**Peter Drucker in the 21st Century?**

What can we learn from Peter Drucker, the father of modern management thinking, in the 21st century? I posed this question to one of today’s greatest management thinkers, Roger Martin, over a Wiener Schnitzel in Drucker’s hometown of Vienna at the annual Global Peter Drucker Forum.

*By Claus Mossbeck, Director at AVT Business School*

I dislike the term “guru.” It’s overused and, to me, implies a body of thought of almost evangelical dimensions, complete with devoted followers. But if there’s one person deserving this title in the realm of strategy and management in the last century, it’s Peter Drucker. The Economist dubbed him the “King of Gurus,” and for good reason: he’s often referred to as the father of modern management thinking. He’s credited with insights such as “culture eats strategy for breakfast,” “what gets measured gets managed,” and “the best way to predict the future is to create it.” His disciples include some of the brightest minds at the world’s leading business schools, many of whom attend the annual Global Peter Drucker Forum in Vienna, a “World Economic Forum” for management enthusiasts like me.

**Wiener Schnitzel in Vienna**

But what relevance does a long-dead management thinker, who met Freud, Churchill, and Kennedy before passing away in 2005 at the age of 95, hold today? I asked this question to what I consider the greatest management thinker of our time: Roger Martin (author of *Playing to Win,* HBR 2013), a self-proclaimed Drucker disciple. Martin carries the intellectual torch to the next generation of management thinkers and practitioners. I’ve known Roger for nearly a decade and invited him, along with his wife and business partner Marie Louise Skafte (with Danish roots), to dinner the night before the Drucker Forum last Wednesday. Being in Vienna, we naturally opted for Wiener Schnitzel at my Austrian father’s favorite restaurant, the legendary Figlmüller.

I recorded the conversation, resulting in 2.5 hours of incredible dialogue. Unfortunately, when the dinner ended, my iPhone froze, and the recording was lost. So, I found the nearest beer hall, ordered a liter of Vienna Lager, and began writing. As Hemingway once said: “Write drunk, edit sober.”

**A Holistic Approach**

Martin and Drucker met several times, including during Martin’s tenure as dean of Toronto’s business school, which under his leadership transitioned from local obscurity to global prominence. Martin believes that if Drucker were alive today, he would be disappointed with how little his guidance has influenced how we run businesses. Chief among his frustrations would be the way organizations are divided into silos, fostering narrow-mindedness and suboptimization. Martin, like Drucker, advocates for dismantling such structures. He is a Renaissance thinker who rejects the compartmentalization prevalent in education, viewing the world as interconnected rather than divided into subjects.

**Challenging Conventional Thinking**

What both Martin and Drucker excel at is challenging our mental models of how the world works. Martin promotes the use of what he calls an “opposable mind” (*The Opposable Mind,* HBR 2007). Just as our opposable thumb allows us to grasp tools, our minds should be able to hold two opposing ideas simultaneously to grapple with and work through the inherent complexity of phenomena, finding new pathways in the process. This ideal has profoundly influenced my own thinking.

**Drucker and Martin as AI Bots**

Fifty years ago, Drucker predicted that the personal computer heralded the arrival of the knowledge economy, where highly educated workers would become the most valuable resource businesses compete to attract. Building on this foundation, the conference’s main theme revolved around human-machine collaboration through artificial intelligence. Accordingly, the conference organizers announced an OpenAI ChatBot incorporating all 16 years of conference contributions, soon to be available for free via ChatGPT 4.0. Similarly, Martin is working on a virtual version of himself, leveraging over one million words from his freely available Medium articles.

Drucker envisioned the knowledge economy ending in the 2010s (*The New Society of Organizations,* HBR 1992). What comes next, however, remains unanswered. Soon, we might be able to ask him directly.

**AVT Business School + Harvard Business Review**

Claus Mossbeck collaborates with authors from the *Harvard Business Review* to write columns for Børsen Leadership. In this piece, he engages with Professor Emeritus Roger Martin (*A New Way to Think,* HBR 2022) about management philosopher Peter Drucker.