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Context to the nugget conversation

Ravi speaks about the notion of punctuated equilibrium where long periods of stability are punctuated with occasional periods of extreme change. He speaks about such periods of extreme change can lead to a new kind of species flourishing on the other side of the change.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I guess it is a, it is also about autonomy and control and independence at some level as we age. Lovely. Let's dive into the book, Ravi. The one term that caught my attention which I haven't really come across in any other piece of work on transitions is this notion of punctuated equilibrium. Can you say more about what it is? And I think, as I was reflecting on it, the question in my head was how do we know there is an equilibrium on the other side given what we are going through. So, I would be curious to maybe if you could just lay out what the term means and talk a little bit about how you see it?

Ravi Venkatesan EP2 (RV): Yeah, look, there is a dinosaur on the cover of the book and people often say what is that dinosaur doing up there and that goes back to this question of punctuated equilibrium. So, this is a term from natural history and when you look at the sort of fossil record essentially what you see is occasional periods of extreme change, which are often correlated with mass extinctions and then things get stable again for a while and then again, another period of extreme change. So, that's why it is called punctuated equilibrium. Generally, there are long stable periods and then there is some shock some event and when this event happens, then a lot of sorts of life struggles to adapt and they become either marginalised or become extinct like the dinosaur and then some other life forms which are able to adapt flourish and become more dominant. And going back to that same extinction during the Jurassic, the mammals became dominant. And so, I say, look, that's a pretty good metaphor for what's going on right now. We have had about nearly 100 years of relative stability, certainly 75-80 years of relative stability and a rising tide of prosperity in many parts of the world and now we are in a period of sudden and extreme change. And in the book, I say that the world will change more in this century than all of human history and that's really the effect of compounding. And this extreme change is driven by so many different forces, the planet reacting to our misbehaviour, the crumbling planet climate change and all that and how we have to adapt to that, there is technology and the way it is driving profound, profound change, there is also very, very new ideas about everything about what is success, how we should organise ourselves, the ideas about whether India should remain a secular country or not and so all over the world there is ferment. And so, this is a period of extraordinary change and most people are not designed or equipped to handle such change, which is why today if you look around there is a lot of anxiety, there is a lot of bewilderment, there is mental health issues, depression, Covid is a superb

example of punctuated equilibrium as a sudden shock which affects every human in the planet. And we are going to have many, many more of these types of events. So, the whole central thesis of the book is the title of Chapter I, Adapt or Perish, Adapt and Flourish. So, if you can adapt, there is probably no better time to be alive because there is just so much opportunity, so many possibilities and all that, but at the same time if you are unable to adapt, you are saying why is this happening, why can't we just go back to the good old days, why can't somebody rescue me and fix these things then the chances are it is not going to be too good.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I am reminded of the conversation with Jennifer Garvey Berger (JGB), an Executive Coach who has written about some of the mind traps we fall into and how that can let us down. She speaks about how evolution hasn't quite prepared us for the complexity of the world around us.

JGB: *"We have spent most of human history in spaces where the biggest threats first of all tended to be physical dangers and second of all tended to be from unknown or uncertain possibilities. And like if we saw a new plant, heard a new noise, met somebody from a new tribe, like for most of human history it was these sorts of things. And so, the decisions we needed to make are like very straightforward decisions. Do I run? Do I fight? Do I hide and our biology is set up to simplify to cut out nuance so that we can get to this question run, fight, hide as quickly as possible and then be able to engage in that? But this is not a useful approach, if the thing that you are dealing with is a very tricky issue in the boardroom and your brain is still sort of preparing your body to run, fight or hide, like these are not useful responses in the modern world. And you see it's particularly unhelpful for something that is hard for our minds to even get a handle on like Covid-19 where there are so many moving parts and it's so nonlinear and it's so interacting, and none of these things are normal habits for the mind. And so, we have to actually evolve ourselves very fast to grow new capacities, to have new habits and also to be a little bit suspect of what we would think of as obvious or the clear solution, because in complexity that's very likely to be your mind playing a trick on you."*

DJ: Back to what Ravi says, there is a huge opportunity if we are able to adapt our mindsets. The conversation with Jennifer Garvey Berger might give you some pointers around how the default wiring of our mind might be coming in the way of our ability to adapt to this period of extraordinary change.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Jennifer Garvey Berger that is referenced: [Humans - an outdated OS](#).

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive’s / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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