

Peter Drucker Challenge 2017 – Human Prosperity in a changing world

AN EDUCATED PERSON IS A SEED OF HUMAN PROSPERITY

The concept of prosperity can mean many things to many people. Think about it for a minute. Traditionally, when people think of prosperity, they think of monetary prosperity. It has normally been about money—material accumulation, the home you purchase, the number in the bank account. However, the Prosperity Index can clarify what the concept most thoroughly encompasses. The Prosperity Index is annually released by the UK-based Legatum Institute, which ranks 149 countries across 104 variables grouped into 9 equally weighted factors: economic quality; business environment; governance; education; health; safety and security; personal freedom; social capital; and natural environment. In 2015, the number of factors stopped at 8 and it was just added the last factor in 2016. It means prosperity relies on a confluence of possible factors in a real life.

Since the first published in 2007, the Index has consistently shown that the top of the list is dominated by developed countries in the West while at the other end of the spectrum sit poorest countries in Africa and Middle East. Some articles considered the countries topping the list are the world's happiest, safest and richest countries. Regardless of what the Index indicates and what methodology Legatum's researchers conduct, I can see those prosperous European nations have better quality of life than in developing and underdeveloped countries. However, in the heart of where I am living – Vietnam, I could feel happy as much as the other Vietnamese in spite of the fact that the lack of basic necessities predominantly exists. This led me to the questions:

- Does being rich, literally owning a lot of money and possessions, lead to prosperity and happiness?
- Can I find prosperity and happiness in a disadvantaged condition in a developing country?
- Is the level of prosperity and happiness appreciation I gain the same as that the others around the world have?

As any individual on earth, I always desire and search for happiness in life. Therefore, I took these questions very personal and serious for a long time as a guiding star in my own journey to happiness. Although the essay opening is zoomed in at the macro level, where the ecology should be presented but will barely be affected by an individual, the main focus of this essay is articulating the answers in a personal lens, where changes can always be made with no limitations.

Happiness and Prosperity

Monetary prosperity is only one kind of prosperity. Prosperity is not static, about how much tangible assets that one owns. It is factored holistically in different human aspects to create lasting prosperity, not temporary richness. To redefine prosperity beyond finances, we can look at our health, relationships, intellectual growth, spiritual capital, and emotional wellbeing. It is undeniable that having money makes life easier, but it does not make life. It's our family, friends and health that make life worth living. At its root, prosperity is about happiness, tuning every prosperity aspect into happiness.

Back to one of the original questions, can money buy happiness? Happiness carries a lot of a touchy-feely connotation, but it is often a relevant topic to money. Admittedly, money matters. Money can relieve us of material needs. It is tempting to imagine the scenario that we never have to work again and are able to afford anything we want with an endless fortune. Furthermore, money can actually buy us the most basic of our psychological needs – human connection. On the flip side, money can't buy physical, spiritual and emotional well-beings. Money can buy lust and power, but it can't buy love. Money purchase medicine, but it can't certainly replace a healthy body. Money sometimes sabotages lives. Getting involved in drugs, alcohol, and other addictions of celebrities is concrete examples. Money can afford all material things, including ones that spoil them. To make it worse, money is addictive. The more you have, the more you want.

A clearer mind understands that you cannot have it all. To be affluent, you have to strive for long working hours in expense of time for your family, opportunities to your interests, or health in later stages of your life. Hence, money should not be translated to happiness. Money should be used wisely. Most importantly, you can decide whether you are lacking or not by perceiving prosperity as an inclusive notion and taking other human dimensions into account.

New generation's definition of happiness

My grandparents' generation view happiness as when American war ended and the whole country was reunified in 1975. Turn to my parents' generation, happiness is when attained houses, guaranteed jobs for life, along with subsidized health care, and pensions. My generation have witnessed a rapid and dramatic reforms, shifted from a centrally planned economy to market economy. Thus, although my perspective of happiness is somehow under the old system's filter, it started being instilled a new lens of happiness with a lot of upheaval and unrest under this economic transformation.

Prosperity through an educated person's lens

Instead of waiting for my country to move up in the prosperity rankings, which currently situated at 75 out of 149, I like to think of how I, as a youngster in a dot of human capital, can transform myself to rise myself towards prosperity and happiness.

An educated person is an answer

As a top student in high school and university, I was shocked and frustrated to constantly hear from envious peers, unsupportive teachers and the first job interviewer that my scores were useless. While I couldn't blame the schools for not teaching me relevant knowledge and in-demand skills, figuring out the way to acquire those knowledge and skills was a painful process. It required a strong commitment of time and effort. Since then, I learnt in a hard way that education is not about how many degrees I won, how high the scores I achieved. It is about truly acquiring knowledge and skills that the business world needs. The universities exist to set a standard, and I am still pursuing a higher degree to serve for my future career. However, with the understanding of the true meaning of education, I strived hard to be admitted in a new environment in overseas, brought myself to trials and errors, and took any opportunity to create things.

As Drucker urged in New Demands on Individual chapter, Management book, "*The educated person now matters*". He also pointed out the importance of knowledge and its essence, "*Knowledge is always embodied in a person; carried by a person; created, augmented, or improved by a person; applied by a person; taught and passed on by a person; used or misused by a person. The shift to the knowledge society therefore puts the person in the center.*"

I am an educated person

Despite the external discouragement, my passion for continuous learning is still there. I just need to learn the right things to prepare for the future, explore my full potential. While the current education system imposes some limitations, there are plenty of education tools free of charge out there in the age of the Internet. Hence, self-teaching is my choice to restart with. It is amazing how many resources are available online with the Google search engine, but it might be burned out to exhaust a plethora of free information accessible. I choose "YouTube University" to dive into the arena where I am unarmed. I have spent countless hours on learning English skills, sciences, economics, and lifestyles. With this type of educational medium, I feel like I have nothing to lose, but everything to gain.

Different from traditional academic learning, I enjoy a steep learning curve with satisfying and rewarding result. My repertoire is quickly built up with bricks of advanced and intimate knowledge from experts in the fields. I am very delighted to be transformed everyday, and I believe that an educated person is always under an intellectual and emotional transformation.

I found the way to fulfil my thirst for knowledge, but I doubted what I could do with accumulated knowledge, and when I could make money with the knowledge. I doubted whether I could possess a significant amount of possessions to contribute to the society when I embraced a frugal and less materialistic lifestyle. However, once I realized that I can find happiness by simply making my heart sing, I knew that I can help others to make their hearts sing as well. I decided to produce abundance by creating joyful experiences and long-lasting memories because experiences shape who we are in the way material goods do not. I learnt that prosperity can be shared easily thanks to the Internet connectivity.

Open the eyes and ears to the world

The Internet seems have all the answers to my questions. However, the people behind the Internet are true heroes. I am stunned by the lectures from MOOC professors, by the stories from Interpal friends, by the experiences from Couchsurfing travelers. In turn, I was encouraged to make solo trips to other countries, to exchange thoughts with foreign friends, to take actions rather than think hard.

Drucker emphasized the meaning of an educated person by saying that:

“He or she must become a “citizen of the world”—in vision, in horizon, in information. But he or she will also have to draw nourishment from his or her own local roots and, in turn, enrich and nourish his or her own local culture.”

Through others’ eyes and ears, I learnt that money is simply a method of exchange. What product or service is exchanged matters. When the concept of sharing economy is embraced, I am thrilled to see and experience the value that people are trying to redistributed, sometimes without money involvement. For instance, via Workaway, everyone can find a decent accommodation while travelling by contributing their skills and time for a host’s projects. In somewhere in Germany, my friend said she exchanged her used clothes for the others’. Back to Asia, we have Singapore Really Really Free Market, where people can get valuable items while the owners are willing to give them away.

I can see that the trend *less is more* or *living-off-grid* is not just as it sounds. It inherently carries the nature of sharing. Where there is sharing, there is prosperity. I believe that the globally minded individuals, who share the same perspective of prosperity will catch wind of the future!

Links:

1. Couchsurfing: <https://www.couchsurfing.com>
2. Interpal: <https://www.interpals.net>
3. MOOC: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massive_open_online_course
4. Workaway: <https://www.workaway.info>
5. Legatum Prosperity Index: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legatum_Prosperty_Index
6. Legatum Prosperity Index 2016, Vietnam <http://www.prosperity.com/globe/vietnam>