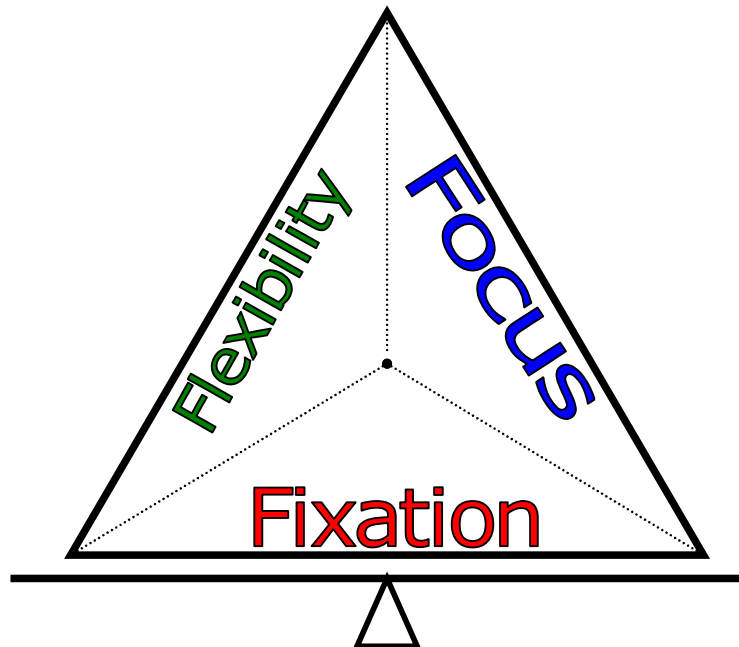


## The 3Fs Approach to Change – To Balance is to Unbalance

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**3Fs** – This framework is an attempt to house 3 elements commonly associated with change management together. The elements are Fixation, Focus and Flexibility. Over here, these elements appear in the form of disciplines because they are presented as activities that one can better through constant practice.

### The Framework



Here are their definitions.

### **Fixation**

A persistent concentration. Fixation is strategic in orientation, looking at the long term. Once a target/goal/objective is fixed, it sets the direction for the team.

The late Steve Jobs' single-mindedness towards how Apple's product should appear was as north as it could get. His pursued of perfection was relentless (*Perfection was defined by Jobs' own terms. He was famous for his non-market survey approach in an era where the consumers decide what is produced. He was always certain that he knows what people **will** want.*). The company success has everything to do with Job's fixation on perfection in product design. At times, his unbending belief frustrates those around him, but, his persistency was also a source of drive and determination that galvanized the organization.

With fixation, the goalpost doesn't change!

## Focus

*'Looking nowhere and everywhere is Focus without Fixation' - Unknown.*

A point of concentration. Focus gives us alignment and effective use of resources by minimizing deviation. It is like a single lane highway directing everything (time, energy, effort) towards the destination.

Allied forces D-day invasion of France offers a dramatic example on the effect of resource Focusing. The Nazis had a near 5000km stretch of coastline (Atlantic Wall) to defend. Normandy, where the invasion took place, stretches a mere 70km of beach. Key to the invasion's success was the penetration offered by the focusing of Allied troops within a pointed scope. In warfare, advantage always lies with the defenders. However, the Nazis forces were stretched too thinly across the Atlantic Wall, and could not maintain a sustainable resistance during D-day.



## Flexibility

*"I am a man of fixed and unbending principles, the first of which is to be flexible at all times." - Everett Dirksen*

Openness to change, capability to adapt. Flexibility allows us to evolve with time and maintain relevant. Instead of a contra, it should rather be view as a complement to Focus. In the field of engineering, flexibility is defined as 'the ease with which the system can respond to uncertainty in a manner to sustain or increase its value delivery'. Similarly, in team-dynamics, any change must be for the better.

*"... any colour so long as it is black" – Henry Ford (Ford Motor Company).*



A great deal has been said and written about this quote. This belief was a symbol of the industrial age, mass market approach in early America's automobile sector where organizations dictated consumer behavior and patterns. Economies of scale generate healthy profits because mass repetition reduces production cost. As a result, American automobile companies flourished. Much of this attitude was carried forward to present day America where consumers have little say in what the factories roll out

All this changed in 2008 when Toyota over took the big 3 (Ford, General Motors, Chrysler) to become the No. 1 automobile brand in America. The same year it becomes the world's largest automaker. One of Toyota's success factors is the execution of highly targeted marketing strategies, which comes from its ability to understand, anticipate and willingness to change according to market's demand. Flexibility in its business model was key to Toyota beating their rivals on their own turf.

More recently, Ferrari announced its ultra exclusive 'Tailor-Made' customized service. This is in respond to the growing shift towards personalized service and goods consumption.

The table below contains a detailed description of the 3 disciplines:

		<u>Descriptions</u>	<u>Possible drawbacks</u>	<u>When to use</u>
<b>Discipline</b>	<b><u>Fixation</u></b>	<p>Strategic in nature - long term and future oriented.</p> <p>First step in LOA.</p> <p>Prevents changes from happening too often as it forces critical review of any deviation.</p> <p>Provides a focal point during decision making.</p> <p>A source of drive and determination.</p>	<p>Too much would amount to obsession.</p> <p>Dogmatic approach, not open to changes.</p> <p>Narrow mindedness thus losing sight of other alternatives.</p>	<p>Set long term direction for team.</p> <p>Brings different ideology together.</p> <p>Overcome procrastination.</p>
	<b><u>Focus</u></b>	<p>Tactical in nature - look at the nows and immediate future.</p> <p>Aligns thoughts and actions.</p> <p>Increases concentration.</p> <p>Promotes consistency.</p>	<p>Might lose sight of bigger picture - like a camera.</p> <p>Likened to 'all eggs in one basket'.</p> <p>Focusing and committing too many resources would increase resistant to change.</p> <p>Too much focus will lead to unwanted fixation.</p> <p>Impede lateral thinking.</p>	<p>Converge resources to make things happen.</p> <p>Overcome procrastination.</p> <p>Convergent stage of brainstorming - narrow down ideas.</p>
	<b><u>Flexibility</u></b>	<p>Ability to sway.</p> <p>Adjust and modify behaviors to suit situation.</p> <p>Openness to differences.</p> <p>Keep up with change by injecting new ideas.</p> <p>Cultivates responsive attitudes.</p>	<p>Deviate too far off original intent.</p> <p>Too much could lead to structure lost.</p> <p>Change too often will lead to loss of stability and credibility - wishy washy.</p> <p>Spread resources too thinly if all options are considered.</p>	<p>Encourage humanistic (individual preferences) approach in processes.</p> <p>Divergent stage of brainstorming - ideas generation.</p> <p>Deal with frustration.</p>

Effectiveness in this framework requires balance in the 3 disciplines. And to balance, it sometimes calls for an uneven distribution of consideration among the disciplines. Here are 3 situations where imbalance is balance:

1. Build commonality. When a team first come together for a new task, it is important for a direction to be set. In this context, higher emphasis on Fixation will enable a sense of commonality to be achieved.
2. Counter group-think. This phenomenon can be challenge by increasing Flexibility and opening up for alternatives.
3. Encourage lateral thinking. Reduce Focus to explore seemingly irrelevant ideas but maintain a fair degree of Fixation to maintain some form of alignment during explorations.

This framework can serve many agendas and be used in various ways, here are a few:

1. Analyze and diagnose a team's current attitude and behavior towards change - the emphasis we place on these 3 disciplines, split 100% among them. What can we learn from this data?
2. Framework to facilitate strategic discussion – where in the process can we be more flexible? Are we focusing too many resources in certain areas?
3. Like De Bono's Six Hats, it clearly separates the disciplines' different functions, allowing participants to mentally wear and switch the 'hats'. This makes it easier to direct or re-direct thoughts, meetings and conversation.

## **Conclusion**

Change is a multi-faceted event that involves many elements and at times, surfaces link and relationships that were previously oblivious, further complicating the process. Thus, to effectively work with change, the approach too must be multi-layered, encompass many factors, flexible and not one dimensional (it forces the situation into a pre-agreed notion).

3Fs strength lies in its generic and broadly defined disciplines, allowing this framework to be applied in a variety of situations. It can also be used over and over again, on the same situation, as the discussion deepens. For example, the initial discussion uses the 3Fs to cover a subject that covers a wide spectrum. It can be used again to analysis the separate activities or results derived from the meeting earlier.

And lastly, 3Fs encourages more point of views to be look into, providing a more comprehensive coverage to overcome the peril of a narrow and thus, imbalance approach.

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