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## **Command and control withers**

The industrial era, based on cheap and plentiful energy and focused on mass production linked to mass consumption, is coming to an end. Meanwhile, the Internet is changing the way we work, learn and most importantly, converse. Combine “ridiculously easy group-forming” with energy scarcity and you get the demise of command and control, mass production and mass distribution. Individuals can act both locally and globally without the aid of formal organizations. That means that the traditional command and control organizational pyramid is getting much more porous. Workers are dropping out of the bottom of industrial organizations, either literally or figuratively, and are doing it on their own. “It” meaning working, learning, creating and collaborating. The Internet has enabled a do-it-yourself revolution with far-reaching implications.

Informal learning is now available from a wide selection venues, from both traditional sources and upstarts. Stanford University's lecture series on are available for free on YouTube while MIT's courseware is on the Internet for non-commercial use. Just in time, how-to explanations from Wiki-How, Instructables or Commoncraft's explanatory series “In Plain English” provide instruction as needed on a wide variety of subjects and the list is growing. Social networking is getting more pervasive, especially via Facebook or Twitter. Anyone can now start their own social network in minutes with platforms such as Ning. Meanwhile, Linked-In is almost an industry standard for recruiting. Distributed work and tele-work are becoming more acceptable. It is now normal to work from home. User-generated content is getting people noticed. Job offers (or reverse job postings) are made through blogs while videos on YouTube can catapult people to fame. Creative Commons is the de-facto license for digital media, enabling easier sharing, and even the US White House is using it. Not long ago, most of these activities were clearly within the realm of organizational training, communications, IT or HR functions. Hyperlinks have subverted these hierarchies, as the Cluetrain Manifesto said they would a decade ago.

## From ideas to ideology

Change begins when ideas meet new technology. Only later do organizations and institutions follow. Lastly comes ideology. When it comes to Enterprise 2.0, we have had the ideas around for some time now, such as the notion of the learning organization or democracy in the workplace, but we now have the technologies in the form of Web social media. Some organizations have practices such as Google's 20% free time for its engineers or Semco's democratic workforce, started by Brazilian Ricardo Semler, but these are still the minority. The majority of organizations have yet to change, but the ideas plus the technologies are now providing the impetus to change the models around which we work.

We're right in the middle of a change similar to the beginning of the 20th century. It's like 1909 right now, with an agrarian economy that will soon be industrialized. When we look at the past century of business, the progress started with the ideas of scientific management, especially Taylorism. This was followed by the technology of mass production, enabled by large engines powered by petroleum products. Corporations were then developed on a larger scale, with more rights than ever before, and on their heels followed business schools, such as MIT's Sloan School of Management established by the Chairman of General Motors. From these ideas, technologies, organizations and institutions came the ideology of management theory and the underpinnings of our current economy.

## From hierarchy to wirearchy

We're at the stage where we have some new ideas for work (e.g. distributed work, natural enterprises, workplace democracy) and some new technologies (e.g. social media, semantic web, nano-bio-techno-cogno). The next step in this evolution is the new organization. Business schools tout themselves as thought-leaders, but they only appeared on the scene after the mass production industrial model had been proven. We shouldn't expect leadership from our academic institutions, with their profitable business schools, until we have a proven new organizational model for the post-industrial era. Actually, business schools may be to blame for some of our current economic problems. According to renowned management professor Henry Mintzberg, "business schools have been promoting an excessively analytical, detached style of management that has been dragging down organizations."

When you compare Japanese automakers with the "Big Three" in North America you'll see the same materials, the same technology and the same base of workers, but DIFFERENT management models. Getting new management models is one of our challenges, but people need to learn these, and few organizations offer good examples. Again, Mintzberg says that, "Management is a practice, learned in context." That means that book-learning is not enough. Ideas from sources like Thomas Malone's *The Future of Work* and Gary Hamel's *The Future of Management* show the need for new management models. They're a start, but what is missing from both are practical models to implement.

Future management models can find inspiration and clues in web-based service companies as well as small, community-based businesses. A networked society means that businesses have to be nimble and small-thinking because every individual transaction is unique. One bad experience can go viral. Lack of transparency is mistrusted. Command and control matters less and less on the business fringes. Look to business models that understand the importance of community as we become a global village. As William Gibson wrote, “the future is already here – it is just unevenly distributed”.

Any new management models will have to break down long-standing walls between departments and let people connect on a more human level. They are already doing it outside the organization anyway. We are no longer “human resources”, if we ever were. We need models that keep everything at a human scale, so biological metaphors, instead of mechanistic ones, are more appropriate. Learning is not something that is “done to you” and management cannot be an external force but must be an internal motivational driver of the organization.

In May 2008, some of the best known management experts were brought together by McKinsey & Company to “lay out an agenda for reinventing management“. Their premise was that 1) management models are important social technologies; 2) that the current models are out-of-date; and that 3) we need to develop more human models for the near future. The 25 recommendations from the group included more community, democracy and diversity as well as redefining control and leadership. The experts also recommended that organizations, “Reinvent strategy-making as an emergent process. In a turbulent world, strategy making must reflect the biological principles of variety, selection, and retention.”

In reviewing all 25 recommendations it is clear that wirearchy, as an overarching framework, is a solid fit for the new nature of work. Wirearchy, developed by management consultant Jon Husband, is “a dynamic two-way flow of power and authority based on information, knowledge, trust and credibility, enabled by interconnected people and technology”. Today, people need to work collaboratively in ever more complex relationships and environments. This calls for emergent work practices, as those vaunted best practices of the past are too rigid and mechanistic in face of complexity. Biological models highlight the need for adaptation and constant learning. As Charles Darwin stated, “In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed”.

## **From training to learning**

Let's look at training and education. Much as the Reformation, sped by the new technology of the printing press, ushered in an era of believing and thinking for ourselves, we have the makings of a Learning Reformation. The removal of overt rules, combined with accessible and cheap tools, can empower people to take control of their own learning. If training departments want to remain relevant in this kind of environment, they will need to reconsider their role. In order to help organizations evolve in a networked environment they have to move away from training delivery and focus on connecting and communicating. Workers, provided the right tools and resources, can figure out what

they need to learn.

Here are some suggestions for training organizations as they shift to supporting the networked workplace. Because change begins at the individual level, these recommendations are for each of us:

1. Get online and be an active and continuous learner.
2. Be a lurker and listen to what others are saying
3. Communicate what you observe.
4. Continuously collect feedback, not just after formal training.
5. Make it easy to share information by simplifying, synthesizing and finding patterns.
6. Use networks as research tools.
7. Identify learning skills, develop them in yourself and pass them on to others.

All of these skills are dependent on the first. Learning is a skill and leadership by example is needed. The best way to find out how to use Web social media in an organization is by using them. No single, sure-fire, cookie-cutter approach can be implemented in a top-down or consultant-driven manner to create a networked workplace performance model that works. No single method will work. Those inside the organization understand it the best, though they may need some direction, support, data, or advice from outside.

## **Remixing organizational culture**

My colleagues at the Internet Time Alliance have recommended for some time that a wide range of silos (HR, Training, Personnel, KM, OD, Communications, PR, Marketing, etc.) should be incorporated into one support function. Three years ago Jon Husband called for an amalgamation of support functions in the networked workplace or eOD (e-Organizational Development). Since then, Luis Suarez at IBM has suggested the merging of knowledge management and learning. More recently, Web Consultant Euan Semple called for combining HR, Communications and IT. Euan has said that HR personnel are “maintainers of order, rather than enablers of staff”; that Communications manages rather than enables communication; while IT controls risk instead of enabling the business. These are generalizations, but expose the weaknesses of our current management system.

Individuals can have a variety of roles, depending on the organizational context, but everyone must be focused on the organization as a whole. Separate departments create tribes and internal cultures that may be at cross-purposes with other departments or the overall organization. With hyper-linked information and access to expertise, not only are internal departments of less value, they can subvert the organization’s future by not responding quickly and appropriately.

Many workers, as well as supervisors and managers, will find the transition to the always learning, networked workplace rather difficult as most of our existing structures have been developed from an opposite sociological perspective. That does not mean that a restructuring of how we organize our work is not necessary, it will just be difficult.