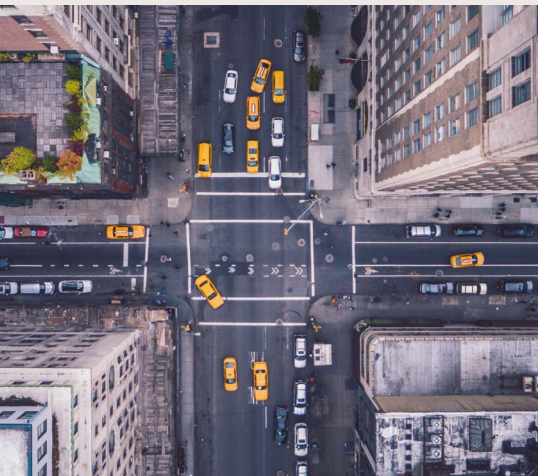




Thomas Micarelli

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Thomas Micarelli is senior regional counsel, Southern Europe at Uber in Madrid and a former associate in the firm's TMT practice in Rome.



Disrupting our attitudes

We live in an era of unprecedented technological change. Few would disagree that we're reaping real benefits. But, when transformation is so rapid, it's no surprise that the pros come with the odd con.

And, that begs a question or two. How best do we adapt to such a fluid environment? Whose responsibility is it to mitigate the negatives?

For Thomas Micarelli, the answers lie in education and in ourselves.

"The challenge is to change our mindsets fast enough to keep pace. Historically, technology has changed relatively slowly, but there's been a recent spike in the curve.

I don't think we've been reactive enough as individuals. This isn't something that should be dictated by law or by competition. Common sense should play its part."

Move with the times

"I often criticize people for being obsessed by their smartphone or by their tablet. And, then I find myself on the sofa and my kids are firing off questions. I look up at my wife and we're both on our mobiles.

So, at the end of the day, we must educate younger people, but be a little more consistent in our own behavior around technology.

We should understand that technology will change us, change our culture, and change the way we live. It always has, it always will, so we should embrace it. We should be ready to evolve with tech."

That sense of readiness, sat in part behind Thomas' 2017 decision to switch to Uber from Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE), whom he had joined in-house after almost eight years with Hogan Lovells.

"HPE is a bona fide tech giant, with a fantastic history of innovation. But, towards the end of my time there, I felt I needed a new challenge. So, when the opportunity came up at Uber, I decided it was time to experience something different."

Real agency

"And, there are certainly different dynamics at play at Uber. HPE is enormous. It is, without question, one of the most influential IT firms of the last several decades, providing serious solutions for hundreds of millions of people. It's been around for more than 70 years and has 250,000 employees worldwide.

Uber, on the other hand, is barely a decade old and only has 15,000 staff. At HPE, I was the youngest in the Rome office. At Uber in Madrid, I'm the eldest – the average age is somewhere between 28 and 33.

And, the way of thinking and of doing business takes some adjusting to. The speed with which decisions are made and implemented is very fast, which makes it challenging and interesting at the same time.

You have enormous responsibility, and your choices can soon determine how things are done. You take decisions, you take risks, you take ownership. And, you learn a lot very quickly, and so far it's been an amazing ride.

Apart from the legal team, everyone hired at Uber has an entrepreneurial background, selling their own start-up before joining the company itself. That maintains the working ethos.

One of the company's mantras is 'be an owner not a renter.' It's a question of attitude. Going that extra mile not because you're forced to, but because you want to.

You're in the driving seat and you want to see how things turn out. You work hard, but you're not counting the hours. You take responsibility rather than sitting back waiting for someone else to determine the path. I see passion everywhere."

A new perspective

It wasn't the first time passion had come up speaking with Thomas. He spent his first couple of years with the firm working in corporate restructuring, but he made a switch and caught the TMT bug.

"I heard one of the partners was leaving and knew Marco Berliri through playing football with colleagues. He suggested I work for his team, which dealt with some big clients like Google.

So, I thought 'why not?' and moved across. Very soon, I fell in love with the whole thing and continued working with him in the TMT practice until I left.

Marco was my mentor and a key point of reference throughout my time at Hogan Lovells, but I'd also have to mention Massimiliano Masnada and Paola La Gumina who helped me enormously.

It was like one big family to me. We used to hang out a lot outside of work and I made many great friends there. But, most importantly, I learned a great deal throughout.

Arguably, the best thing I learned was the ability to work independently with clients and to find and build new business relationships.

Bringing clients into the firm and growing partnerships for yourself is very satisfying, but you have to manage the pressures and create the right solutions. That is all-important."

Changing tack

It's often said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. That's true in the case of Uber, Thomas' home of just over two years. They have created a market and, as the pie has gotten bigger, more people have come after a slice. And, now there's a game to stay ahead of.

"There's been a radical shift in strategy in the last couple of years. Under the former CEO, Travis Kalanick, Uber wanted to become the world leader in Personal Hire Vehicle (PHV) services, so it entered a lot of territories and achieved its goal.

But, when the new CEO, Dara Khosrowshahi, came in from Expedia, he took a different view. He wants to leverage the brand and the platform, applying our technology to a number of different industries.

That's why we have Uber Eats, the food delivery business. That's why we're launching Uber Freight to deliver goods in the U.S. and in Europe, and UberBOAT in Croatia to take people from island to island.

The same logic explains UberCOPTER and we've even acquired JUMP, a U.S. company providing mobility services with e-scooters and e-bikes. We want to become the Amazon of transportation.

Our strategy is different. Others simply concentrate on the PHV market or on new mobility. Whereas, we do everything. You want to go from A to B? Just open the app and find the quickest or cheapest way."

Power of the platform

Technology has given each of us a voice. It gives us unprecedented choices and it gives us easy access to the near sum of human learning. But, it also has an element of anarchy.

"There's no real asymmetry of information like there was. Before, our sources of information were limited, unless we held certain positions, and those with freer access had a competitive advantage over everyone else.

Now, we are all free to have our own ideas and to research whatever information we like. Open Wikipedia and you can find out almost anything. You want to learn how to garden, you open YouTube.

"We should be ready to evolve with tech."

But, no one's in charge. If we look at how easy it is for a company or individual to influence a wide audience with a simple social media campaign or see what's happening with fake news and the dark web, things are out of control. And, it's going to be very difficult to tackle them.

Whenever you prohibit or limit the use of tech, that's when you are failing. Wherever you draw the line, you make a mistake for one reason or another.

Instead, policymakers should guide us on principles and ethics, educate us about how to use technology responsibly, but let us explore for ourselves. They should be like fathers. Educating, putting in some restrictions, but not banning things altogether."

To prohibit is to fail

"In 200 years' time, people will put the Digital Revolution on a par with the Industrial Revolution. Perhaps even bigger, but such fundamental change always comes with a high degree of disruption.

It seems to me that we sometimes take the pros for granted, without appreciating them fully. But, we're also very quick to point out the cons.

Technology makes a lot of services more efficient and enhances some aspects of our quality of life. But, we're not doing a great job educating younger generations on how we might manage these new technologies.

When I was young, I was only allowed to watch TV for two hours a day, sat no less than six meters away from a 14 inch screen. Supposedly, it was bad for my eyesight.

But, now we regularly watch 50 inch screens from up close, my eyes are OK, despite years of working in front of a monitor for 11 hours a day, and it turns out my parents' blanket rules were pointless.

If I were to try telling my kids they can't use the iPad for more than 3 hours a day, when they're older, they'd think I was an anachronism.

So, I try to guide them as best I can. Without laying down the law."

