The Future of Management . . . Are You Ready?

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For the past two decades, public and private sector executives and managers have struggled to develop effective ways of sharing what their organizations know. Driven by concerns such as downsizing, the impending retirement of baby boomers, terrorism, the troubling economy, and a host of other organizational challenges, many leaders have sought ways to share knowledge with both internal and external stakeholders.

Despite the best efforts of many innovative leaders, few organizations have achieved the desired level of knowledge sharing. This is certainly not due to a lack of energy, enthusiasm, or excitement on the part of executives, but rather the result of technology-focused, complicated, and expensive tools, techniques, and technologies. Equally, a culture based on a *need-to-know* rather than one based on a *need-to-share* basis prevented the transparency necessary to achieve organizational knowledge goals.

Our review suggests that many first-generation knowledge management projects were based on collecting and classifying information. The belief seemed to be that if we developed huge, centralized, IT-based repositories of artifacts, then stakeholders would serve themselves. Unfortunately, this approach never delivered the promised user-friendly access but rather resulted in many very expensive partial databases of little value. Second-generation knowledge management projects shifted the focus to codifying tacit knowledge and combining explicit knowledge to create new knowledge. This approach seemed plausible in theory; however, quickly it became apparent that codifying tacit knowledge was difficult and very expensive. Further exacerbating the challenge was the issue of information overload that resulted from the combination efforts. Often these projects spawned small islands of knowledge in a larger sea of chaos.

Today we are seeing some very promising results from third-generation knowledge projects, which focus on connecting people and facilitating collaboration. Some organizations are now reaping the benefits of using social media tools such as wikis for collaboration and knowledge sharing and commercial social networking tools, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Socialcast or Twitter for connecting people. These emerging tools and techniques provide flexible, agile, and intuitive solutions for connecting people with people and facilitating coordination, communication, and collaboration.

A word of warning is necessary, as most of the tools, tactics, and techniques that we will discuss in this article are relatively immature. Indeed, this is a domain in which practitioners are leading and academics are lagging. As a result, there is little empirical research to support many of the claims articulated by the proponents. The ideas presented here are not for the fainthearted – they are more likely suited to early adopters. That said, we believe that each of these emerging concepts are worthy of consideration; however, caveat emptor—let the buyer (or user) beware!

By far the most watched phenomenon of the 21st century surrounds the power of everyday people. Executives across the board seem surprised by the sudden, and sometimes unwanted, knowledge and resultant power of the people. In their book *Groundswell: Winning in a world transformed by social technologies*, Forrester analysts Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff describe part of this phenomenon as a groundswell, which they define as: "A social trend in which people use technologies to get the things they need from each other, rather than from traditional institutions like corporations."

In a *Wired* magazine article, Jeff Howe coined the term *Crowdsourcing* to describe "everyday people using their spare cycles to create content, solve problems, even do corporate R & D." In his book, *Crowdsourcing: Why the power of the crowd is driving the future of business*, Howe defined crowdsourcing as "the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call." Howe

groups can be very cumbersome, expensive, and difficult to communicate.

Enter Web 2.0—a world wide web based on collaboration rather than content—and suddenly all of these obstacles evaporate, at least for virtual groups. In their book, *Wikinomics: How mass collaboration changes everything*, authors Dan Tapscott and Anthony Williams, describe how a low-cost collaborative infrastructure is empowering the many—they term these "the weapons of mass collaboration." Tapscott and Williams warn these *weapons* support a new level of collaboration that will turn the economy upside down and may well facilitate the destruction of organizations who fail to adjust.

There are many examples of how organizations are using the collaborative forces of the Internet to create and exchange knowledge. The question is, what are you doing in your organization to exploit the weapons of mass collaboration. Virtually every day, new web tools are being developed offering new ways to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing. Our aim is not to endorse particular tools, but rather to encourage leaders to think about how these tools will help them achieve a competitive advantage. The future starts now – are you ready?

wrote, "The amount of knowledge and talent dispersed among the human race has always outstripped our capacity to harness it. Crowdsourcing corrects that—but in doing so, it also unleashes the forces of creative destruction."

Both terms, groundswell and crowdsourcing, are neologisms and as a result many academics may dismiss them as hype designed to sell books. However, we would caution against a hasty dismissal. Of course, time will be the real test of their relevance. In the meantime, we suggest that leaders should learn about the opportunities and threats of the social revolution. We are most concerned about these ideas from a knowledge point of view; however, there may also be substantially benefit in marketing, public relations, or human relations domains.

So what has changed to empower these communities with such power? Surely, groups of passionate people have long yearned for the opportunity to influence or perhaps even hijack issues. Of course, there have been many times in history when large groups congregated to spark change. However, the logistics with massing large

"Motivation is the art of getting people to do what you want them to do because they want to do it."

Dwight D. Eisenhower