

Homo lotas | Human of micro things



Bigger the better crooned the Canadian Song Writer and Artist Nelly Furtado. We often come across the saying Think Big.....If you take care of the Big rocks the small things will take care of itself....an advice voiced ever so famously by Steven Covey, Author of The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

As human beings we have been by habit, obsessed with the Big. Big bank balances, Big Buildings, Big cars, Big job titles and big whatever. For each one of us Big has a certain meaning, a certain fulfilling meaning. Is Big going to make our lives more successful, more meaningful, more happy?

May be its time for – paradoxically - a Big shift! Its perhaps, time to explore some counter-intuitive possibilities.

We are now the only living members of what many zoologists refer to as the human tribe, Hominini. From *Australopithecus* to *Homo Erectus* to *Homo Neanderthalensis* to *Homo Sapiens*what is our next progression? Our next level of evolution?

In an era, when we are experiencing the astounding success and applications of Nano Technology, Micro Finance, Micro Learning.... is the universe giving us an allusion to where we can seek our answers from? Scientists have for many decades pondered over the remarkable similarities of our macro cosmos with the micro

universe that exists at the molecular, atomic and sub atomic levels. When viewed with an Electron microscope many substances resemble the macro worlds that we are accustomed to.

So are there answers to our macro problems in the micro?

A few decades ago, Argyris and Rousseau introduced the concept of Psychological Contracts or what I like to call Micro contracts in organisation settings. Micro contracts represent the mutual beliefs, perceptions and informal obligations between individuals engaged in relationships. But look at our everyday lives. Are we not living a life engulfed in Micro contracts? Are we not looking forward to the promise made by our friends for the get together this weekend? Do we not expect our colleagues to help voluntarily when they see us struggling in the office? Are we not anticipating that strangers standing in front of us in the airline queue will let us embark first, especially when we are wheelchair bound? We may be deploying Micro contracts more with many of our nearer ones than with people we consider distant. However Micro contracts may be in place even with strangers or with people who we have met in the digital space, on social media in virtual settings. Like with more formal contracts, the breach of a contract often has a consequence. Sometimes it is a hostile reaction, sometimes a drop in trust levels, sometimes a fissure in the relationship. Breaching a Micro contract often may lead to a deficit in the Emotional Bank Account.

It seems that there is after all some wisdom in examining the Micro. Take Micro messages for instance. Micro-Messages are small, subtle messages we send and receive verbally and non-verbally. Most micro messaging is not intentional. We communicate values and expectations subconsciously. These messages can be supportive (micro-affirmations) or negative (micro-inequities). We are all accustomed to micro messaging. We may have been at the receiving end. We may have been supportive, with micro messaging, without even realising it.

We may have been speaking to a person without making eye contact. We may be in a group and speak to another person in the same group in a language known only to the two of us. Someone may have called into share something important and we respond with low energy and inattentively. We may also have expressed empathically with a nod which could have had an encouraging effect on an otherwise nervous speaker on the stage. We may have smiled at a new neighbour in our building looking around awkwardly on his first day, settling in.

The impact of micro affirmations and micro inequities goes far deeper than what meets the eye. Coined by MIT researcher Mary Rowe, Microinequities—the seemingly harmless messages of devaluation—are a subset of the estimated 2,000 to 4,000 micro-messages that individuals send each day. Researchers cite that in the space of a one minute conversation, each individual will send between 40 and 50

micro-messages to one another. These small bits of meaning occupy a continuum with positive micro-affirmations on one end, and negative microinequities on the other. In the case of the latter, researchers contend that these negative micro-messages are rooted in powerful biases that are often subconscious.

While on the subject of the Micro, for many years now, American psychologist Paul Ekman, the world's expert in emotions and deception detection, has been conducting research to help people read and respond to micro expressions. He says that Micro expressions occur in everyone, often without their knowledge. What is more interesting is that according to Ekman, There is no way to prevent them from occurring and learning to detect this leakage is critical for emotional intelligence and deception detection. We do this intuitively many times. Unlike verbal communication or gestures, facial expressions are a universal system of signals which reflect the moment-to-moment fluctuations in a person's emotional state and we may have a natural inclination to be sensitive to another person's Micro Expressions. However at 1/25th of a second, micro expressions can be difficult to recognize and detect. It is possible that our biases may impact our reading of these micro expressions.

We examined contracts, messaging and expressions. What about decisions?

In organizations, communities and families a lot of emphasis is put on the big set-piece decision-making. However, people make decisions together in many informal ways. Researcher Gittel has examined decision-making in informal contexts, asking what affects the effectiveness of the decisions made. Her research found that two distinguishing criteria are the presence, or absence, of high quality communication and high quality relationships.

In an article on the subject, Harvard Business Review reports that when pundits talk about decisions, they are focused on the major ones made by powerful individuals. It's true that big decisions can create or destroy a lot of value. Like in companies, in communities or families or amongst individuals, however, those decisions don't typically happen very often. What we don't realize is that micro decisions — small decisions made many times by all of us at the interface, in the moment — can have a major impact, how they are made can be the difference between sloppy and effective execution, in building a great relationship or a weak unsustainable one.

What are examples of micro decisions – How did we explain turning down an invitation to a coffee by a neighbour? How was the call from the student who made an out of policy request handled? How did we decide on allocating time to the new employee who came to meet? How did we excuse from the little one's football match which coincided with the customer meeting?

If we can identify a few key micro-decisions that can be addressed and improved, we can often dramatically improve relationships, performance and prosperity.

Perhaps one way of shifting our focus from the Big or the Macro to the Small or the Micro is recommended by Author James Clear. He says Success is the product of daily micro habits—not once-in-a-lifetime transformations. The outcomes we generate are a lagging measure of our habits

Time magnifies the margin between success and failure. Daily micro choices will compound ten or twenty years down the line. Breakthrough moments are often the result of many micro actions, which build up the potential required to unleash a major change. Micro habits generate a compound interest of self-improvement. Getting 1 percent better every day counts for a lot in the long-run. He mentions that The Diderot Effect – The phenomena that obtaining a new possession often creates a spiral of consumption leading to additional acquisitions. So one of the best ways to build a new habit is to identify a current habit you already do each day and then stack a new micro habit on top. And let Diderot take effect. When we invest in a micro habit, we will over the long run experience macro change.

So still stuck in the delusion of the big, the macro?

Decades ago Author Arundhati Roy, wrote about the God of Small Things and went on to win the Man Booker prize. Perhaps the great human may not resemble a god. The great human may be the human of micro things..

Great things as the old adage goes, may after all come in micro packages. Micro contracts, Micro Messaging, Micro Expressions, Micro Decisions, Micro Habits..... Micro inputs. Macro Impact

The next level of evolution for Homo Sapiens. Homo Iotas.

(All views expressed here are the views of the essayist and does not represent the official standpoints of any organisation the essayist is associated with)