

# DR. DRUCKER'S HUMAN ANATOMY OF A MANAGER IN CRISIS

Mind that is open to the majority, but more importantly equipped with fact finding tools

Eye sight capable of looking past mistakes and into the organization's future

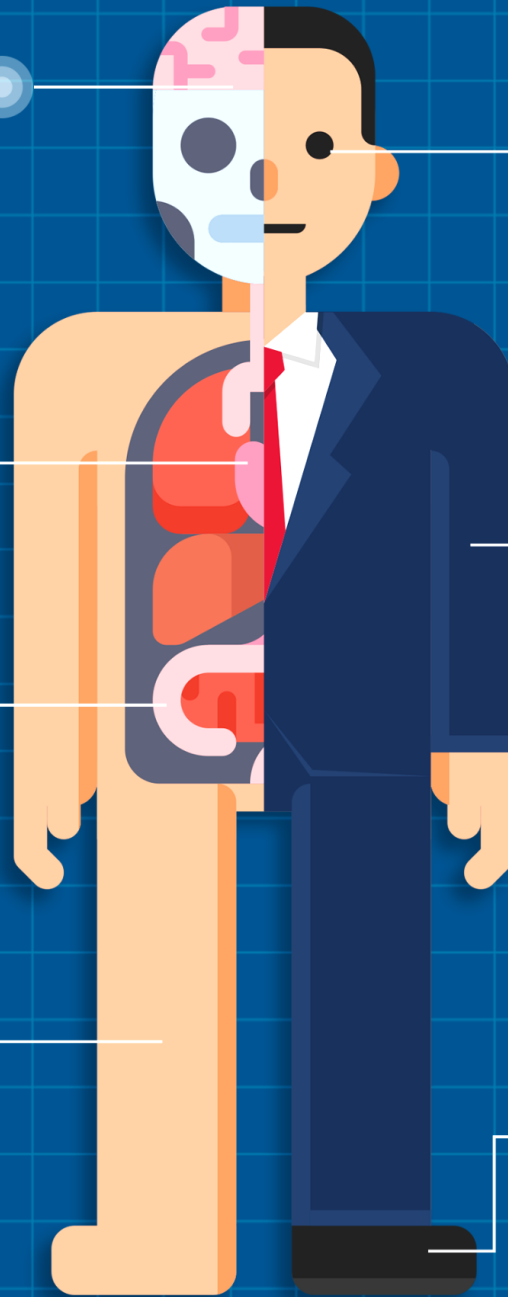
Heart for the practice that is management

Arms never letting go of the company / organization's mandate

Guts to make unconventional yet measured decisions

Agile thighs for competing in the fast paced market

A sturdy foundation in the form of the institution's mission and vision



## **Dr. Drucker's Human Anatomy of a Manager in Crisis**

### **Humbling Encounter**

I am one who conjures random imaginary companions in my mind. They are all manifestations of self-absorption or curiosity, and in that way they are warped and tailored to my creativity; often-time pictured as combinations of famous personalities or professionals whom I find interesting. These companions' purpose? –to accompany their creator in his random adventures, providing him with hearty discussions surrounding the vastness of life. From passively sipping a cold-brewed caramel macchiato in a cafe near the city edge to just lying around in the living room, even when there was no one else around, I truly never felt alone.

One cold February day, while in the midst of watching TV news where Covid-19 was bringing down its hammer on various institutions across the world, the words 'organization', 'company', and 'management' were in the spotlight. Just like that, like manifesting a cuckoo in clockwork, a rather interesting fellow sprung up in my neural networks. Poised, self composed, and comfortably seated in our dusty sofa, "Peter Drucker" he introduced, with eyes glinting behind his massive glasses. "Management sage, author, philosopher... Doctor" he added.

Doctor? Great, another by-product of watching too many medical documentaries and the famed Grey's Anatomy Series.

"Tell me, why in the figment of man's imagination is God or the Higher Being/s so often pictured in the human body?"

"A rather peculiar first question to ask, and at the same time I can't whip up a definite answer to that sir." I answered reluctantly.

"It's because it is said that the human body is/are the Higher Being/s embodiment to seek freedom in all things that can be done in life - especially for progress. It is an invention which evolved and got tested through time, revamped again and again to be its current structure driven towards goals which are ultimately encompassed by the desire for survival." My new companion dusted his wool tailored suit and with great dazzle he fully turned himself towards me. "I assume you are curious as to how these

organizations are going to pull themselves out of this horrible quagmire. Don't you worry, I am here to tingle your inner-thinking."

"It is indeed an honor to be able to converse with you regarding these topics sir, I won't definitely let it go to waste! How should we start?"

## **Understanding New Perspectives**

"...I'm more interested in people than I am in how businesses work."

- Peter Drucker

People interaction is a very important thing we lost during the pandemic. Dr. Drucker pointed out to me that this posed a great problem in relation to three of eight important practices on what makes executives effective. As he said, the loss of interaction hinders communication, asking of what needs to be done, and lastly it hinders running productive meetings, often resulting in the current shambles of skewed priorities and false information.

"Imagine you lost your nervous and endocrine systems - the great viaducts of information in the body. Some organizations might certainly feel that way today. As I once said 'knowledge has power, it controls access to opportunity and advancement.'" Cells are the building blocks of the human body, meanwhile it is people for businesses and management. Losing touch with them is like being unable to pull your hand back as it will be engulfed by flames. Knowledge and information that could swerve a business away from the quagmire comes from the people within or at times from outside the organization, and a manager in crisis knows that.

Take the interesting *Ajinomoto* anecdote as an example. In the story, *Ajinomoto*, a Japan based company selling food seasonings and condiments, was conducting hiring interviews. Participants were asked a simple question during the interview - given top management's worries on the company's sales figures this year, how do you suppose *Ajinomoto* can effectively raise them? The typical answers given were to increase marketing strategies (ex. television advertisements, promotion of products in cooking magazines). Yet, a single answer stood out from the rest and it was to 'widen the holes of the condiment shaker.' It was a very innovative, unorthodoxically daring, and cost efficient solution to the company's problem, and this type of information would more likely come from the company's bottom level (or even from its cafeteria cooks), rather

than its top management. Valuable as they are, unstandard yet calculated solutions like what was mentioned in the anecdote, are those which managers need to be hungry for.

Journalist and editor Jemma Smith characterized management as a people centric practice in which building relations are integral. Furthermore, she also mentioned task delegation as equally vital. Intriguingly, my guru companion once defined in his works the eighth practice of an effective executive as: one who thought and said “we” rather than “I.”

Dr. Drucker pulled himself out of the sofa and slowly paced towards our kitchen table, his brown leather shoes glistening with freshly applied polish. He then looked back at me and invited me to come over. “Can you lift up this gallon of water for me?” he asked. Befuddled, I just did as told and lifted it up with my right arm. “Now, please do the same thing with the other water gallon right next to it.” Conforming to his request, I then raised the other container with my left arm. “See? Task delegation as simple as that!” he exclaimed. “If your organization is burdened with the problem of carrying two gallons of water, it's logical to give one gallon to each arm based on the fact that you have two, and that one arm can only carry a certain amount at a time. Additionally, you lifted with your arms and not your feet, since they are most appropriate for the job.”

Effective managers henceforth need to work like how our bodies do. They are to focus on not losing important information - through constant communication (whether physical or digital), with people inside and outside of their institution. They can then properly deliberate tasks given their different resources and fundamental limits, based on the information they initially garnered.

### **Manifestations in the Real World**

From time to time, Dr. Drucker was scarce in my thoughts since I was preoccupied with other things. Despite that, his first appearance was the catalyst for an avalanche of realizations and ponderings. There is indeed a commonality between institutions and the body. Both are driven by unique smaller units, and both have that prime desire to move forward in society for as much and as long as they can; but we know life is a great giver of lemons, in which it gave us a juicy one in 2020 in the form of Covid-19.

Businesses found themselves limited by the situation - shortened business hours, fewer customers, restricted supplies, and a prevalent shift to the digital medium.

Regardless, some were able to champion these hurdles by simple nature (ex. ecommerce stores, online delivery services, etc.), or by possessing a completely different factor, being agile.

Consider this small clothing and accessories retail store in my hometown whose sales didn't wane but in fact grew during the pandemic; a feat malls were unable to accomplish. Apart from shifting online, they focused on delivering products to employed resellers residing in different towns all over the province, who in turn directly sold the products straight to the customers. This served as a two pronged approach to the new normal by leaping over the conundrum of selling through physical stores during lockdowns, and by having a people network. The latter helped supply the retail store with important information such as varying demands of customers from town to town when it comes to clothing trends. "They need to have agile thighs and minds open to the majority to continually change direction in this fast paced market." as Dr. Drucker used to say in our conversations. A further supplementation to the idea, quoted from his earlier work *The Daily Drucker*: 'Any business enterprise has two — and only two — basic functions: marketing and innovation.'

On the public side, with the need for mass testing in the Philippines during the first quarter of 2021, the vice president of the country deployed *Swab Cab* - a free and mobile antigen swab service which cuts costs compared to the establishment of multiple swab centers across Philippine cities. A couple of weeks later, the country started its vaccination programs, in which the VP envisioned the shift of the prior *Swab Cab* services to mobile vaccination centers in order for the country to reach herd immunity faster. "A manager's eyes should see beyond the first goal. He needs to squint to further view the plethora of goals awaiting." as my companion had once told me in our living room discussions.

### **Acknowledging What Make us Human**

To err is human - in the process of achieving goals, there are always the ideas of hindrance and failure. In fact, in educational systems, there is a whole study devoted to those factors, usually in the realm of risk management. It is often defining capabilities and limitations within the organization that shines clarity on whatever factors could possibly give negative implications. It also clarifies what is achievable for the time being.

Peter Drucker himself fervently gave importance to the involvement of human characteristics into organizational work, he wrote: 'Organizing work according to its own logic is only the first step. The second and far more difficult one is making work suitable for human beings—and their logic is radically different from the logic of work. Making the worker achieving, implies consideration of the human being as an organism having peculiar physiological and psychological properties, abilities, and limitations, and a distinct mode of action.'

Building up from the earlier topic of delegation, failures often happen due to organization's negligence over the limits of their resources (particularly human resources). At times, executives fail to see the bigger picture and avoid delegation over the fear that it is a sign of weakness. Jemma Smith countered that idea by stating 'Delegation isn't a sign of weakness, and can in fact multiply the amount of work that a manager can accomplish - while developing the team's confidence and skills.' In a similar sentiment by Gary Veynerchuk, a businessman and entrepreneur, he expounded that delegation isn't about weakness but about ego. Even though being multi-disciplinary is a step to being a successful manager, there is still a well defined line between that and learning when to let go, since some tasks are doable by the bright, interesting people hired by the organization.

Managers need to recognize that workers together with themselves, have personal limits - defined by the scope of their expertise or strengths; such limits are even multiplied during moments of crises. Successful executives should thus stick by an important phrase in *The Daily Drucker* when maximum work efficiency is not achieved: 'Just because a person doesn't perform in the job he or she was put in doesn't mean the person is a bad worker whom the company should let go. It only means he or she is in the wrong job.'

### **Navigating Through Uncertainty**

All of the prior discussions with Dr. Drucker could be a guide to counter future life-lemons. "It's so easy to bridge gaps, young 'un. Another commonality between organizations and the human body is that it is always experiencing something new. The coronavirus is something that the two had never experienced before."

When the body is under attack from external microbes, it just doesn't stand idly. The immune system deploys white blood cells and antibodies to counter the invasion.

People themselves also change course, by having a doctor's checkup and by resting to avoid worse effects. In addition, reactive action isn't the only choice, as there is also prevention through vaccination and having a healthy or active lifestyle.

"There is nothing permanent except change."

- Heraclitus

As one belonging to the younger generation born into the digital world, I could attest to the accelerating growth of information; data is easily reachable through a press of a phone screen, or a scroll of a computer mouse. For leaders and executives faced with changes left and right, the presence of vast information can be overwhelming or worse, detrimental. In order to avoid such circumstances, it is best to revisit all of the initial perspectives that Dr. Drucker had helped me realize: investing in a people network, properly delegating tasks, acknowledging limits, and having organizations work like our bodies. To cap it all off, there is also a need for constant adjustments and preparations; like athletes before competitions, whose figures had been honed to the hilt. Managers hence need to adapt fast, and they have to change or much more, abandon strategies from situation to situation. Warren Buffet in the context of how he deals with businesses and stocks, said: "Should you find yourself in a chronically leaking boat, energy devoted to changing vessels is likely to be more productive than energy devoted to patching leaks."

The current situation is therefore a call to the younger generation - future executives and leaders in society, to make use of their fast paced nature and change vessels quickly when necessary, to overtake the effects of crises yet to come.

## **The Overarching Idea**

Humbling Encounter

Understanding New Perspectives

Manifestations in the Real World

Acknowledging What Make us Human

Navigating Through Uncertainty

\*With a play of words, the first letters of the section titles put together spells out H-U-M-A-N. Acknowledgement of the importance of the human factor by an organization gives it strength. Understanding the soundness of human structure, as Dr.

Drucker my imaginary companion had shown, can give institutions a sturdier foundation in the ever changing times. Amplifying the importance of human judgement, especially in multiplinary disciplines, can alleviate misinformation and blunders in a world of rising digitization and Artificial Intelligence. Knowing human limitations is like knowing the boundaries of what is realistic and achievable for the organization. The ideal manager in crisis is one who starts with knowing what is HUMAN.

"The world belongs to humanity, not this leader, that leader, kings or religious leaders. The world belongs to humanity..."

- The Dalai Lama

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