



The why's and how's of becoming a Changemaker

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- Methodologies like the 6X1 are very useful in giving us a concrete roadmap to translate our ideas, ideals, dreams, into action. It is also like a recipe, telling us that in order to achieve a certain result, these are the ingredients that we need and steps we need to follow. Methodologies like these guide and inform our intentions, but we know that in practice, there are gaps between reality and our plans. So in these few moments, I would like to take one step back and talk about motives: why we do the things that we do and how they impact on the actions and outcomes of those actions. I will also go back to the topic that I have previously talked about with you, and that is on wicked problems, and how that affects our motives. I think this is important, because all these might impact on how we implement the 6X1 methodology. We might find out, for instance, that instead of a linear, straightforward roadmap, what we might end up doing is like a trek through a forest or mountain that we have never been before. Although we have an indication of where to go, there might be moments or circumstances where we have to retrace our steps and re-do them, not in a linear, but more in a circular, iterative way. Hopefully this discussion will also give us insights on how to be, and what it takes to be a changemaker.
- Slide 1

Motives to Act

Motives \ Action	Passive	Reactive	Active	Proactive
Intrinsic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apathy / disillusionement Fear of consequences Lack of awareness / understanding Personal priorities Low self-efficacy Cynicism Lack of connection Paralysis 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solidarity, compassion, fraternity Sense of justice Desire for change Sense of duty or responsibilities Personal fulfilment Desire for legacy & impact 	<p>Mixed: intrinsic + awareness that we cannot solve problems on our own</p>
Extrinsic		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent reputation damage Lack of awareness/understanding 		

- First, let us examine motives and what kind of action they bring about. As you can see in the first slide, we can characterize our motives as being either intrinsic (stemming from our own values, beliefs, priorities) or extrinsic (triggered by external events or circumstances). Depending on these motives, we may, in turn, act passively, reactively, actively or proactively.
- When things happen before us, our minds automatically works to explain why it happens. They call this cognitive simplification. This is why we tend to stereotype, make mental shortcuts, which sometimes lead to biases and prejudices. So when we observe a person’s action, consciously or unconsciously, we try to understand the motives that drive that action to ourselves. For example, when we see a person refusing to act, or passive in front of a personal or social problem, for instance, we would perhaps conclude that this is a person who simply does not care, is egoistic, indifferent, etc. When we see a company who do not act in front of a societal problem, we could conclude that this company only wants profit, that they don’t care, that they’re exploitative. When Greta Thunberg made that now famous “how-dare-you” UN-speech, the implicit assumption is that world leaders do not act because they don’t want to, that they are protecting the welfare of their big corporations more than they care about society in general, or that they are timid, or only care about being re-elected.



- Yet, as our problems become more complex and wicked, the reasons for our inaction also become much more complicated. When the change that is needed does not happen, it is good to pause and dig a bit deeper to find out why. One, it could be because of cynicism due to disillusionment from past failures; feeling of despondency or apathy due to a sense of helplessness, and the belief that one's effort will be futile. A poor farmer who hardly earns enough to feed his/her family despite many hours of labor, may decide to abandon his/her farm. To an outsider, this may seem laziness, and lead one to think that the poor deserve their fate. And yet, nothing may be further from the truth. Inaction, apathy in this case is not due to a personal vice or lack of virtue, or lack of courage, but a lack of prospects, or lack of confidence about the future.
- Next, one could also feel paralyzed due to the gravity of a problem. The more complex the problems become, the more people, groups or stakeholders are needed to address them. This means that an action is not only an individual choice but a collective choice as well. If there is no collaboration, no communication, no relationships, no leadership to orchestrate this collective action, a waiting game takes place. Economists call this coordination failure, some people call it the bystander effect, or the 'tragedy of the commons'. When problems become wicked, individual action at the societal level becomes futile. So people retreat back to their own limited sphere (where they can control the outcomes)– and this may seem as individualism, but may in fact, be a sign that there is a lack of trust on the ability of the 'collective' to act.
- The global inaction in addressing climate change could also be seen, not so much as unwillingness to act, but as the incapacity to act as a collective. Individual action of countries will surely fail because its effects will only be neutralized by the inaction of polluting countries. Eventually, the support for costly climate change policies will weaken, because of this. Even the European Union is struggling with its environmental rules for companies, for instance, because leaders find that as long as there are no global rules to address the problem, European companies will simply move to other countries with more lax rules and then re-export their products back to



Europe. Moreover, government leaders cannot make commitments in the global arena, which are not supported by a broad consensus of their citizens back home.

- To sum up, whenever there is inertia, paralysis, or a very persistent (bad) status quo, then there is something more going on than just lack of values or virtues. That can also play a role, for sure, but it is not normal not to act if there is something you can actually do to get yourself out of a hole. The survival instinct is the strongest instinct of all. So when a problem is persistent and there is no move to change it, then something more structural is going on.
- When the motivation is instead triggered by external events or forces, then action tends to be reactive. In 2013, for example, Rana Plaza in Bangladesh collapsed killing 1,134 people and injuring around 2,500 more garment workers. Fearing reputational damage to their brands, Zara, Mango, Primark and other clothing retailers took action to improve the labor conditions in the industry, and strengthen supplier agreements to ensure compliance to safety and labor standards, among others. Sometimes tragedies like this act as a trigger to change the status quo, and if they lead to longer-term relationships that can sustain that change, then good can come out of such calamities. But it can happen that after a surge of action, the status quo is re-established, because the state of emergency has passed, or media attention has waned.
- Action that is triggered by a negative force, such as fear, might work in the beginning, but it is difficult to sustain. When governments forced cigarette companies to put horrific pictures of cancerous lungs on the cigarette pack to discourage smoking, there was probably an initial shock, but that quickly turns into indifference, especially if the motivation to smoke is strong. Very bad cases of corruption might hit the headlines and there will be investigations even convictions, but when corruption becomes deep and widespread, then people can get used to it, even consider it almost a normal feature of politics. The world now is in a constant state of crisis, for instance, whether it is due to climate change, migration, wars. But instead of moving us into action, we can instead be numbed to it. Crisis fatigue sets in. We know that we have to act, and indeed, there are positive developments towards transitions to clean energy, for example, but the reality is that we still burn too much fossil fuels,



there is still way too much plastics in our lives, forests are still being denuded as we speak. There are no shortage of external triggers to act, but if we are only motivated by fear or shame then action will tend to be temporary and insufficient to address the root causes of our problems.

- Despite all these, we do see numerous positive actions in world as well, and many changemakers that we could emulate. So how do we characterize the motives that drive all these efforts?
- From bleak motives (passive-reactive), we now turn our attention to strong (active-proactive) motives. Powerful intrinsic motivations can generate actions that make positive impact to society at large. These can stem from a sense of altruism, which can be due to religious values and principles. It can also evolve through time due to relationships that bring about empathy. A company that initially was forced to act, or re-act to an external trigger such as the Rana Plaza disaster, might then eventually see, understand, and empathize with the plight of workers, and in the process build relationships with the community or their suppliers. I've been studying a company who has invested in banana plantations in the war zones of the Philippines. Initially, the dialogue and inter-faith values formation sessions they started were a reaction to the regular conflicts that erupted between the Muslim and Christian workers. They then later on pursued these sessions (one hour weekly, during company hours), and what resulted was the deep understanding that though they are from different faiths, they are brothers and sisters, children of one Father. They also initially made their practices environmental friendly, but only because they wanted to comply to the standards of Rain Forest Alliance, which would then allow them to brand their product as premium, higher-priced bananas. Later on, also through the continuous values formation, they realized that they are stewards of God's creation and must therefore ensure that the environment, which is a common good for all, is protected. Eventually, good environmental practices emerged not due to compliance to external standards but because of a sense of stewardship.
- Motives can therefore evolve or can develop through formation, and also through relationships that change not only our opinions or understanding, but also our values and our sense of community. We start being active and proactive once we begin to



see in the pain and well-being of the others, our own pain and well-being. But as I've hinted a while ago, sometimes this is not enough. It is important that we can imagine, and trust that our actions, no matter how small, can have meaning.

- What is the difference of being active or proactive? Some say that it is simply a matter of timing and approach. Active motives involve responding to immediate needs or situations, while proactive motives involve pre-emptive action to address future needs or goals. I think it also depends on the problems we face. When they are fairly simple -- meaning that they are either easy to solve, or that they are **not** easy to solve, but they are easy to understand and therefore to address – then we can often do it on our own. We may react to a problem, but our action is not forced by an external motive but by our own sense of social responsibility. And if a problem is indeed simple, one-off action might suffice. For instance, we realized that there is no stable source of water in a far-flung area, then we can organize an action to provide a well, or lobby our local officials to provide them.
- When problems are wicked on the other hand, then you know that your individual action is not enough. Even if you bring together your friends to address the problem, you know that it will not be enough, it will eventually have no impact. It will not work, not necessarily because your action is small, but because you are doing it all on your own. You might seek help, for instance, for funding or resources, but that might also fail, because the others are just donors, one-off supporters. Sometimes, you will begin with a simple issue, only to realize in the process that you are dealing with a wicked problem. What will change in your approach and perspective? What will change is the realization that your entering a totally different sphere of action. It will not be enough that you have a vision of things, but you need to share, and perhaps re-calibrate that vision based on the inputs of your partners. And that is the key word: partners. They are no longer just donors, or people you go to and lobby for what you want, they become partners.
- Why and how do extrinsic motives come into the picture? Now, I'm not going to tell you something that I know from literature, or studies, but something purely from experience. By now, I have been in several programs, projects, campaigns, and I realize that intrinsic and extrinsic motives are like our two legs. Although we can



move forward with just one leg, we can't hop all the time. If I say that I am ONLY intrinsically motivated, I will be lying. The reason is that when things become really difficult, there is really the temptation to give up. Especially, in cases where I am not directly affected, in the sense that I am not in the area where there is a calamity, etc.. But then I realize that I can't give up because the others are depending on me, or if I leave, then chances are that the others will also leave and then the whole thing breaks down. So when my intrinsic motivation wanes, the external motives push me to go forward. It can also happen that I find myself working with people that I don't agree with, or simply, people I don't want to work with. But then the intrinsic motivation kicks in, telling me to keep my eyes on the ball: and that is the common good, the poor people we want to serve, etc. So this is the positive motion of change, driven by personal values and vision, but also by social relationships, and sense of interdependence and fraternity.

- Finally, what insights can we draw as to what it takes, and how to be a changemaker? Let us look at two things: first, let us ask what are the causes of inertia, paralysis, apathy. Next, what do we do when problems become wicked and complex.
- When we face paralysis, as changemakers we are the ones who need to instigate, rock the boat, initiate a conversation and dialogue. If the problem is a lack of understanding of the problem, then we become the facilitators, synthesizers of the common views that emerge, reminding everyone that diversity of perspectives is a good thing as it helps us to broaden our own limited perceptions. If the problem is lack of social values, then we are the ones that should lead by example -- knowing that sometimes just a display of passion and conviction can awaken the other's social conscience.
- When problems are wicked, we know that we must step up our ambitions as changemakers. We need to reach out to people and groups that we might not want to associate with, but whose collaboration is needed to address an issue. In front of a complex problem, let us not be in denial and try to over simplify the issues. We have to embrace the complexity of the problem, first of all, by exercising patience. We have to be willing to start small, but not be afraid to raise our ambitions once the



opportunity presents itself. Patience also means not succumbing to activism, believing that if one wants to go fast, we often need to go slow.

- How do we start? We trigger it with a series of conversation, dialogues – the ones that build relationships, trust, and create a ‘spark’. A spark happens when our minds, spirits and hearts connect -- eventually leading to lasting friendships. We also start by opening our eyes to whatever opportunities we may happen to come across. These opportunities might come through the talents, resources, networks that may come our way. And of course, there is crisis. Never waste a good crisis, they say, as these are external sparks that create a sense of urgency, and jolt people to action.
- Although there are many motives that drive changemakers, the most powerful one is the belief that we are not alone. When we act because we have experienced the love of God as Father and recognized each other as His children, then God Himself is with us. Ultimately, it is He -in us and among us -- who will make everything new.

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