

**INTELLECTUAL INERTIA: FRIEND AND FOE FOR AN EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTION TO GROW**

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Abstract

The paper attempts to conceptualize and analyze the concept of intellectual inertia due to absence of a genuine definition. The term is less prevalent in education literature, rather crystalizing through internet based discussions, but of significant value. Intellectual inertia is an analogy of a physics entity known as inertia of matter. Intellectual inertia can be individual as well as collective in nature. In an educational institution both individual as well as collective intellectual inertia operate. Like inertia of matter intellectual inertia is also a neutral entity which can be work for and against an educational institution. Paper elaborates when intellectual inertia can be used as a friend and avoided to become foe for an institution. Finally possible approaches to use intellectual inertia in favor of an educational institution are elaborated followed by tools could be used in these strategies. Paper is a thought provoking effort to theorize the effectiveness of an educational institution by capturing the minds in terms of intellectual inertia.

Key words: Intellectual inertia, Education, Strategies, Growth Mindset, Fixed Mindset

Introduction: An educational institution is an ever-growing entity which strives to establish and maintain its identity. It needs to change with changing times and at the same time needs to maintain the good traditions even in changing times. It is always in dilemma for choosing what is to be accommodated and what is to be eliminated from its working framework of infrastructure, methods & methodologies, knowledge store and non-material resources. It has been observed that sometime we need to repent for not changing our ways and at other time for changing too early without testing for workability. All this happens at intellectual level which results in formation of attitudes which finally transformed in to our actions. This 'to do' or 'not to do'

situation is fundamental question of intellectual inertia. Inertia is one of the basic concepts of physics technically known as inertia of matter. It is “to resist to the change in existing state of motion of the body” meaning there by a body having mass resists its change in state of motion. If it is in rest state it will try to remain at rest and if in motion will resist to be put to rest. The significance is multitude in terms of mass, momentum, shapes, and materials to apply for creation of different mechanical machines etc. The corollary has been drawn to develop psychological concept we name it as ‘mental inertia’ or ‘inertia of mind’. Human mind also develops inertia, it may happen both at the individual and collective levels. At the individual level, for instance, a child who is socialized at their early age imbibes language, values and culture of the society it is born into, which in turn become part and parcel of his identity. Leaving this identity is difficult for any person irrespective of gender, economic strata, community or nationality. But at the same time socialization is essential for communication and developing new bonds. This can’t happen if we are strongly stricken to our identity and beliefs. A similar phenomenon is experienced in communities and societies we may call it as collective inertia. At institutional level we are dealing with both individual and collective inertia. An institution can’t grow without innovation, but can’t survive without maintaining upholding values, and valued traditions. In this way we understand that intellectual inertia by itself is a neutral entity which can be positive or negative, a friend or foe depending on how we use it.

The mantra of intellectual inertia is: the ideas and concepts that worked for years will work in the future too. Old is gold and experience is bound to win. Trying new may prove to be misadventure a blunder and can spoil the game. Intellectual inertia could block creative thinking. It limits the horizons of search and reach, blocks exploration, develops disinterest or lassitude in the individuals, creates mental barriers and what not. It erects ideological fences and impedes the capacity of the intellect to generate creative ideas and innovative concepts. It even resists creative expression of thoughts, emotions and values in the form of music and art, at extreme level results in loss of inner drive to do something new and worthwhile. They find no point in even trying to do or learn anything new anymore. Intellectual inertia affects institutions also; institutions may develop a culture of collective intellectual inertia. Such institutions will prefer loyalty to competence and conformity to creativity. Discipline will be considered as the most important value of the institution. They develop structures to police discipline and mafia-like structures will emerge, the spy-network will prevail and flattery will be the order of the

institution. The creative minds will be suspected, victimized and put to great agony. Any potential challenge to the existing practices will be nipped in the bud. Individual pursuits of truth will be kept subservient to the institutional mission and vision. Administrators will make sure that the institution operates just like a well-oiled machine. The communications will assume the nature of propaganda; questions will be discouraged or played down. Discussions will be closed in nature, with decision already taken by the top level management. The management styles of such institutions will soon develop autocratic features.

Factors maintaining intellectual inertia: foe of an Educational Institution

Vision and Mission: the vision and mission of an institution are guiding force for an educational institution. Institutional philosophy is reflected in the vision and mission of an institution. Progressive philosophy will discourage mental inertia where as traditional philosophy does the reverse. Institutions with strict idealism may go in to inertial state due to impractical vision and mission.

Administration style: style of administration is big determinant for instilling intellectual inertia among teachers and institution as a whole. A progressive style of administration encourages creativity and experimentation and allows taking the risk to undertake innovation. Whereas, traditional style of administration retards growth of even an enthusiastic teacher and hence instills intellectual inertia among teachers.

Rules and Procedures: rules of institution decide how individual teacher will perform for self and work for the institution. Democratic rules and procedures ensure justice and liberty which helps in developing sense of belongingness, consequently will work for the progress of the institution. Autocratic rules and procedures prevent people from taking responsibility hence encourages intellectual inertia.

Curriculum: curriculum is another significant determiner of level of intellectual inertia among teachers. Traditional curriculum taught induces stereotype attitudes which have potential of building intellectual inertia among teachers. Dynamic curriculum on the other hand can definitely induce sense of newness and adjustment to the changing situations, hence breaking the barrier of intellectual inertia. The academic and co-curricular program of the institution has great influence on the personality and attitudes of both students and teachers. Progressive attitudes can help in defeating intellectual inertia for changes to be adapted in curriculum program.

Training of personnel: the training programs both pre service and in service also greatly influences the attitude towards work. Teachers need to be trained to accommodate for new developments in the subjects of knowledge which he deals with. It is not the knowledge rather how to attain knowledge makes possible for acquiring and transmitting new knowledge. In case training lacks the knowledge acquiring skills same will be practiced by the teacher exhibiting intellectual inertia.

Evaluation: evaluation of students and teachers is one of the deciding factors for evaluating intellectual inertia among the human resource of the organization. Constructive evaluation mechanisms can encourage students and teachers to think creatively which opposes intellectual inertia. On the other hand stereotype evaluation mechanism instills intellectual inertia among students and teachers which discourages anything which disturbs status quo.

Attitude: human attitude towards institution, work and clients is a key factor for extent of existence of intellectual inertia among the employees. Positive attitude is absolutely necessary for breaking intellectual inertia among persons and institutions. Positive attitude is self-energizing and progressive in nature which becomes basis for our productive actions. Status quo attitudes retard the growth and development of the people and institutions due to promotion of intellectual inertia among the humans.

When Intellectual Inertia becomes Friend for an Educational Institution?

Inertia by itself is not a negative thing, like friction on many occasions we desire it to stay for reasons of stability, persistence, uniformity, implementing directions, maintaining traditions, ensuring equality and the like. Educational institution should look for intellectual inertia in some aspects of the institution as elaborated below.

Maintaining values and traditions: an educational institution follows certain values, traditions and beliefs for which it stands and can't afford to lose these. If one is too labile on intellectual space any new wave of thoughts can sway the employee from the basic philosophy of the institution. This has potential to threaten the identity of the institution.

Maintaining Discipline: it is impossible to maintain discipline in the institution without ensuring intellectual inertia among humans. Discipline is nothing but abiding the accepted rules for common good. Change for the change and adventurism can destroy the structures and systems of the institution. An institution needs to have a power structure with defined hierarchy to serve and effective results. One needs to be intellectually stable and ready to accept the

standards of acceptable behaviour for ensuring discipline in the institution. Intellectual inertia will help a lot in doing so, which ensures uniformity and discipline without questioning authority.

Achieving Targets: an educational institution sets target in all dimensions of performance which can't be achieved without synergy among all involved. Synergy can only be achieved when one does not deviate from chosen common path, meaning thereby retaining the intellectual inertia. Without intellectual inertia people tend to move in different directions which results in poor net outcome.

Achieving cohesion: an institution can't achieve anything of significance without cohesion among the human force involved. Cohesion is achieved only by dissolving the differences among themselves. This can't be done by allowing people to raise different voices in the group with common objectives. It is like people in a religion has different opinions on different subjects, but they are one when it comes to religious matter, in other words maintain intellectual inertia.

How to strike a balance between 'to be' and 'not to be'

As we learn in physics 'friction is a necessary evil' so can be said about inertia and so is about intellectual inertia. We desire people to be creative yet disciplined which seems to be unnatural combination, yet needs to be created. Actually there are different dimensions of performance where institution's human force needs to show opposing attitudes. They need to express conformity when it comes to institutional identity that's why we say 'intellectual inertia as friend' and they need to show diversity when it comes to institutional performance that's why we say 'intellectual inertia as foe'. There are some strategies as explained here which makes it possible.

Growth mindset rather than fixed mindset approach: institutions and persons should believe in growth mindset rather than fixed mindset approach. Growth mindset believes in incremental growth of abilities whereas fixed mindset believes in limit of abilities by nature and resources. An institution having growth mindset moves gradually towards the targets which ensures defeating intellectual inertia and at the same time does not get carried away with fast and newer concepts. Fixed mindset invents collective intellectual inertia which prevents any attempt of trying new venture and innovations for solving problems and thinking about new ones.

Agitation approach: as we see in democracy with lax attitudes of government system starts slipping in to collective intellectual inertia, unless agitated by free forces like media, civil

society, pressure groups and the like. Institution needs to be transparent and democratic so that when needed be agitated by the agitating forces to break the barriers of intellectual inertia to restore the order.

Prefer change over revolution: institutions should prefer change over revolution. Change occurs slowly and is acceptable to majority of the persons; whereas revolution harms many when benefit offers. If an institution does sweeping changes in its working style, curriculum, evaluation procedures, it will meet with strong opposition, but if same change is brought in small increments people will get time to digest the same. Also change can't always be reverted back, whereas it is not true for revolution. It will ensure traditions at the same time avoid settling in of collective intellectual inertia.

Seize the path breaking events: Unless acted upon by a critical external/internal force intellectual inertia will prevail. This is true for individuals as for institutions. The trigger to break away from the intellectual inertia could be a critical and path-breaking event. There are narratives from the biographies of many important historical figures describing such critical moments, which forced them to invent themselves anew. Some made even radical change to the direction of the life. Buddha walked away from home and became a mendicant. Mahatma Gandhi changed his career as a lawyer to champion the freedom struggle of India. They set out in search of new horizons, adopted new world-views that challenged the existing ones and made path-breaking contributions to humankind. This is also true for institutions where some time or other an environment is created when change can definitely happen. If opportunity is lost collective intellectual inertia can take over and chance for newness is lost.

“Kaizen” and “Kaikaku”: “Kaikaku” and “Kaizen” are Japanese concepts describing two different types of innovation introduced by Toyota. Katuaki Watanabe, the president of Toyota suggested in 2007, in the event of Toyota becoming the world's largest automobile manufacturer: “There's no genius in our company. We just do whatever we believe is right, trying every day to improve every little bit and piece. But when 70 years of very small improvements accumulate, they become a revolution”. He was summarizing the innovation policy of Toyota, which consisted of a perfect integration of both Kaizen and Kaikaku. Kaizen refers to steady improvement of a specific area of manufacture. It is evolutionary, focused only on incremental improvements. Kaikaku, on the other hand, refers to a radical change of

manufacturing methods or breakthrough. . It is revolutionary, focused on radical improvements and paradigm shifts.

Kaizen could be compared to the uniform motion of a body along a straight line. It makes continuous improvement. However, according to the Newton's First Law of motion it contains the same inertia as possessed by a body at rest. The breaking of inertia occurs only during a Kaikaku event. Kaikaku is necessary to make a creative turn of events. Relative role in the progress of an institution is depicted in figure: 1 given ahead.

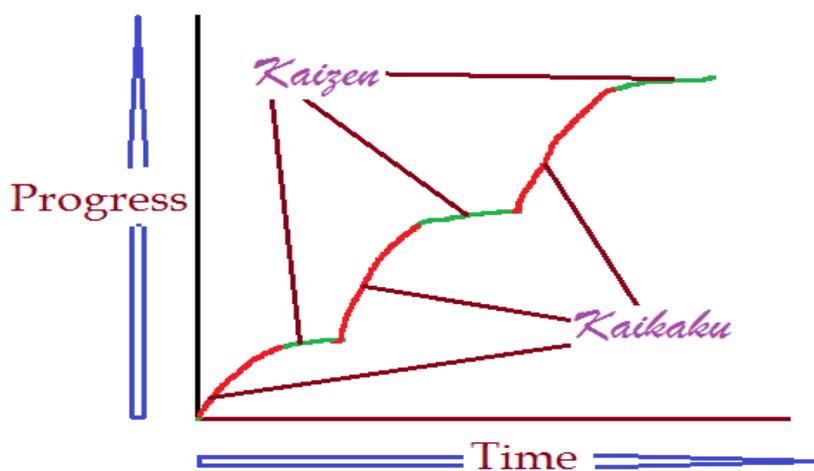


Figure 1: Relative Role of Kaizen & Kaikaku

However, Kaizen and Kaikaku cannot be separated. Kaizen is the rock-basis for Kaikaku and Kaikaku is an offshoot of Kaizen. A perfect integration of both Kaizen and Kaikaku taken as Toyota model seems to be relevant for an educational institution also. An institution needs to grow at all times at steady pace, but look for a great leap by self-invented breakthrough. Educational institution should apply this strategy in all spheres of performance. This requires complete freedom and motivation to the human force with supervision, monitoring and individual as well as collective accountability. An objective and unbiased feedback will also help immensely in implementing this Toyota model in an educational institution.

Conclusion: as explained in physics inertia by itself is a neutral physical entity which is needed as well as needed to be reduced under as per demand of the situation. Similar analogy can be applied to the mental inertia or intellectual inertia, which can serve as friend as well as foe for the institution. It is foe when used opposite to the demand, but work as friend when applied as per the demand of the situation. Peoples and systems have natural tendency to slip in to inertial

mode, but institution need to devise strategies to take it out from such mode. Creativity, innovation, new thinking, unconventional path choice can work as tools to break berries of intellectual inertia, whereas objectivity, keeping focus, common concern, keeping institution first and discipline be the tools of maintaining intellectual inertia. Our problems should be our source of motivation for work, continuous work and extraordinary work. These three situations require appropriate use of intellectual inertia implemented by the above said tools and strategies.

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