” and the “Can I have your number, please?” That simply wasn’t your nature. You were definitely not ready. But by this time, you had accumulated too much experience to keep waiting. Too many missed opportunities for someone who didn’t want to be just another student, someone preparing early for life beyond the university gates. You already knew how much being expressive mattered, whether in a debate or a class presentation. So when the opportunity came to campaign for a leadership role in your department, you decided to act. It demanded visibility and boldness, everything outside your comfort zone. But you took a deep breath and did it anyway, walking beside your popular friend, meeting strangers, collecting numbers. You were afraid. You were not ready. But you moved.

(And yes, you won.)

READINESS IS ALL ABOUT PERSPECTIVES

“If you’re offered a seat on a rocket ship, don’t ask what seat! Just get on.”

— Sheryl Sandberg

There is a myth about the mother eagle that I still use today, even though it has been debunked. Motivational speakers often use the fabricated story of the mother eagle forcing the eaglet to fly by pushing it off the nest so that it learns how to do it. They use this story to buttress this point home: “Don’t wait until you feel ready/ Don’t wait till you’re fully ready.” Despite the false story this principle is built on, it is quite fundamental and true to doing anything new.

The start of a second curve while the first one matures and then plateaus is heavily dependent on the individual’s or organizational state of readiness. The second curve is new and therefore, is (and feels) alien. For the individual, there is often the risk of starting the second curve, the feeling of unreadiness despite the amount of preparation that takes place, and the unwillingness to change for the fear of the unknown. For organizations, it takes a rather complex level. Organizations can sometimes sit too long on innovative ideas as a result of organizational culture, or ignore certain necessities and strategies that help them properly act on being ready.

This section addresses the readiness issue at each level, both personal and organizational.

Personal Level

Psychological research has a consistent pattern towards proving that perceived unreadiness often reflects a mindset gap. This subjective belief that one lacks the necessary skills, knowledge, or capacity to undertake a new task or path often stems from underlying mindset gaps and not from objective deficiencies. A common evidence of this claim is Carol Dweck's foundational work on mindset theory. His book "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success"⁷ outlines two types of mindsets, fixed mindsets (belief that abilities are static) and growth mindsets (belief that abilities can be developed through effort), both with varying perspectives on how we see life and therefore, the results that follow. Individuals with a fixed mindset often see the second curve as a threat to their identity and competence, interpreting challenges or failure as proof of unreadiness and a reason not to proceed. On the other hand, individuals with a growth mindset perceive the second curve not as a barrier but as an invitation to learn, adapt, and improve.

Similarly, the Self-efficacy theory, the belief in one's capacity to execute tasks, directly influences perceived readiness. Self-efficacy influences how people feel about their capabilities and shapes whether they take action at all. This concept was further explored in the paper *The Effect of Self-Efficacy on the Work Readiness of Universitas Negeri Padang Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, which found that students with higher self-efficacy were significantly more likely to feel ready to enter the workforce despite the uncertainties posed by the pandemic⁸.

While active preparation is an important prerequisite for embarking on personal disruptive events, it can be thwarted by one's negative concept of readiness, influenced by their poor perception of self, abilities, and the situation at hand. A proven and effective way to overcome these challenges is all contained in the Intentional Change Theory, a framework developed by Richard Boyatzis. Intentional Change Theory (ICT)⁹, developed by Richard Boyatzis, provides a comprehensive psychological framework for achieving sustainable, purposeful change, particularly during disruptive transitions like the second curve. It centres on five key concepts: **the ideal self, the real self, a learning agenda, experimentation with new behaviours, and supportive relationships**. This aligns strongly with Peter Drucker's philosophy, particularly his belief in *managing oneself*¹⁰, that individuals must take responsibility for their development, understand their strengths, values, and how they perform best. This structured formula for change serves as a clear roadmap, moving individuals from where they are (first curve) to where they want to be (second curve) with a step-by-step process to achieve that.

7 Carol S Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (Random House, 2006).

8 R. Syofyan, "The Effect of Self-Efficacy on the Work Readiness of Universitas Negeri Padang Students during the Covid-19 Pandemic," in *Proceedings of the Eighth Padang International Conference on Economics Education, Economics, Business and Management, Accounting and Entrepreneurship (PICEEBA-8 2021)* (Atlantis Press, 2022), 391–393, <https://doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.220702.059>.

9 Richard E Boyatzis, *The Science of Change* (Oxford University Press, 2024).

10 Peter Drucker, *Managing Oneself : And What Makes an Effective Executive* (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press. Copyright, 1999).

Organization Level

Defining readiness at an organizational level comprises two important steps: organizational culture and navigating technical execution.

Kodak is the paradigm for any business that fails to innovate or accept change on time. “That’s cute – but don’t tell anyone about it,” the popular line shared by Steven Sasson, the Kodak engineer who invented digital photography, does not depict a comprehensive view of the management’s response, according to a Harvard Business Review article¹¹. In reality, Kodak invested billions into digital photography but failed to let go of its film-first mindset. This cultural inertia at Kodak made real change nearly impossible, even when the path forward was clear. Without a shift in shared beliefs and openness to new business models, even the best technology cannot deliver transformation. Organizational readiness for change is a shared psychological state in which members are committed to implementing change and confident in their collective ability to do so¹². This readiness is shaped by how much people value the change (change commitment) and how capable they feel of implementing it (change efficacy). Structural resources like funding, staff, or tools only support change when people believe they can use them effectively and if they are ready to. Organizations may appear well-equipped on paper, yet still fail to act because their readiness culture is low. Without this shared belief and commitment, even well-planned initiatives will likely face resistance or collapse during implementation.

The second step is execution. After the psychological and emotional hurdle is overcome across members of the team, execution becomes the true test of readiness, turning intent into action.

The two frameworks I would recommend for execution are the Effectuation theory¹³ and the Lean Startup methodology¹⁴. Effectuation theory, developed by Saras Sarasvathy, is rooted in how expert entrepreneurs operate under conditions of uncertainty. Instead of starting with a fixed goal and acquiring the resources needed to reach it, effectuation begins with the means already available, the entrepreneur’s identity, knowledge, networks, and resources, and uses these to explore what can be created. In an organizational context, effectuation asks, “*Given who we are, what we know, and whom we know, what can we do?*” This mindset encourages initiative without needing perfect foresight.

On the other hand, the Lean Startup methodology, developed by Eric Ries, focuses on building and scaling innovative solutions through iterative development. Organizations that adopt Lean

11 Scott Anthony, “Kodak’s Downfall Wasn’t about Technology,” Harvard Business Review, July 15, 2016,

<https://hbr.org/2016/07/kodaks-downfall-wasnt-about-technology>.

12 Bryan Weiner, “A Theory of Organizational Readiness for Change,” *Implementation Science* 4, no. 1 (October 19, 2009),

<https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-4-67>.

13 Saras D Sarasvathy, *Effectuation : Elements of Entrepreneurial Expertise* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2008).

14 Eric Ries, *The Lean Startup: How Today’s Entrepreneurs Use Continuous Innovation to Create Radically Successful Businesses* (New York: Crown Business, 2011).

Startup principles do not waste months perfecting ideas in isolation. Instead, they release minimum viable products (MVPs), test them in the real world, learn from user behavior, and refine accordingly. This scientific approach to execution allows organizations to pivot quickly and avoid costly missteps.

Effectuation empowers organizations to start with what they have and act despite uncertainty, and Lean Startup ensures that these actions are continuously tested and improved. Together, they create an operating system for the Second Curve, a new growth trajectory that often starts with abandoning a legacy model and building new value from scratch. Netflix unintentionally applied these by starting the streaming service with what they had, and then constantly refining the platform based on user behavior, engagement data, and the trends that later unfolded.

*NYSC¹⁵ Met Me... Ready?
February 2025*

The SDG¹⁶ CDS¹⁷ training classes during the NYSC Orientation Camp were nothing like you expected. You anticipated lectures, and yes, there were a few, but not the impromptu presentations where team reps addressed over 50 people with barely any prep. You admired those who volunteered. It couldn't be you, you thought. But you thought wrong.

On the second day, in a new SDG discussion group, four representatives were expected to present. As the conversation unfolded within the group, something felt missing. They were discussing the what, but not the why. You raised your voice and pointed it out. "The very essence of sustainability is meeting today's needs without compromising tomorrow's," someone echoed. Heads nodded. "You should be one of our reps," someone said. You resisted. They insisted, but later on, you caved in. With just fifteen minutes of preparation, you stood and spoke.

That could have been enough victory. But a few days later, you were chosen to represent your platoon in a debate. With only a week to prepare, you didn't feel ready, but you showed up. You gave it your best. And you won. Not just the debate. You won the war against unreadiness.

¹⁵ National Youth Service Corps, a one-year mandatory program for Nigerian graduates aimed at promoting national unity and development.

¹⁶ Sustainable Development Goals

¹⁷ Community Development Service

READY OR NOT: IT WILL COME

“The Only Constant in Life Is Change.”- Heraclitus

As I pondered hard on this theme of this essay, I concluded, obstinately, on the constant case of recurring disruption in our lives and the need for unceasing adaptation. Subsequently, I couldn't help but reminisce about how I put in effort to change and reinvent myself to become more expressive, recognizing that my voice and not my grades would matter in my second curve (after school). And then, I thought about human computers who worked at NASA and typists who were quickly displaced by the development of computers. I thought about the post office and how letters, once so essential, were slowly replaced by email and instant messaging.

I thought about how quickly a career path can become outdated, how the degree that guaranteed a job in one generation may not even spark an interview in the next. I thought about the AI frenzy, how in just a few months, artificial intelligence moved from a technical buzzword to a global reckoning, with people scrambling to upskill.

And then, I thought about the humans behind the change, the inventors, the early adopters, the skeptics turned believers, those rare few who always seemed ready for the new, and finally those left behind. I want to be among the ones behind the change. If I can't, being an early adopter would be my last resort. The second curve is a way to adapt to inevitable changes, and it demands a constant state of readiness to change, to adapt, to hop on the new. I hope the strategies in this essay help you or your organization stay ready, because ready or not, change will come.

Word Count: 2989 words

HOW GENERATIVE AI ASSISTED MY ESSAY WRITING PROCESS

To write this essay, I made use of the assistance of Chat GPT and Perplexity AI in the following ways:

Concept Validation: When I came up with the concept of readiness, I wasn't sure if it aligned with the second curve. It was the only thing I could think of and write on, as that was the only concept that was true to me. At that idea stage, Chat GPT helped confirm my concept and gave me reasons why it was viable. This gave me the encouragement I needed to work on the outline and begin my research.

Research: I made use of Chat GPT and Perplexity AI to uncover theories or ideas that supported the concept that I had.

Editing: My first draft was over 4,000 words, a far cry from the word limit set by the Peter Drucker Challenge. Chat GPT helped me in reducing the word count of the anecdotes and also tightening up certain sentences in the essay. Most times, I end up fine-tuning the sentences to how I want them to sound in the mind of the reader, despite Chat GPT's output.

Examples of Prompts:

1. "(TEXT)
Can you make this more surmised?"
2. "(STATEMENT)
Is there any research behind this statement, or any concept supporting it?"
3. "Please explain this concept. I don't understand it."
4. "I need you to be honest with me. Am I going off track?" (Paraphrased)