



RECOGNIZING EXAMPLES OF THE **7** CRUDE LAWS OF NON-LINEAR CHANGE

This chapter introduced the idea of the “7 Crude Laws of Change in Complex, Nonlinear Systems.” While these may be a new set of concepts for you, I encourage you to start applying these concepts to your own life. Below I list again the 7 Crude Laws—can you think of examples in your own life when you saw these rules play out?

7 CRUDE LAWS

RECOGNIZING THE LAWS

1 Complex, non-linear systems are highly sensitive to slight differences in [initial conditions](#).

Can you think of a time that the foot you started on—in a conversation, a relationship, a job, an event—felt like it set the tone for everything that came after?

2 Complex, non-linear systems tend to [move toward coherence and integration](#).

Can you think of a time that you were part of a new group or organization that quickly became implicitly or explicitly shaped by a set of mutually understood norms, rules, or expectations?

3 Attractors become [highly impervious to outside influences](#).

Can you think of a time that you were part of a group or event that had a clear way of doing things, and that was highly resistant to or even hostile toward outside input or influence?

4 However, [significant shocks](#) to strong attractors can destabilize their deep structure and ready them for radical change.

Can you think of a time in your life that some major shock to the system—an event, an illness, a death, a leadership change—fundamentally shifted the ground you stood on? Did this shock change what came next—in terms of how you viewed the world, what you valued, how you behaved, an organizational way of doing business, etc.?



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5 Complex, non-linear systems can also be significantly impacted by modifications to their most [basic rules of interaction](#).

RECOGNIZING THE LAWS

Can you think of a group or organization that you are a part of that has a clear set of rules for interacting? What are the norms and expectations that everyone understands and follows in these settings?

Are there certain fundamental rules or guidelines that you hold dear that shape how you behave in the world—in your family, your friendships, your workplace? How do these “rules” shape how you behave? Do other people you know seem governed by different basic rules of engagement?

6 Some changes in complex systems are more obvious and immediate, others are [invisible or delayed](#), but nevertheless consequential.

Can you think of a time where something or some event that happened a long time ago seemed to exert surprising effects much later on?

I encourage you to think of relevant examples from your own experience, but to make this less abstract, examples of this could include the way a relationship with a parent impacts a child’s relationships later in life, or the way a policy from the 1970s plays out in impactful ways decades later, or the long term effects of changing demographics on voting patterns.



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7 Significant changes to tightly-coupled systems—or systems where different beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and norms are closely linked together and interdependent—almost always result in [unintended consequences](#).

RECOGNIZING THE LAWS

Can you think of a time in your own life—either in a relationship, or in your family, or at a workplace—that a well-intentioned effort to change something for the better actually made things worse, or led to unexpected other consequences?

REFLECT

Do these laws—and thinking about examples of these laws playing out in your own life—change how you think about where you'd start trying to make change in complex systems? How?

