

The Philosophy of Disruption

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The Philosophy of Disruption: From Transition to Transformational Change

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Toronto, 2 January 2022

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Preface

As the true beginning of the mobile revolution, June 2007 marked the arrival of the iPhone. The iPhone changed everything: it put the Internet in everyone's pocket; it transformed photography from a hobby into an act of everyday life; it changed how software was created and distributed; it introduced developer-driven apps that changed everything from how people shop, how they travel to how they entertain or get the news; it transformed the advertising industry through mobile ads and made Apple the world's most valuable company.¹

Nevertheless, many analysts missed the significance of this transformation spectacularly. Under the headline 'Apple iPhone Debut to Flop, Product to Crash in Flames', one such pundit proclaimed in 2007 that: 'The iPhone is going to fail because its design is fundamentally flawed'.² He was not alone. Other headlines included definitive statements such as 'We predict the iPhone will bomb'.³ and 'Why the Apple phone will fail and fail badly'.⁴

How could such a radical disruption to the market dynamics be so critically misjudged? Most commentators discounted that Apple changed the rules of the phone game entirely and that Apple was building something fundamentally different. Very few did see that the disruptor was not technical but predominantly cultural. The iPhone disrupted the market by first *defining the category for itself* and then challenging the notion of what was valuable about a technology product.

The iPhone transformed expectations; it was the first generation of software and hardware that changed our lives. In doing so, Apple disrupted the perception of value, challenging individuals philosophically. Such challenge to the basis of one's knowledge can result in an intellectual tunnel, a place of comfort where bias anchors one into the status quo. It becomes easy to reject the vision of the iPhone, its boldness and its new way of engaging people with technology in everyday life. Such critics looked at the iPhone as an everyday product instead of understanding

¹Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/2017/6/26/15821652/iphone-apple-10-year-anniversary-launch-mobile-stats-smart-phone-steve-jobs>

²Retrieved from <http://suckbusters2.blogspot.com/2007/06/apple-iphone-debut-to-flop-product-to.html>

³Retrieved from <https://techcrunch.com/2007/06/07/the-futurist-we-predict-the-iphone-will-bomb>

⁴Retrieved from https://theregister.com/2006/12/23/iphone_will_fail

it as a cultural signal. Apple's engineers and designers have created a philosophy, an artistic endeavour that has unapologetically transformed our lives.

New technology demands thinking differently. It challenges us philosophically, and when we are challenged, we question the way we think. New technology presents a path to testing our abilities to explore the limits of what is possible. New technologies have a unique way of disrupting social systems, changing the foundations of society and transforming values. Social change rarely occurs just by passing legislation. Social change requires a disruption of the prevailing social order, and disruption occurs only when the perception of the foundational value system of a society is changed to a new, more effective value system.

We have learned through lived experience that technology is inherently disruptive and that humans are also inherently disruptive. Disruptive technologies make possible a new form of human connection, and the proof is in the social media platforms that have disrupted the traditional distribution of power within societies on every continent of the world. The net result is an efficient and effective mechanism for social change.

Disruption and Philosophy

Disruption is a catalyst for transformative change and new knowledge and thought. As current knowledge systems have not necessarily been set up to reflect disruptions, this book is about the creation of knowledge as the starting point of a philosophical framework for human behaviour in times of transformation. Philosophy is the logical clarification of thought, and when applied to disruption, it interprets the possible impacts of a disruptor. The philosophy of disruption inhabits the transition space between the disruption of the existing order and its transformation, re-establishing the balance between what we know and what we need to know. Change is a sequence of a disruptor leading to a disruption, which leads to a transition, leading to transformation. We cannot ignore the role of philosophy and the humanities in this sequence. No discipline combines philosophy's critical thinking, analytical skills and cognitive skills with the broader humanities' people skills, symbolic reasoning and social justice perspectives. When disruptors change the context of entire industries, systems and markets, we need to activate our capacities to reason. The role of philosophy is to understand human behaviour in terms of reason, logic, rational thought and the exploration of human actions.

As a catalyst for a new form of knowledge, disruption opens spaces and possibilities that have not been explored. The philosophy of disruption is a platform to engage in re-imagining what will happen next. Philosophies are engines for re-inventing the world, building the world we do not yet know and working together to shape the world we do. The philosophy of disruption is one such philosophy, with implications for strategy, policymaking, education, and business practice and how we approach disruption in all its guises. This book is a primer on the philosophy of disruption to help businesses and leaders make better

decisions when a new paradigm, technological shift, product innovation or other disrupting element emerges.

To sustain social changes that support transformation, we must recognize that transformative outcomes will be unpredictable without foresight. Foresight anticipates the impacts of a disruptor. To transform people and their institutions into catalysts for change, one must foresee change. Foresight is not the simple identification of future scenarios but a sense of what needs to be done in the present, a combination of knowledge with wisdom to distinguish between what is possible and what is inevitable. A philosophy of disruption in combination with foresight will enable people to make an early decision on the possible outcomes of current events in an intentional way, in a process that generates a range of opportunities in a much broader context.

Disruption, Unlearning and the Self-Concept

Disruption does not mean knowledge is being taken away; it means that knowledge is being changed, and there is a tendency for the self-concept to shift out of agreement with technology disruptors. Self-concepts are the behaviours and attitudes that make one think and act in specific ways. They are the values that individuals adopt and are embedded in cultural codes. The self-concept includes beliefs and attitudes about others, the purpose of personal goals, how one needs to get to them and how one contributes to societal goals. Unlearning is the ability of the self to un-connect from the self-concept and give critical attention to areas in which self-concepts are unhelpful – unlearning means discarding things that were once a part of one's identity. Unlearning is a process that starts with a moment of introspection. To unlearn means that we choose to stop taking for granted our truths. To unlearn is to grow curious about our world, to ask questions. When we embrace unlearning, we accept the possibilities of a new world, a world that offers different challenges, challenges that are consonant with our values and traditions, and a world that could be much better.

Ultimately, disruption is a multidimensional phenomenon because its forces are moving at various speeds in multiple directions, making disruption not just a matter of one moment coming and one moment disappearing. Disruption creates a shock and causes us to respond to it by creating new behaviours and a new set of beliefs and ways of doing things. Disruption cycles ask us to think for ourselves. We are forced to change our behaviours. We are forced to change our minds. When we transform our beliefs and our behaviours, we transform our world. When we change the rules of our world, we are changing the rules of our future.

A continuous stream of change disrupts our world, from news to technology to information about everything. These are the transformational changes we are faced with today. The purpose of this book is to describe and explain how disruptions occur and take hold and help the reader recognize patterns of transformational moments and the mindset that can turn them into opportunities.