

## The Pokemon generation – ‘Exploring and creating the new age’

Over the past few days, I have been spending more time than I would care to admit on a mobile phone game. I’ve been playing it everywhere – at home, at university, at the pool, when I’m on my daily run.... And I’m hardly the only one. One could say that a revolution of sorts has been taking place. Like all other revolutions, this one, too, has young men and women taking to the streets. However, it differs from normal revolutions in its scope and in its nature. From New York to London to Melbourne, people from across the world seem to be responding to its call. This time though, the people on the streets are glued on to their smartphones screens, and they are all trying to catch virtual Pokémon.

Within three days of launch, the app, which lets users capture wild pocket monsters, had more daily active users than twitter, and saw greater engagement than Facebook. National park rangers in the US reported that they were seeing an unprecedented amount of visitors due to Pokémon ‘hunters’, and police in New Zealand had to issue multiple warnings because people were kayaking and swimming out into the middle of the Oriental Bay in pursuit of Pokémon.

All of this reminded me of a brilliant article which The Economist had published on the twentieth birthday of Pokémon in February of this year.

“Pokémon is a Darwinian tale of observation, collection and recording”, it reads, “with Buddhist mind-set, featuring a protagonist, Ash Ketchum, sporting denim jeans with a sense of adventure akin to a wandering Sufi... Ask millennials about their childhood or teenage years and many will surely scream Pokémon until yellow in the face. Pokémon transformed the way in which millennials identify with their place in the world.”

How wonderfully this article captures the ethos of our generation, a generation which has grown up hearing stories about how denim clad wanderers, sharing Ash Ketchum’s sense of adventure, changed the world by starting companies like Google and Apple.

It will not be stretch to claim that entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg have now become pop cult symbols, much like musicians and athletes. Countless books have been written about them, and they have had big ticket Hollywood blockbusters made on their lives.

And they are inspiring an entire generation of young people to reject conventional career choices and go their own way.

This May, I was fortunate enough to be one of the students invited to the St Gallen's Symposium in Switzerland. Dozens of heads of state and CEO's of Fortune – 500 companies had graced the event. One the way over, I looked at the bios of the speakers at the event. The list read – CEO, CEO, Founder, Founding President, and so on. Then, I looked at the bios of the students attending the conference. I was surprised to see a very similar list there too – Founder, Co-Founder, etc. The entrepreneurial bug certainly seems to have badly bitten the millennial generation.

**'Bigness is not an obstacle to entrepreneurship'** – Peter Drucker

Peter Drucker, however, somewhat counter intuitively, states that that big organizations actually have a greater scope to be entrepreneurial. In his landmark 1985 book "Innovation and Entrepreneurship", he wrote:

"It is not size that is an impediment to entrepreneurship and innovation; it is the existing operation itself, and especially the existing successful operation. And it is easier for a big or at least a fair-sized company to surmount this obstacle than it is for a small one."

Drucker listed seven potential sources of innovation and entrepreneurship (which have since become management gospel). As long as medium sized and large businesses keep these seven rules in mind, he said, they would be able to leverage their size into gaining much larger amounts of the beneficial effects of entrepreneurship.

Interestingly, Nintendo (the company that developed 'Pokemon Go') only came up with the idea because, consciously or unconsciously, it was following

one of Peter Drucker's rules for entrepreneurship – “Always analyze unexpected success”.

The inspiration of the idea for the app was a prank played by Google in April, 2014. Google had integrated a “Pokemon Challenge” into its widely used ‘Maps’ feature, whereby users could see Pokémon on the roads and streets via Google Maps. John Nanke, CEO of Nintendo Games, looked at the success of the prank, and decided that this could very well be a video game of its own. And two years later, the company launched the game.

**‘Management may well both be more needed and have greater impact on the small entrepreneurial organization than it has in the big “managed” one.’  
– Peter Drucker**

I must confess that before reading Drucker, I too, thought of entrepreneurship and management as being dichotomous. Entrepreneurship was the exciting unknown, full of new possibilities. On the other hand management was an exact science, to be learned from text books and case studies. It's only when I read Drucker that I realized that entrepreneurship itself is something that can be managed!

Silicon Valley is one of my favourite television shows. This show centres on the day to day activities of four young misfits who decide to reject corporate life, and they set up a company of their own. Deeply mistrustful of anything that smacks of corporatism, they repeatedly mock the management techniques of a new employee who joins them from a much larger firm. After much reluctance, they agree to adopt one project management technique that he suggests— Scrum. And *voila*, productivity dramatically increases overnight.

Such stories don't just belong to the realm of fiction. In ‘Innovation and Entrepreneurship’, Drucker took the example of Thomas Edison.

Today, we all know Thomas Edison as a great inventor. His real ambition, however, was to be business builder and be a tycoon. You would think that the man who has as a product the first light bulb would not face much of a difficulty in doing so. He knew exactly how to get all the money he could possibly need for his ventures. His products were immediate successes and the demand for them practically insatiable. But Edison remained an entrepreneur;

or rather, he thought that “managing” meant being the boss. He refused to build a management team. And so every one of his four or five companies collapsed ignominiously once it got to middle size, and was saved only by booting Edison himself out and replacing him with professional management.

It is worthwhile to note that in his book, Drucker used a very different definition of entrepreneurship than the one we use today. Wikipedia describes it as “Entrepreneurship has traditionally been defined as the process of designing, launching and running a new [business](#), which typically begins as a [small business](#), such as a [start-up company](#), offering a product, process or service for sale or hire”.

Drucker, however, called that ‘New Venture Creation’. He makes a distinction between that and entrepreneurship.

‘The husband and wife who open another delicatessen store or another Mexican restaurant in the American suburb surely take a risk.’ he writes.’ But are they entrepreneurs? All they do is what has been done many times before. They gamble on the increasing popularity of eating out in their area, but create neither a new satisfaction nor new consumer demand. ‘

Pokemon Go, on the other hand (as I can personally attest to), has created much new satisfaction.

As I aspire to work in the social sector after graduating college, I was reassured by Drucker’s declaration that Entrepreneurship is not limited to For-Profit organizations alone, something that flies in the face of today’s overtly monetary definition of the term.

The Girl’s Scouts of America, for example, started noticing that their traditional sources for volunteers to run local activities were drying up, as young mothers were no longer sitting at home searching for things to do, but were going to work. So, it immediately redesigned its activities to make them more attractive to the working mother, who wanted to have fun and spend time with her child, while contributing to her child’s development at the same time. It recognized that with the movement of women into professions and managerial positions, girls need new programs and role models that stress professional and business careers rather than the traditional careers as homemaker or nurse.

It was able to do this because it kept an eye out for one trend that Drucker said would always be an evergreen source on entrepreneurial opportunities – Demographic change.

Moreover, I am doubly glad I read the book because although it is on Innovation and Entrepreneurship, it also forced me to rethink some of my personal habits.

It is telling of Drucker's people-centric management style that many of the insights he has developed for business and entrepreneurship are relevant, perhaps even more so, for people to apply in their own lives too.

For example, One advice that Drucker offers companies is –

**'Of course problems have to be taken care of. But don't let opportunities die of neglect.'** – Peter Drucker

Managers at board meetings, he says, are so concerned about where the company is not performing up to mark; that they fail to take to analyze where the company is performing better than expected, and why.

I feel that this is great personal advice as well. We usually get so caught up in the problems of our lives that we stop thinking about the opportunities that life provides. We should not forget to ask ourselves – 'What have I done well? And how can I stretch myself to do even better?'

Another place where companies go wrong, he say, is oftentimes they take pride in doing things the hard way. The R&D department of Bell Labs invented the transistor in 1947. Everyone knew that this would eventually replace the vacuum tube, which was then used in all televisions and radio sets. However, all major manufacturers of that time claimed that the transistor at that time was not good enough for the radio and television, and they would wait till 1970 till the transistor is improved.

Sensing an opportunity, Sony's President Akio Morita bought the patents from Bell Labs for an absurdly low amount. Two years later, Sony had introduced the first transistor in the market. Eight years later, they had captured the radio market across the world, which paved the way for their future success.

To paraphrase Drucker – ‘It is a typical example of pride in doing things the hard way. The Americans were so proud of the wonderful radios of those days, the great Super Heterodyne sets that were such marvels of craftsmanship. Compared to them, they thought silicon chips low grade, if not indeed beneath their dignity’

Most of us either are, or strive to be perfectionists. After all, so many of our role models, ranging from Steve Jobs to James Cameron (Or Flaubert, searching for ‘Le Mot Juste’), are perfectionists too. Oftentimes, however, this hurts us. It is far more productive to start something and evaluate over time rather than overanalysing about the best choice one can make. Like Drucker assures us about decision-making: "there are at best only "mostly right" and "almost wrong""

**“Businesses that are being betrayed by their habits will not admit it and will find all kinds of excuses.” – Peter Drucker**

As anyone who has ever read a detective novel will know, criminals often get caught because of their *modus operandi* (Or M.O., or method of operation). A habitual criminal will always commit his crimes in the same way, allowing the police to track him down.

Businesses too often score self goals because of innate characteristics that they would never admit to. Here, Drucker gave the example of Xerox, which tried time and time again to capture every single consumer in the market. When the Japanese came in with their copiers in competition with Xerox, they designed machines that fitted specific groups of users—for example, the small office, whether that of the dentist, the doctor, or the school principal.

They did not try to match the features of which the Xerox people themselves were the proudest, such as the speed of the machine or the clarity of the copy (again, perfectionism at work).

This holds true for me too. Countless times, I have procrastinated and put off doing assignments and studying tests. And yet, it always seems so easy and

convenient to blame a whole set of other factors, rather than accept full responsibility.

For me, however, Drucker's most revealing insight was when he analyzed companies that have managed to find a very profitable niche, which is compatible with their own strengths and culture, and have proceeded to dominate that niche.

### **'Try finding a profitable ecological niche for yourself' – Peter Drucker**

Drucker, in this case, cited the example of Dewey and Almy, a company, which since, 1930's has been manufacturing and selling a compound which seals tin cans. The company has been dominating this particular niche for such a long time now, and has, through constant innovation, pushed costs so low that now it's not worth anyone's while to challenge them.

I feel like this is relevant for young graduates choosing their line of work too. First, understand what your value system is and what your core strengths are. Then, choose to do work that is complementary to them. And then, through constant effort, try to dominate whatever niche you've chosen for yourself and do your best to become the best in the world at it.

While reading about Drucker's views on entrepreneurship, I must admit that I felt a strong sense of hope. Millennials, I feel, certainly do not lack the raw material that makes a good entrepreneur.

('It (Pokemon) celebrates adventure, instant data, and diverse friendships—including that with your enslaved pet', The Economist's article concludes). A willingness to explore, to travel the world, to reject the conventional, all of these are traits which manifest themselves in our generation. We just need a little gentle guidance, the right sort of role models, and we'll be all right.

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