

WHY YOU NEED TO MANAGE THE KNOWLEDGE WORKFORCE

Managing the Knowledge Workforce started as a small white paper intended to direct attention to the challenges awaiting companies of all sizes as a sea change in our economy takes place: the migration from an industrial economy to a knowledge-based economy. When I reached page 60 or so, I began to realize that “white paper” was not the correct format.

Unlike the often-promised paperless office, whose imminent arrival has been portended for the past three decades, the move to the knowledge-based economy has been real and measurable. Twenty odd years ago, the personal computer made its first appearance within the enterprise – providing the first on demand access to stored information – and things haven’t been the same ever since.

Unfortunately, neither managers nor workers have been adequately prepared for the changes that this development occasioned, among them a flatter reporting structure (today anyone can e-mail the CEO), and the ability to work with far-flung colleagues across multiple time zones and continents.

And people expect results faster and faster, something attributable to what I refer to as the age of instant gratification, which can be traced back to the advent of Federal Express and overnight delivery.

While it may sound inconsequential, when Federal Express began operations on 17 April 1973, a shot was fired that was

heard around the world: documents and products could be reliably in another person's hands the following day.

As of 18 April 1973, people were no longer content to wait days and weeks for something to arrive, be it a document or birthday present. Combined with the advent of less expensive telecopiers and rapidly sinking telecommunications costs by 1980, knowledge workers began to develop the expectation that information requests could – and should – be fulfilled on demand. The arrival of internal e-mail systems (prior to inter-company Internet-based e-mail) further raised their expectations.

This book consists of three parts: Knowledge Workers – What They Do and How They Work; Increasing Organizational Effectiveness Through Knowledge Work; and Conclusions. The first part is designed to help managers focus on the issues that they are about to face within their own organizations; incredibly enough, while more and more managers and executives use information technologies to perform some of their work, they fail to understand the greater ramifications of these tools. The second part is in part a tutorial for knowledge workers and their managers on how to use (and improve upon) various tools and platforms to increase productivity, information flow, and make themselves more informed, capable, productive, connected, empowered, and knowledgeable. The reader will also find 13 case studies that describe how some of the smartest companies around the globe are managing their knowledge workforces.

Most CIOs have failed to align IT with their core business strategies thus far but see doing this as a primary objective. Until this happens, knowledge workers will suffer from information overload and data disconnects, instead of seeing the

gains, which include greater corporate agility, faster decision making, and quicker customer response.

In fact, the need for agility may finally be the silver bullet that will force the alignment of business and IT requirements. The quest for agility – agile companies are characterized by quickness and nimbleness in and out of markets – is on many companies' radar screens. Without agility and the ability to innovate, a company will stagnate. Today, very few organizations are agile, but many want to be, and the price of entry may very well be to become a knowledge-based organization and focus on a set of business capabilities that are both core to operations and highly profitable. Non-core functions, and this depends on the type of business, may be outsourced but companies need to partner with those they outsource to, not just turn over the keys to the castle.

By focusing on core business capabilities, an organization is less vested in its solutions and can move on when profits wane. In order to plan for a profitable future, companies need to increase the speed of innovation and, to do that, they not only need to ensure the alignment between business and IT, but they need to connect far-flung individuals, partners, customers, suppliers, and employees. Agility isn't something that pops out of a Cracker Jacks box, and it doesn't happen overnight. It can occur in a dynamic organization that has achieved certain organizational/structural and intellectual capabilities, one in which people adapt rapidly, collaborate, and share knowledge as a matter of course

Knowledge workers can, in many cases, make the difference between success and failure. In many circles, capital is plentiful; people with know-how are scarce. That leads to corporate environments where employees do better than the shareholders, highly paid by companies desperate to hold onto them.

That's not to say that talented workers weren't always in demand; it is only recently that they began to recognize how much they could get for their services, be they programmers or researchers.

Of course, until more organizations have deployed true Collaborative Business Environments, knowledge workers will need to survive with extant tools; there are many practices that will facilitate knowledge work which individual workers as well as entire companies can implement, without the need to deploy new software, commission studies, or purchase new hardware.

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