

Jive eXchange

Who is in Control?

Do you remember when you were younger and whatever space you had, whether it is your bedroom, a place in your back garden or even just your clothes closet and you wanted everything to be in the order (or chaos) that you desired. You could always tell when someone had moved something and been to “your place” and I would guess you were generally not very happy. From this very early age we all wanted control of our lives and have always sought after ways both as individuals and as a society to be able to exert more and more control over lives and future. Of course some of us seem to crave this control more than others and may start including other people and things in an unhealthy control sphere but I think we can all agree that control is an innate urge common to us all.

Now throughout our entire human history it has primarily been new technology that we have developed to increase our perceived levels of control with a large variety of consequences both good and not so good. The reason I say perceived levels of control as well I will come back to later. We have created newer instruments of warfare to control people, land and resources. Agriculture has seen massive developments over the centuries so we can produce better yields from our farming endeavours. The list goes on and on and on, and whether you agree with these technology advancements or not, the ultimate purpose at least in the minds of the creators was to better and ease their lives through greater control of their environment. However as society has progressed who is actually in control? And is all this control actually beneficial to us?

In the 1970s in many western universities and colleges around the world, students were taught that their standard working week of 40-50 hours would possibly be halved due to the great advancements we were making as computers and robots would gradually take over our roles allowing us more free time. Now the technology breakthroughs we have made in the last 30 years have been mind blowing to say the least and the way society functions today is in many ways unrecognisable from the seventies. At the same time the amount we are working has actually increased sharply and to most of us does not look like subsiding. Let's look at another example which I would describe as our most important resource, our children. In the US today there around 52 million kids attending schools around the country with about 6 million adults involved in teaching and administering them. That means about 20% of the entire American population is involved in the process on a daily basis. One of the technologies we have invented to maintain control over this process is called Methylphenidate, otherwise known as Ritalin. About 6 to 8 million kids have been told they have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and children as young as 4, are being prescribed medication. As a side note, school shootings and violence are on the rise, eating disorders on the rise, youth depression and suicides at alarming levels, respect for authority and academic performances on the decline. It sounds like using all our modern advances, we are having great control in our workplace and with our kids!

I guess it obvious why I said we have perceived control now. We are never short of idea of how to fix or manage a problem but we are more often than not looking for the magical quick fix cure and not solving the real problem. Could it be that our “can't sit still” kids are just striving for a bit more exercise and engagement from people like their parents? Might it be true that as our true motive was laziness when we conceived robotic technologies that we were too limited in our thinking to realise the ultimate consequences of our creations? The answer lies, as with most things, that we are most in control of any situation when we are proactive and not reactive. The most well adjusted, healthy and respectful kids are the ones that have been parented and exercised consistently right from the start. The most harmonious, productive and happy workplaces are the ones that regularly, actively engage with each other and listen. It's funny really, when we are not really seeking control we are more in control than ever!

Chris Jacob is a director of Jive eXchange (www.jiveexchange.com/metronews)