

## Transport, innovation, risk and James Joyce in Trieste

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### Transport and Innovation and Risk

Transport thrives and prospers on innovation and risk taking.

Transport connects us to each other and to other cities, countries, markets and cultures.

Transport evolves continuously adapting to the needs of society and markets

and we in the transport business take and manage risks deploying innovations to make transport more efficient to meet the needs of users and consumers.

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Behavioural economics and empirical evidence confirm that all actors from investors and lenders to suppliers and insurers are averse to uncertainty.

I meet colleagues frequently who tell me –

we're very careful and conservative in the transport business, we don't take risks.

But this is patently not true.

We all take risks everyday – it's a matter of the degree of risk that we are willing to take.

To bring about change in the face of great challenges of our time

- Whether that is
  - Climate Change
  - Trade wars
  - Digitalisation
  - Or dare I say it - BREXIT

we need to be able to innovate and take risks, measured risks.

As managers and leaders in the transport and logistics sector, you know that managing risk is the heart of business life:

- How much more can we achieve within our budget?
- Will that technology solve our problem?
- How will that decision work in a year, or in five years' time ?

But there are also the broader systemic and societal risks which warrant our attention:

- How to approach systemic innovation in response to systemic risks?
- How should we deal with the pricing of that risk – can it help us put a value on innovative solutions?
- How shall we deal with long term investment in the presence of secular risks e.g technology, climate change.

So many of these types of business questions involve judgement and risk – Judgement which, at the end of the day, is a context driven, personal behavioural characteristic.

Recently I completed a Risk Profile Assessment for a Financial Services Company – I was planning some personal pension investments – and I was struck by how simple and straightforward it was and at the same time how sophisticated it was. It asked simple

penetrating questions about my attitude to risk to give me a risk profile score.

Putting a number on your risk propensity is thought provoking and gives rise to reflection – do any of you know your risk number?

I am a careful risk taker and was given a 3.4 score.

Our everyday business decisions are all informed by our personal attitude and disposition towards risk in various contexts.

And so as a Dubliner, invited here as a guest in Trieste, I could not ignore opportunity to highlight the famous connection between the two cities

but also to highlight the fact that James Joyce himself was one of the world's great innovators - in the realm of literature

and that he would not have been such a great innovator had he not also been willing to take risks.

### Joyce as an Innovator

So, why James Joyce was one of the great innovators in the realm of literature.

Joyce was a modernist author who wrote a number of novels, short stories and plays but his most famous work is his novel "Ulysses" which he started to write while living here in Trieste.

Although Joyce was living in Trieste, he wrote this outstanding novel about the events of one day in Dublin in 1904, on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> June to be precise.

It traces the journey of one man around the city in great and enormous detail, detailing every person he meets, every event and sight that he saw and every street and public house that he entered, each activity that he witnessed, conversations that he had and

thoughts that went through his head. Such is the level of detail in this dense novel that Joyce himself said:

“I want to give a picture of Dublin so complete that if the city suddenly disappears from the earth, it could be reconstructed from my book.”

But this is not a random journey - Joyce modelled the story and the journey of his main characters on the story and structure of the ancient Greek epic The Odyssey, but only in reverse –

where Odysseus was a Greek warrior undertaking a great 10 year voyage carrying out great deeds and returning a hero – Joyce’s hero is Leopold Bloom and he is portrayed as an ordinary average everyman, a Jewish advertising salesman, walking around the city, carrying out the mundane activities of everyday life and returning home to his house in the evening wondering if his wife is being faithful to him.

As a modernist writer Joyce mixed literary styles, invented new ones and where the form of language and vocabulary was insufficient, he created his own in an innovative style called stream of consciousness, which was to write in a style that mimics that way that our mind wanders from thought to thought in a free-flowing way.

For example, in a classic English novel the narrative was expressed in clear coherent sentences, like this:

But that’s not the way our mind thinks – we think in a more disjointed rambling wandering way.

There is an entire publications industry dedicated to studying and analysing Ulysses to identify the parallels of structure, themes and characters between Ulysses and the Greek epic.

Joyce famously said that “I have put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant and that is the only way of ensuring immortality”

There are 18 chapters in *Ulysses* and it mirrors the structure of the Greek epic but each chapter is written in a different literary style.

For example Chapter 15 is in the form of a play, chapter 17 is a question and answer session and chapter 13 is a racy romantic thriller.

When it was published *Ulysses* was both significant and innovative because in dealing with a wide range of interacting complexities, he showed innovation and ingenuity in the use of language, vocabulary and imagery

which all bind together to create a universal character, that of Leopold Bloom as the quintessential everyman, a modern *Ulysses*, wandering around in a Dublin that becomes a microcosm of the world.

Yet the novel's reputation for difficulty masks the extent to which *Ulysses* is warm, welcoming and witty, granting a uniquely intimate perspective on what it is to be human.

Joyce was and is considered a modernist writer part of a wider movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who sought to break with traditional ways of writing and who experimented with structure, literary form and expression.

While Joyce kept company with luminaries such as Ezra Pound and TS Eliot and of course his Trieste friend Italo Svevo, Schoenberg in field of music and Pablo Picasso in art were also leading modernists.

So, to thrive and excel in this company one had to be not only a great innovator but also a skilled risk taker.

## Joyce as Risk Taker

Joyce took big risks not only as a writer / but also in his personal life.

In the different world of over one hundred years ago, Joyce took a risk by leaving Dublin - risks for both his personal and professional standing.

Born into a comfortable, wealthy and genteel middle-class catholic family in 1882, Joyce was the eldest of a family of 10 children.

Joyce was a talented and gifted student who attended at a prestigious Jesuit boarding school where he had his first encounters with the discipline and teachings of the institutional catholic church, something which was to strongly influence him and his writings throughout his life.

As a favourite of his father, whose unfortunate drinking habits led to the demise of the family's fortunes, there were high expectations that Joyce would fulfil his promise.

But the chaotic family life which was a backdrop to his formative years in school and university and the stifling social cultural and religious environment which he felt deeply constraining him in turn of the century Dublin led him to feel the immense frustration of his ambitions.

Being very aware of his abilities, and not shy of letting people know, he felt he could not express or fulfil his ambitions in Ireland so in 1904 he left his native Dublin with his new girlfriend Nora Barnacle on the promise of a job in the Berlitz School in Paris.

But that risk turned out to be a false promise – there was no job!

and he was sent on to Berlitz in Zurich where in turn he was sent on to Trieste and then further on to Pula.

He eventually ended up Trieste, where he was to spend the next ten years, in a multi-cultural city that provided a welcome base for

innovators and risk takers of all kinds. This was an era when Trieste was booming as the maritime gateway to the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the years leading up to the Great War of 1914.

Joyce supported his family by teaching English and writing for journals and newspapers/ but it did not provide a stable income. His main focus was his writing and trying to get his work published.

This led frequently to immense financial hardship for his young family as Joyce squandered money on an indulgent lifestyle of drinking dining and attending the opera.

By all accounts he was well known and connected in Trieste literary circles as well as in business circles. One of his strategies while struggling to get work published was to develop entrepreneurial money-making schemes with the support of wealthy Triestino investors.

It is less well known that Joyce, with the backing of his Trieste friends, opened the first cinema in his native Dublin in 1909. Unfortunately, the business was not a success.

While his literary work was innovative and impressive to some, his style and the content risked rejection and condemnation from a conservative publishing establishment.

His first book called “Dubliners” – considered by many nowadays as a masterpiece collection of short stories – was repeatedly delayed in publication due to disputes with the editors and publishers over some of the content which was deemed defamatory.

Joyce took risks with his personal relationships and reputation by the way he wrote. He had developed a reputation in Dublin for including people known to him as characters in his work – and not always favourably. In fact, it was considered that Joyce often gained revenge on people by placing them in his works – that is one of the many

reasons that makes his work and in particular Ulysses so intriguing - trying to unravel the intricate references and character portrayals.

In 1914 Joyce took his biggest risk, both creatively and reputationally with Ulysses.

He started the novel in Trieste and continued to work on it when he moved to Zurich during the first world war. With the help of Ezra Pound, he took up the idea to publish the novel in serial form - chapter by chapter in an American journal in 1918.

However, this backfired due to the uproar and protest from the reading public in the United States and in the United Kingdom.

While Ulysses was eventually and famously published in Paris in 1922, the book was banned and declared obscene in the US where a great dispute arose with the US Post Office who had seized and destroyed illicit copies of the imported book. It was not published in the US until 1934.

Why did he take risks – what was the motivation?

There is no doubt Joyce was highly intelligent and a huge intellect - but this was something he was aware of from an early age, and this huge self confidence in his abilities had of course its downsides.

Many would attribute the risks he took in his personal and family life to be driven by his need to articulate and fulfil his literary ambitions. But his self-confidence and intellectual arrogance revealed itself in his ability and propensity to use and manipulate people to assist him very often in a selfish and self-serving way.

And so while Joyce was so evidently intelligent, immensely innovative in his literary domain and was prepared to take risks to achieve his ambitions, what is there that we can learn from him?

## Innovation and Risk in Transport and Logistics

Innovation requires courage and conviction in taking risks – this doesn't mean wild irresponsible risk, but it means managed risks within our capacity to handle the consequence of both success and failure.

Transport and logistics businesses have been innovating and managing risk for centuries and that is why they survive and thrive. Transport has always embraced new ideas, technologies and opportunities to improve the flow of goods.

Just as in the time of Joyce in Trieste in 1914 when the world was facing a range of social, political and technological headwinds of change

one hundred years later we are faced with great challenges such as climate change, digitalisation and automation which have implications at regional and global level with direct impacts on all of us.

Today the forces of the internet age including communications, connectivity and cybersecurity are forcing change at a rapid pace.

So what would Joyce be telling us to do?

I would think that he would say to us to embrace the courage of our convictions, to live life and do the right thing.

We must embrace the fact that,

to face challenges, solve problems and make things better

we must play our part, we must tackle global challenges and bring about positive changes in our industry and businesses for the benefit of all.

That involves by necessity

- Understanding our context and role in this global industry

- Understanding the everyday importance and impact that Transport and Logistics has on people's everyday lives in all its mundane details
- Understand that we have huge scope to make change and improvements in our business that will have positive impacts on everyday lives
- Understand that the biggest risks are not in technology itself but in their implementation and governance – that is the management of change

And overtime the transport and logistics industry has shown itself repeatably to be very good at the management of change.

Look for example at the progress being made in intermodality here at the Port of Trieste – with focussed direction and leadership opportunities can be captured if we are prepared to take the risk, a managed risk.

Look at the speed of change in the automotive and trucking sector with the increasing use of connectivity and the real progress on introducing of truck platooning.

Is the railway sector ready for this type of competition?

Can the railway and intermodal sector afford the risk of inaction?

Managing risk is part of everyday business at all levels and how we manage and mitigate those risk to deliver benefits and optimal outcomes is a measure of success.

Innovation means looking at problems in a new and different way every day and to imagine different or better outcomes. Where are you managing risks today and where will you innovate tomorrow?

So let us embrace change and innovation

Let us take risks, managed risks

Let us improve transport logistics and supply chains for the good of all and for the good of all the Leopold Blooms of this world.

And in concluding I will leave my final remarks to the great author himself Mr James Joyce

“Better to pass boldly into that other world, in the glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age”

Thank you.

Conall Mac Aongusa

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He is Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Mobimetrix ([www.mobimetrix.com](http://www.mobimetrix.com)), an Irish technology company based in Cork that develops advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) and collision warning systems for large vehicles in the transport, rail and logistics industry.

He has worked for over 30 years in the transportation industry and before establishing Mobimetrix he worked in consultancy and in the Government sector in Europe, in Africa and in the Middle East

He is a Council Member and former Chairman of the Council of the Association for European Transport (AET) which hosts Europe’s largest conference for policy, practice and research – the European Transport Conference – which will be held in Dublin in October 2019 and will be held in Milan in 2020.