

# Navigating Human-Centered Management in the Digital Age

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**2015 Global Drucker Challenge  
Managing Oneself in the Digital Age**

## **Drucker's Call to Action**

Always ahead of his time, Peter Drucker pioneered a call to action for managers and subordinate individuals alike to prepare for the business challenges presented in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, stressing the inevitable effects of shifting work ethics, morals, political ideologies, economic theory, global relationships, and above all technological advancements. As an incessant exponentially developing sector, digital technology has become an essential component in today's approach to communicating with others, remaining socially "in-tune" with the world, and especially to business improvement, development, and management. The relationship society has with technology today, and will indubitably continue to have, is one of a symbiosis of sorts – a constant give and take, a call and respond, or balance of inputs and outputs – that will contribute to the direction humanity moves forward as one race. As Drucker insisted, individuals and humanity alike will only be able to accept the challenges of the ever-fluid advancement of technology by revolutionizing the approach to firstly managing oneself, then to business cultures and local communities, but most importantly and recently, to work together to manage the global human network.

## **A Symbiosis of Sorts**

As individual people and as humanity alike, it is important that the human relationship with digital technologies is best understood by realizing and working off of similarities of the two, while recognizing and appropriately addressing the differences. It is imperative to understand this relationship in three perspectives. First, as technologies advance and capabilities increase, it is important to know how to best leverage digital technologies to strengthen human capacities and drive the innovative global society forward. However, this rampant advancement should not remain unchecked and balanced by the human experience and essence, by the emphasis of the strong moral and ethical compass of those working to benefit society. The injection of what it is to be human is essential to this relationship, justifying a model of symbiosis – a marriage of technology and humanity – to navigate the turbulent and ever-moving tides of technological advancement.

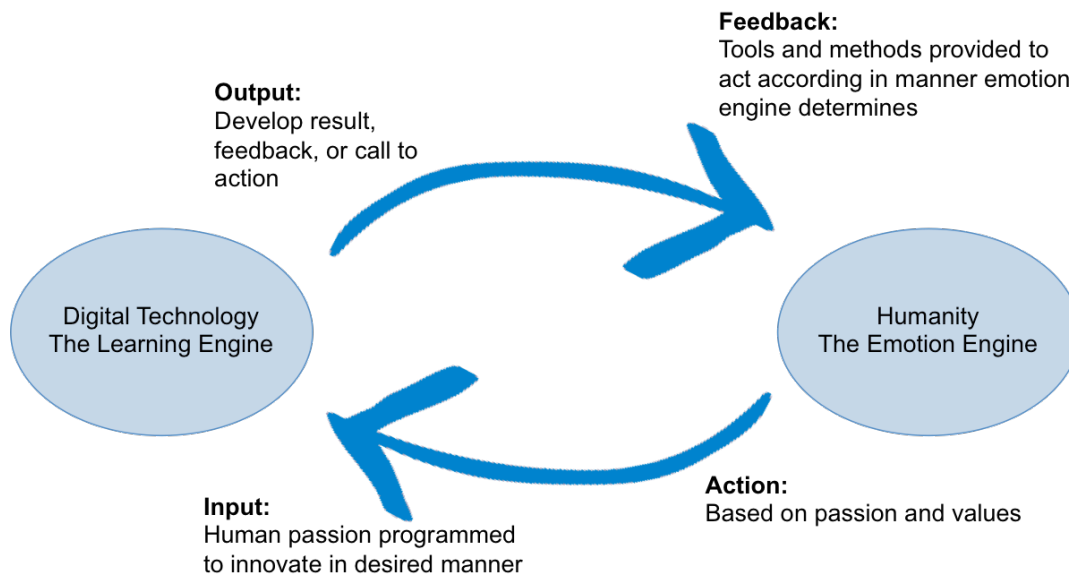
There is no question that technology makes life much easier. Difficult or tedious tasks become simple and efficient, and quality of life generally improves with productivity from digital technology advancements. When we act or make a decision, today's (and more so the future's) technology responds and provides understandable and efficient feedback. We can then make our next, more educated action or decision based on the

feedback technology provides to streamline our productivity or enjoyment depending on the use of the technology. By leveraging and acting on the data and information technology provides, we engage in an evolutionary dance with Peter Drucker's self management tools of asking "What are my strengths?" "How do I perform?" and "How do I learn?"<sup>1</sup> Technology has strengthened the human ability to determine answers to these questions and provide feedback analyses with action conclusions. It aids us immensely in individual and business settings to develop continuous improvement models that can almost run on auto-pilot. It is because of these efficiency capabilities that entrepreneurs and intrepeneurs more assuredly test the vast digital possibilities in their market or individual cases. As technology continues to progress, advanced algorithms and automated processes drastically lower the cost involved in developing, obtaining feedback, and iterating on even more ideas. However, without proper guidance from humanity, these digital advancements could be fruitless. Drucker believed that "[t]here is surely nothing quite so useless as doing with great efficiency what should not be done at all."<sup>2</sup> Managing this digital lever requires the human touch.

Surrounded by continuously improvement technology, the human piece of this symbiotic relationship begs to answer "what is it truly to be human?" What is it that preserves humanity's importance when computing power surely will surpass us in this lifetime? The answer lies in what has always made humans unique: *passion*. Humans develop emotions and opinions in coordination with their strengths and values to perceive and respond to the world. This emotion engine is the symbiotic factor humanity presents to technology. Humanity, down to the individual striving to manage oneself, injects its passions, beliefs, morals, and values into its work unlike any way technology can try. More importantly, Drucker points out, "where there is success, there has to failure."<sup>3</sup> While it is true technology can fail in ways similar to humans, the human condition reacts extremely differently to failure – it inspires and enflames passion, the key human element, and the crux for managing oneself in a digital age.

How does this symbiosis play out? How do we leverage the technology piece while creating value that is guided by human passion? How do we let the digital component rationalize the process but use our strength to implement and augment? The diagram below depicts this proposed symbiosis while also referencing Drucker's call to determine "what one's strengths are."<sup>4</sup> In sum, the cycle depicts that technology provides the tools and feedback that strengthen the individual human, for where the human directs these given strengths through his funnel of passion and ethics to determine how technology and innovation progress. One might envision a present day or future Drucker adding the additional soul searching quandary of "*What are your passions?*" to his list of self-guiding precepts.

## Humanity and Digital Technology Symbiosis



Drawing more on Drucker's management precepts, this symbiotic relationship should encompass an understanding of roles and trust. Like Drucker calls us to evaluate and understand the strengths, performance, and values of our bosses and colleagues, we should similarly evaluate technology's strengths and performances. It's then in turn up to us to ensure that it understands our strengths, performance, and values. With an establishment of roles, we are called to trustfully and diligently manage technology as we would manage Drucker's relationship responsibility model today.<sup>5</sup> Treating this digital technology piece as such allows for the technology's capabilities to be leveraged, but not at the expense of the individual human guiding the values and driving the passion into the project.

### From Managing Oneself to Managing the World

Navigating Peter Drucker's self-management piece in today's world is no easy task, especially for Millennials and like-minded individuals, who carry the torch for creating the future and leading the masses through this fast-moving technology world, all while balancing their personal self worth and aspirations. As Drucker points out that individuals work longer than companies or careers last, and throwing in the need to constantly adapt to new technologies, today's knowledge worker must continuously reevaluate her passions and strengths, values and ethics, and find her sense of belonging in order to propagate success. The knowledge worker must remain rigid in focusing and planning her future careers while maintaining an essence of fluidity and adaptability, as Millennials shift jobs or careers more frequently than any other generation. Being nimble

in specific work, but steadfast in passion and values clarifies Drucker's message of managing oneself, but introduces the element of passion to the equation to navigate the technology relationships of the day.

As Drucker alludes to, this philosophy expediently infects larger groups of knowledge workers, inspiring cultural change and effective team management. For example, combining technology with cultural concepts such as Social Entrepreneurship and Human-Centered Design have expanded immensely in recent times, changing how a larger company, industry, or community reacts. In a valuable experience I have had, I learned how to help manage opportunities for my community when the right technology came along:

Devastated for decades, the once proud and booming manufacturing city of South Bend, Indiana is haunted by economic decay, and despite having four college level academic institutions in its community, suffers from "brain drain" and is unable to retain graduates in the local area. However, with the enhancement of a few technological assets, and a handful of catalysts teaming together to manage and fuel the passion and ethical use of the technology, cultural change has occurred. I joined this cultural shift with a team of fellow recent graduates, and functioning as a non-profit startup called enFocus, we developed bold technological solutions to impact local government, non-profits, and for profit businesses. Our passion for improving the city contributed millions of dollars in savings to the local community.<sup>6</sup> Now an open data city, South Bend has changed its course considerably. Just four years after ranking in the top ten on Newsweek's "America's Dying Cities" list in 2011, South Bend has been identified as a top city in the world for its data and fiber assets, including being the first city in the world to manage its water systems in the cloud.<sup>7,8</sup> With the innovative successes of managing technology with value and passion, the city has attracted graduates, more businesses, and entrepreneurs to a place perfect for testing new and bold ideas, lending the city the unofficial nickname "The Beta City." In this case, managing our team's passion combined with the introduction of technology opened doors for enFocus and others to bond and be a part of something bigger than themselves and affect the greater good.

After my valuable start up experience at enFocus, I changed careers, as Millennials will do, to a more intreprenurial marketing and product development role at a leading global musical instrument manufacturing company. Studying the corporate culture at a company relatively unfamiliar with the nimble, fast-paced, and technologically charged environment of my previous role has been an enlightening exercise in how to adapt and manage myself. Drawing on my strengths in technology, understanding how I have performed in the past, and listening to my passions in music and marketing, Drucker's exercise could not be more relevant as I develop continue to develop my personal management skills, as well as work to understand corporate human-centered management. As an aspiring executive, Drucker's claim that "each of us is a CEO," could not ring truer for me as I imagine myself in a decision maker position in the future.<sup>9</sup>

This exercise evokes Drucker's requirements that a successful 21<sup>st</sup> century CEO guides for his business: vision, organization personality, and influence. These aspects must continually be nourished as the CEO seeks to manage the corporation, but also himself as the figurehead and leader. He is in charge of listening, learning, and adapting to set the course, especially as technology continually interrupts. Because of this he must periodically check the company in the mirror, making sure that the digital as well as non-digital actions the company is taking are appropriate and respectful of the living, breathing company culture.<sup>10</sup> In reference to the symbiosis detailed before, an executive must represent the emotion engine for the entire company, for example, by listening to the marketing data provided by digital technologies, and then in turn guiding the story and message that the company will tell. This storytelling role is crucial to not only engaging with customers, but developing loyalty and the ability to continually serve customers. According to Drucker, "[t]here are only two functions in any organization: marketing and innovation, both of which create a relationship with the customer."<sup>11,12</sup> Reflecting on a manufacturing company like the one I am now a part of, some of the biggest challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century involve remaining relevant by not solely relying on innovations in new products, but serving the market with a story, with passion and permission to believe in product value. Consequently, today many of the best methods to tell a story or how to communicate those ideas and maintain relevancy involve engaging in the use of digital technology, with the bottom line goal of serving customers. When capitalizing on digital marketing that serves the emotional and passionate components of a customer base, a CEO has successfully navigated managing oneself (as a company) in the digital age.

The final piece in managing oneself in the digital age involves the expansion of the Drucker fundamentals even beyond the community or corporate level, to a much bigger scale. The exponential rate of digital technological advances correlates indirectly with how big the world feels to humanity. With instant global communication and interaction already widely available, the global human society is more connected now than ever. Drucker's principles of managing oneself must also apply to this global stage. This symbiotic relationship with technology must likewise be cared for by balancing and respecting the different strengths, values, and passions of the global community, a daunting task no doubt that will be have to be figured out and carried out by today's knowledge workers, with the attention focus on Millennials. The moral compass has certainly not settled on due north, and the global scales of judgment have not been balanced. Each of us must pick up not only our personal management mantle, but each of us must assume global responsibility. A hopeful Peter Drucker speaking today might challenge that *each of us must become a world leader*.

## Endnotes

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