

THE MIGRATION OF VALUE

A Framework of Human Adaptation

First Edition – June 2026

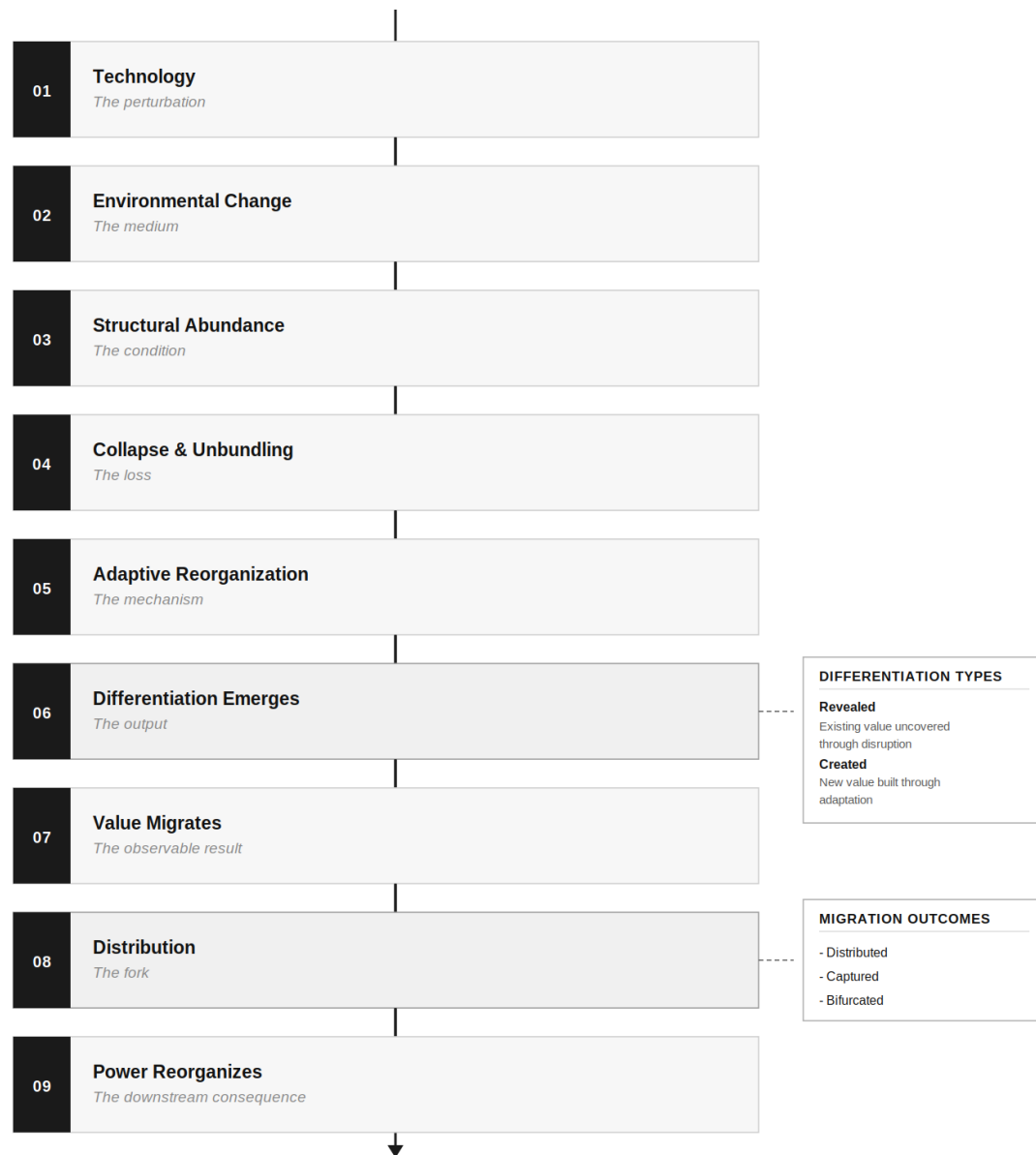
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THE MIGRATION OF VALUE

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Every perturbation establishes the conditions for the next.

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AT CHANGED IN THE FIRST EDITION

The First Edition makes six changes from Pre-publication Draft 3, all derived from evidence accumulated across three independent historical stress tests (the Printing Press, the Quartz Crisis, and the Steam Engine and Industrial Revolution).

Stage 4: Unbundling named as the operative mechanism.

Stage 5: Individual displacement correctly distinguished from organizational and generational adaptation.

Stage 6: 'New differentiation' replaced with two precise sub-types: Revealed Differentiation and Created Differentiation.

Stage 8: Binary replaced with three states: Distributed, Captured, Bifurcated. Contested Redistribution added as a sub-type.

New mechanism: Institutional Resistance named, with Delaying and Redirecting sub-types.

New section: Scholarly context added.

Nothing else changed from Pre-publication Draft 3.

Core Statement

WHAT THIS FRAMEWORK IS

The Migration of Value is a framework of human adaptation. When technology changes the environment and makes a previously scarce capability structurally abundant, an existing source of meaningful differentiation collapses. Humans adapt. New differentiation emerges from that adaptation. Value reorganizes around it. The migration of value is the observable result of that adaptation. Technology is the perturbation. The environment is the medium. Adaptation is the mechanism. Differentiation is the engine. Technology changes the environment. Adaptation reorganizes value. Power shapes who ultimately captures it. This framework should be understood as an integrative explanatory framework, synthesizing observations from economics, sociology, psychology, evolutionary thinking, and history into a unified descriptive sequence.

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Formal Definitions

KEY TERMS DEFINED PRECISELY

The pre-publication drafts used the word differentiation across multiple contexts without defining it. Pre-publication Draft 3 corrected that. The definition is carried forward unchanged.

Meaningful differentiation (formal definition)

Any characteristic that reliably distinguishes one person, organization, or idea in ways that others recognize as significant within a given context.

Four load-bearing elements of this definition:

- **Reliably:** a one-time distinction is not differentiation in the sense this framework means. It must be reproducible.
- **Distinguishes:** this separates differentiation from mere scarcity. Something can be scarce without distinguishing anything.
- **Others recognize as significant:** differentiation is inherently social and contextual, not intrinsic. A characteristic only differentiates within a system of recognition. This means differentiation can collapse when the recognition system changes, not only when the characteristic becomes abundant.
- **Within a given context:** what differentiates in one context is irrelevant in another. The qualifier prevents the definition from overclaiming universality.

Under this definition, the forms of differentiation the framework describes are not competing meanings. They are specific expressions of the same underlying mechanism:

Form	How it expresses meaningful differentiation
Identity	A characteristic others recognize as defining who you are in ways they cannot easily replicate or replace.

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Market value	A capability others recognize as worth paying for because alternatives are less reliable or less significant.
Social status	A position others recognize as conferring standing within a shared system of meaning.
Trust	A track record others recognize as reliably reducing their risk in ways that alternatives do not.
Craft	A quality of execution others recognize as bearing the mark of human intention and irreplaceable skill.

The Sequence

HOW IT WORKS

The environment is not passive. It determines which adaptations produce meaningful differentiation and which do not. Two actors facing the same technological perturbation in different environments will adapt differently and arrive at different differentiators. This is why the same technology can liberate one population and destroy another simultaneously.

01	Technology <i>The perturbation</i>	A paradigm technology, one that structurally eliminates the scarcity of a capability, acts on the environment. Not a productivity improvement. Structural change.
↓		
02	Environmental Change <i>The medium</i>	The environment, the totality of economic conditions, cultural norms, technological infrastructure, institutional structures,

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		and competitive landscape, shifts. This is the new context within which adaptation must occur.
↓		
03	Structural Abundance <i>The condition</i>	A previously scarce capability becomes broadly accessible within the changed environment. The barrier to access effectively collapses. What was rare is now common.
↓		
04	Collapse & Unbundling <i>The loss</i>	The capability no longer confers meaningful difference. It no longer reliably distinguishes in ways others recognize as significant. Identity built around it is destabilized. The operative mechanism is unbundling. Technology does not simply destroy a differentiator. It separates the bundle of economic, social, and identity value organized around it. The economic component collapses first. The social and identity components persist, often for a generation or more. This is why disruption consistently produces cultural grief alongside economic loss: the way of life continues while its economic foundation dissolves beneath it.
↓		
05	Adaptive Reorganization <i>The mechanism</i>	The environment has changed. What differentiated no longer does. Reorganization follows. At the individual level, the most common short-term outcome is displacement, not adaptation. When change is rapid and differentiation is narrow, individuals whose identity and livelihood were organized around the collapsed differentiator frequently cannot reposition within their own lifetime. Adaptation is primarily what organizations, industries, and generations do. The gap between individual

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		displacement and generational adaptation is where the human cost of migration concentrates.
↓		
06	Differentiation Emerges <i>The output</i>	Meaningful differentiation emerges within the new environment. Two types are distinguished: Revealed Differentiation: Pre-existing capabilities that were always present but obscured by functional necessity. When technology removes the functional layer, these capabilities become visible as independent sources of value. Revealed differentiation consistently appears first. Created Differentiation: Genuinely new capabilities, credentials, or forms of value that did not exist before the disruption. Created differentiation typically emerges later and is more often mediated by institutional action.
↓		
07	Value Migrates <i>The observable result</i>	Economic and social value reorganizes around the new differentiator. This is what the framework observes from the outside. It is the result of adaptation, not the cause of it. Migration is episodic rather than continuous. The timeline varies with the scale of the perturbation: from years in contained industry disruptions to generations in civilizational transformations.
↓		
08	Distribution, Capture, or Bifurcation <i>The fork</i>	The migrated value distributes, concentrates, or splits simultaneously across different populations. Distributed: Value reorganizes across many actors. Broad participation in the new differentiator becomes possible. Captured: Value is controlled by a small number of entities before broader

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		adaptation can occur. Contested Redistribution is a sub-type: initial capture partially reversed through organized resistance over a longer timeline. Bifurcated: Different populations or market segments experience different outcomes simultaneously. This was the most common outcome across all historical cases examined.
↓	09	Power Reorganizes <i>The downstream consequence</i>
		Power follows the new differentiator. It accumulates with whoever holds it until the next perturbation triggers the sequence again. Power is downstream of migration, not its cause. Power reorganization typically lags value migration. The economic shift comes first. The social, institutional, and political reorganization follows, often across multiple decades.

Institutional Resistance

A NAMED MECHANISM OPERATING WITHIN THE SEQUENCE

At multiple points between Stages 4 and 8, institutions attempt to preserve existing differentiators or contest the terms of migration. Three independent historical cases produced evidence of this with sufficient regularity to warrant formal naming.

Institutional resistance: the organized effort by guilds, governments, professional bodies, legal systems, or cultural institutions to preserve an existing differentiator or contest the terms of its collapse.

Two sub-types have been documented across independent cases:

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Delaying Resistance

Postpones migration without altering its direction or ultimate outcome. The Statute of Artificers regulating craft apprenticeship until 1814 is one example. The Stationers' Company monopoly on English printing until 1695 is another. Both delayed migration for decades. Neither prevented it.

Redirecting Resistance

Changes the terms and distribution of migration without preventing it. Factory Acts, trade union legislation, and organized labor action in the Industrial Revolution did not stop value from migrating away from skilled craft labor. They shaped who captured it and under what conditions.

Institutional resistance does not appear in a fixed position within the sequence. It modulates the timeline and distribution of the migration, not the underlying mechanism.

Boundaries

WHAT THIS FRAMEWORK IS NOT

- It is not a predictive model. It does not specify where value will migrate, only that migration follows from adaptive reorganization around new differentiation.
- It is not deterministic. Environmental change creates conditions under which migration becomes likely. It does not guarantee a particular destination, beneficiary, or timeline.
- It is not a moral argument. The migration mechanism is neutral. Whether the outcome is equitable depends entirely on whether the migration is distributed, captured, or bifurcated.
- It is not a theory of progress. Human adaptation and value migration do not imply improvement in aggregate. They imply reorganization.

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- It does not claim value migrates toward what technology cannot do. It claims value migrates toward whatever continues to differentiate meaningfully within the current environment.
- It is not universal at the individual level. Individual experiences of migration are most commonly displacement in the short term. The framework names this honestly rather than implying adaptation is the normal individual outcome.

The Human Cost

IDENTITY DISRUPTION

The disruption is not about losing a skill. It is about losing a source of meaningful differentiation. When the characteristic that reliably distinguished you in ways others recognized as significant becomes common, the identity built on its scarcity dissolves before a new one forms.

This explains why technological change so consistently feels existential rather than merely economic. The emotional intensity is not proportional to the economic disruption. It is proportional to the identity disruption.

The Luddites were not irrational. They were experiencing the collapse of a differentiator that organized their identity, livelihood, and place in a community, before any new differentiator existed to replace it. The same mechanism explains current AI anxiety. People are not mourning software. They are mourning the source of their meaningful difference.

Understanding unbundling helps explain the specific character of this grief. When a differentiator collapses, the economic component disappears first. The social and identity components often persist for a generation. The result is a community maintaining the cultural forms of a way of life whose economic basis has been destroyed.

Testable prediction: When technology structurally commoditizes a previously scarce and valued capability, individuals and communities whose identity was organized around that



capability will experience significant psychological and social disruption during the period before new differentiation stabilizes. The intensity of disruption will correlate with how completely the lost capability defined their meaningful differentiation, not with the economic magnitude of the change.

Scale

THE FRAMEWORK OPERATES AT MULTIPLE SCALES SIMULTANEOUSLY

The same perturbation produces migration at every scale simultaneously. Those migrations operate at different speeds. The gap between scales is where the human cost concentrates.

Scale	Typical migration speed	Where cost concentrates
Individual	Years to decades	Identity disruption, skill obsolescence, displacement before new differentiation stabilizes
Community	Decades	Economic displacement, erosion of shared purpose and collective identity
Industry	Decades	Business model collapse, structural unemployment, concentration of capture
Nation	Generations	Political instability, power redistribution, inequality between early and late adapters
Civilisation	Centuries	Diffuse and largely invisible until retrospect reveals the arc

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A civilizational migration may be net positive over 150 years while being catastrophic for specific communities within the first generation. Both are true. The framework does not resolve that tension. It names it.

Scholarly Context

HOW THIS FRAMEWORK RELATES TO EXISTING WORK

The Migration of Value did not emerge from a vacuum. Several major intellectual traditions address parts of what this framework describes. The relationships are stated explicitly here: to give readers an accurate map of the intellectual territory, and to be honest about where the framework adds something and where it restates what others have already said.

The framework's primary contribution is the unified treatment of meaningful differentiation within a broader explanatory sequence of technological adaptation. Within the scope of the prior art reviewed, no existing framework integrates that mechanism into the explanatory sequence presented here.

Thinker	Relationship	Where we overlap and where we differ
Joseph Schumpeter	<i>Partial overlap</i>	Creative destruction describes industry-level economic replacement through entrepreneurial innovation. The Migration of Value goes further by explaining the direction of value migration and the human mechanism through which it occurs. Schumpeter describes that industries are replaced. This framework addresses why some things survive and others do not. The quartz crisis is the clearest demonstration: Schumpeter's framework predicts the

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		Swiss mechanical watch industry should have been destroyed. This framework explains why it flourished.
Karl Polanyi	<i>Complementary; the most important prior framework</i>	Polanyi's double movement describes the simultaneous drive toward market liberalization and the protective counter-movement that societies generate in response. This maps directly onto Stages 4 through 8. The relationship is complementary, not competitive. Polanyi describes how migration is contested. This framework describes what migrates and through what mechanism. The institutional resistance mechanism named in this edition is partially a formalization of what Polanyi's counter-movement describes. Readers who want to understand how migration outcomes are contested and redistributed should read Polanyi alongside this framework.
Clayton Christensen	<i>Partial overlap; different level of analysis</i>	Disruptive innovation describes a specific supply-side pattern in which lower-tier entrants capture mainstream markets by improving incrementally. The Migration of Value operates at a broader level, across multiple dimensions simultaneously, and addresses populations and communities, not only firms and markets. The two frameworks are not in conflict; they address different questions at different levels of analysis.
Nelson & Winter	<i>Compatible; similar mechanism at different abstraction</i>	Evolutionary economics treats organizational routines as the primary unit of selection under environmental change. This maps onto the framework's Stages 4 and 5 with high fidelity. The Migration of Value is more human-centered and explicitly addresses the identity and social dimensions that evolutionary economics treats abstractly. The frameworks are consistent.

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Pierre Bourdieu	<i>Compatible; most relevant for luxury and cultural capital cases</i>	Bourdieu's field theory and concept of cultural capital describe how social distinction operates through the accumulation of recognized symbolic value. The framework's recognition-based definition of meaningful differentiation is structurally Bourdieusian: differentiation is social and contextual, not intrinsic. Bourdieu provides more precision on how recognition systems reproduce and distinguish themselves. Readers analyzing cases where cultural capital is the primary form of differentiation will find Bourdieu's vocabulary useful alongside this framework.
Adrian Slywotzky	<i>Adjacent; different level of analysis</i>	Value Migration (1995) uses the same phrase to describe the movement of economic and shareholder value between business designs as customer priorities change. The Migration of Value uses the phrase to describe a different phenomenon: the redistribution of value following technological abundance as humans adapt and new meaningful differentiation emerges. The frameworks share terminology but differ in unit of analysis, mechanism, scope, historical method, and emphasis on human adaptation. They are complementary rather than competing.

What none of these frameworks address, and what this framework treats as central: the collapse and reconstruction of meaningful differentiation as a unified mechanism that operates simultaneously at the economic, psychological, social, and institutional levels.

A comprehensive review of adjacent literature, including areas of overlap, distinction, and potential redundancy, is documented in the companion publication, Prior Art Review: Related Work and Distinctions.

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Intellectual Honesty

WHAT WOULD FALSIFY THIS FRAMEWORK

A framework that cannot be falsified is not a framework. It is a belief. The following evidence would require serious revision or abandonment:

- A clear historical case where a paradigm technology changed the environment, collapsed an existing differentiator, and no new meaningful differentiation emerged over a sufficient time horizon.
- Evidence that value migrations are random rather than directional, with no tendency toward new sources of meaningful differentiation within the changed environment.
- A demonstrated case where a capability retained its full recognized significance despite becoming structurally abundant, suggesting differentiation as defined was never the operative variable.
- Evidence that the adaptive reorganization described here does not hold across non-Western or pre-industrial historical contexts, which would limit the framework to a specific cultural condition rather than a general human pattern.
- Evidence that the recognition system, the social context within which differentiation is judged significant, is so variable across cultures and periods that no general pattern can be claimed.

Open Questions

WHAT REMAINS UNRESOLVED

Three open questions are carried forward. All are named honestly. None is resolved.

Open question one: differentiation or fitness?

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The framework currently proposes that humans adapt and differentiation emerges from that adaptation. But a harder question remains unanswered. Do humans value differentiation? Or do humans value fitness, and differentiation is simply how adaptive success becomes visible to others? Evolution does not reward difference. It rewards fitness. Difference is the consequence of fitness, not its cause. If the same logic applies to the Migration of Value, then the framework is not describing a drive toward distinction. It is describing adaptive fitness expressing itself as recognizable difference within a given environment. Those are not the same claim. The answer determines whether this is fundamentally a theory of human psychology or a theory of adaptive systems.

Open question two: does scarcity create value, or reveal it?

When technology removes the functional layer from a valued object or practice, what emerges? Is the remaining value newly created by the disruption, or was it always present, hidden beneath functional necessity? If technology removes the noise created by abundance, and what emerges is something humans always cared about, then the framework is not describing economic migration. It is describing what becomes visible when everything inessential is stripped away. That distinction, between value created by circumstance and value revealed by it, may ultimately determine whether this is a framework about markets or a framework about the nature of human meaning.

Open question three: power and contestation

Three historical cases have produced consistent evidence that migration outcomes are substantially determined by the organizational resources, political access, and institutional capacity of the parties involved, and not by differentiation logic alone. This framework describes the mechanism of migration accurately. It does not yet provide an adequate account of why



specific parties capture specific migrations. That gap is acknowledged here. It is the primary focus of the next round of testing.

Status

WHERE THIS STANDS

The evidence strongly suggests the Migration of Value describes a real and recurring pattern in human history. It does not prove it. The framework remains an evolving explanatory framework under continued historical validation.

Four drafts and a published edition in, the framework has become more precise with each iteration. Not longer. Not more elaborate. More precise. That is the right direction.

The six changes correct one factual inaccuracy from Pre-publication Draft 3 (the individual adaptation framing in Stage 5), replace inadequate vocabulary (the distribution binary at Stage 8 and the single differentiation category at Stage 6), name two mechanisms that repeated evidence had revealed but prior drafts left unnamed (unbundling and institutional resistance), and add the scholarly context section. No changes were made for theoretical elegance. All six are grounded in documented evidence from independent historical testing.

Technology perturbs the environment. The environment changes. An existing differentiator collapses and unbundles. Some individuals are displaced. Organizations adapt. Generations inherit the new environment. Revealed and created differentiation emerge. Value reorganizes around them. The migration is what that looks like from the outside. Technology was always just the trigger. The environment was always the medium. The human was always the story.

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