

The severe effort of many converging wills: public sector leadership in a connected world

Martin Stewart-Weeks Cisco IBSG (Public Sector) Sydney, 6 September 2012

In many ways, leadership in the connected world is no different from leadership in the unconnected world. Some core expectations persist...the ability to set direction and clarify priorities, the capacity to craft narratives of purpose to which others can enthusiastically subscribe, making it easier for others to contribute their full potential to the larger endeavour as well as a set of basic behavioural attributes which would include honesty, ethics, fairness, consistency and openness.

But in many ways leadership in a connected world is completely different from leadership in the unconnected world. There is something about how the connected world works that places new pressures on leaders which opens some new chapters in the book of organisational leadership, especially in the public sector.

So far as leadership for a connected world is concerned, nothing has changed and everything has changed.

The best way to describe these changes, and to consider their implications for public sector leadership, is to frame the discussion with a powerful analogy from the world of technology drawn from a description of the rise of open source software.

1 The cathedral and the bazaar

In 1996, Eric Raymond wrote what has become one of the most famous essays about technology¹. Ostensibly about trying to understand the unexpected success of the then relatively new open source approach to writing software, the *Cathedral and the Bazaar* is in fact a dissertation on the profound and sometimes unsettling changes for organisations, and therefore for organisational leadership, wrought by a world increasingly open, connected and complex.

The scene is set from the opening paragraph. “Linux is subversive,” wrote Raymond. “Who would have thought even five years ago that a world-class operating system could coalesce as if by magic out of part-time hacking by several thousand developers scattered all over the planet, connected only by the tenuous strands of the Internet?” The rest of the essay, give or take a few diversions into some of the deep technology involved, is a compelling explanation of just how that outcome was possible.

Raymond was prompted to his exploration of the open source world pioneered by Linus Torvalds by challenging his own received wisdom. Like many at that time, he believed that “there was a certain critical complexity above which a more centralized, a priori approach was required.” He thought that really important, large and complex software “needed to be built like cathedrals, carefully crafted by individual wizards or small bands of mages working in splendid isolation, with no beta to be released before its time.” All the more reason, as he explained it, to be shocked when it transpired that an alternative, “bazaar” style seemed to work and work well. So the question arose in his mind “why the Linux world not only didn't fly apart in confusion but seemed to go from strength to strength at a speed barely imaginable to cathedral-builders.”

The central lesson from the essay, to which Raymond keeps returning, is not just that the “bazaar” works at all but, in conditions of rapid change and volatile uncertainty, actually works better and faster than traditional, top down and highly closed, proprietary

¹ <http://manybooks.net/titles/raymondericother05cathedralandbazaar.html>

approaches. Key to the bazaar's success was the ability, as designers in another context tend to describe it, to "launch to learn", that is, to be prepared to use openness as a tool to allow a piece of software (for which you could substitute any major initiative or program in an organisation) to be improved and strengthened much more quickly by letting people see what you are doing early, rather than hiding it from gaze until the cost of making improvements starts to become too steep and difficult.

Under the sub-heading of "release early, release often", Raymond explained that "early and frequent releases are a critical part of the Linux development model. Most developers...used to believe this was bad policy for larger than trivial projects, because early versions are almost by definition buggy versions and you don't want to wear out the



"The environment in which non-profits are doing their social change work has changed dramatically over the past five years. Its more complex, online networks are central to our lives and work, and stakeholders want more involvement. Seeing tangible results from your organization's social change efforts now requires two things to be successful: leading with a network mindset, and using measurement and learning to continuously improve. It is just not about using the tools—having a Facebook brand presence or tweeting as the CEO of your organization—it is a total redesign of your organization.

A network mindset exercises leadership through active participation, openness, decentralized decision-making, and collective action. It means operating with an awareness of the networks the organization is embedded in, and listening to and cultivating these networks to achieve impact. It means sharing by default and communicating through a network model, rather than a broadcast model—finding where the conversations are happening and taking part."

http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/becoming_a_networked_nonprofit?utm_source=Enews12_08_30&utm_medium=email&utm_content=1&utm_campaign=kanter, Beth Kanter, August 2012

"some coordinating developer" but it doesn't require significant communication between the hackers and users themselves. He also noted that, in the bazaar model that emerged from Linus' Law, "it is not critical that the coordinator be able to originate designs of exceptional brilliance, but it is absolutely critical that the coordinator be able to recognize good design ideas from others."

In that sense, a leader in the connected, complex and open world of the bazaar doesn't need to expert in their own right, but they do need skills to see what's happening around them, to understand the where good work is being done and to nurture its evolution and connection back into the larger endeavour.

patience of your users." In fact, what the open source world discovered is that groups of users, often with deep expertise in their own right, were only too happy to be asked to contribute to the de-bugging process. The result was better software, quicker. As a line from the essay describes the resulting lesson, "to a thousand eyes, all bugs are shallow".

From the open source movement, Raymond discerned some distinct implications for the leadership model that Torvalds himself adopted. For example, Raymond noted that Torvalds kept his hackers/users "constantly stimulated and rewarded—stimulated by the prospect of having an ego-satisfying piece of the action, rewarded by the sight of constant (even daily) improvement in their work." And in one of his central observations, Raymond nails the key characteristics of what he described as the differences between an essentially top-down, closed and proprietary approach to software development (the cathedral) and an open, connected, complex approach (the bazaar).

This is his summary:

"In the cathedral-builder view of programming, bugs and development problems are tricky, insidious, deep phenomena. It takes months of scrutiny by a dedicated few to develop confidence that you've winkled them all out. Thus the long release intervals and the inevitable disappointment when long-awaited releases are not perfect.

In the bazaar view, on the other hand, you assume that bugs are generally shallow phenomena - or, at least, that they turn shallow pretty quickly when exposed to a thousand eager co-developers pounding on every single new release. Accordingly you release often in order to get more corrections, and as a beneficial side effect you have less to lose if an occasional botch gets out the door."

Raymond also explains how the dispersed and de-centred model of the bazaar doesn't always need complex management to coordinate all of that work back to the centre. There is some communication necessary back to

Similarly, this is a world in which the insight from Peter Drucker about rewarding “contribution, not status” is played out in the notion of “egoless programming”. Drawing on the work of Gerald Weinberg, who wrote a book called *The Psychology of Computer Programming*, Raymond explains that this means “developers are not territorial about their code, and encourage other people to look for bugs and potential improvements in it.” The result is simple and immensely practical – “improvement happens dramatically faster than elsewhere.”

He explains that a bit further. While software writing and coding remains an essentially solitary activity, the really great hacks come from “harnessing the attention and brainpower of entire communities”. The developer who uses only his or her own brain in a closed project is going to fall behind, Weinberg explains, the developer who knows how to create “an open, evolutionary context in which feedback exploring the design space, code contributions, bug-spotting, and other improvements come from hundreds (perhaps thousands) of people.”

Just consider some of the obvious leadership implications if that principle is applied more broadly to the world of organisations, including in the public sector. It requires leaders capable of creating a culture of open and collaborative engagement where ego is harnessed to the collective endeavour and people’s status is derived from the quality, persistence and value of their contributions, and less from apparently arbitrary allocations of positional authority. It demands a level of close listening and observation that goes beyond having an “open door” policy but which actively recruits the leader to the task of sensing who is doing quality work, who has got a contribution to make.

And it demands, by the same token, new skills of synthesis and sense-making to keep connecting the smart work of lots of different players coherent and purposeful. What it tends not to require is the ability to bark out orders or to assume that command and coercion is any long-term substitute for persuasion and authentic engagement.

Raymond presses this last point when he notes that Gerald Weinberg draws on the work of Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin who, in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, explains that “like all young men of my time, with a great deal of confidence in the necessity of commanding, ordering, scolding, punishing and the like. But when, at an early stage, I had to manage serious enterprises and to deal with [free] men, and when each mistake would lead at once to heavy consequences, I began to appreciate the difference between acting on the principle of command and discipline and acting on the principle of common understanding. The former works admirably in a military parade, but it is worth nothing where real life is concerned, and the aim can be achieved only through the severe effort of many converging wills.”

In a more open and connected world, perhaps the important purpose and skill for public sector leaders is the ability to lead “the severe effort of many converging wills.” It’s not a bad slogan, if confronting in some of its implications and demands.

Raymond draws some important conclusions from his exploration, including that the future of his area of expertise, software development, belonged to people “who know how to play Linus’s game, people who leave behind the cathedral and embrace the bazaar.”

But he is not a pie-eyed poet about this. He does not suggest that the answer to leadership in this complex, fast-changing world was the organisational equivalent of asking people to “play nice” or hold hands and hum. Individual brilliance and vision still matter, perhaps even more than ever. But for him, “the cutting edge of open-source software will belong to people who start from individual vision and brilliance, then amplify it through the effective construction of voluntary communities of interest.”

Raymond’s most significant conclusion is an even more profound, but quite pragmatic insight. “Perhaps in the end the open-source culture will triumph”, he writes at the end of his essay, “not because cooperation is morally right or software hoarding is morally wrong ...but simply because the closed-source world cannot win an evolutionary arms race with open-source communities that can put orders of magnitude more skilled time into a problem.”

Leadership, including in the public sector, in a connected world is basically an exercise in learning how to lead in the bazaar. That is hard enough. What becomes even more challenging is the ability to bring those same leadership qualities into the cathedral too.

2 Attributes of a connected world

From Raymond's analysis, what attributes emerge as the hallmarks of a connected world? I think at least these (and there others) represent a basic representation of the new dynamics which are now unleashed into virtually every organisational context, public, private or civil society.

The first attribute is **speed**. The pace of change and the need to make sense of complex information appears to be ramping up mercilessly, putting a premium on the ability to move as quickly as the ideas evolve and demands for answers emerge.

It doesn't mean reflection and discernment are unimportant or impossible. But it does mean that the way we reflect and discern meaning from data to information to knowledge (and even, if we're lucky, to wisdom) is a function not just of time – although there is something inescapable about the need for time and patience - but of collaboration. Raymond's point is that, if you put enough people on the job, give them the information early in the process and harness their collective capacity for shared intelligence and insight, you will garner at least some of the benefits of reflection and analysis much more quickly.

The second attribute of a connected world is **complexity**. Everything is connected to everything else and the trick increasingly is to understand and draw the right conclusions from those connections. The same instinct is at play that embraces large-scale collaboration, openness and visibility and the ability to "let go" to invite a wider potential community of expertise to engage and contribute.

A third attribute is **transparency**. In a connected world, it is much easier for people to see what is going on in all sorts of environments. A trivial example might suffice.

A few weeks ago, there was a story in the US media about the Romney campaign team confecting Twitter "followers" on Mitt Romney's Twitter account. Someone who found themselves mistakenly described as a Romney Twitter "follower" expressed some surprise at her new-found status which, it turned out, was not something she had either done herself or sanctioned. Naturally, she queried the outcome and asked the Romney campaign team to withdraw her "following" status.

But of course she prosecuted her protest campaign in the full glare and blare of Twitter itself so that, not only did she presumably get the redress she was after, but she made sure the millions of people on Twitter who were interested (and doubtless thousands more who read about the story when it was uplifted into the mainstream media) knew about it too. In a connected world, there are fewer and fewer places to hide, which is largely (but perhaps not always) a good thing, but quite unsettling in some situations for those who aspire to lead and make big decisions on behalf of those in whose name they exercise their power and authority.

A fourth attribute of the connected world is a different definition of **expertise**.

There has been for some time a lively discussion about different ways to define knowledge and expertise, broadly split between those who use an essentially top down, structured and highly credentialed or formal definition ("type 1") and those who, on the other hand, put more faith in bottom up, informal and experiential knowledge ("type 2").

The connected world and the rise and rise of social media especially has started to privilege "type 2" knowledge that grows from the ground up and whose value is a function of its pragmatic roots in experience and the range and mix of those involved in its production.² More and more of that kind of knowledge and expertise seems to be the stuff that organisations, and therefore their leaders, are expected to work with and make sense of.

² *The new production of knowledge: the dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies*, Michael Gibbons et al, Sage 1994

In one recent characterisation, that task is leading to much more profound discussions about the nature of knowledge itself in a time and context in which “the facts aren’t the facts, experts are everywhere and the smartest person in the room is the room.”³ The implications is that we made the mistaken assumption that it was knowledge that was scarce whereas it was actually growing more and more abundant all the time.

It turns out that the problem is not scarce knowledge but the fact that “our shelves were small” as we tried to contain everything we thought we needed to know. Now we live in a world in which “new knowledge is not even a set of works...it is an infrastructure of connection” through which we have to travel “as knowingly as we can, which is to say always within a context and from a standpoint, always with others, always with the amount of care we judge is required, always fallibly.”(Weinberger, page 196). Knowledge has become a network. That carries important implications for leaders in any organisational context especially in the public sector.

How we will manage

<http://www.jarche.com/2012/08/how-we-will-manage/> Posted on *Wednesday, 29 August 2012*

Is Google an indication of the how organizations will manage in the 21st century?

Experienced managers who join Google from other companies can find it difficult to operate in a culture where power over subordinates is derived from one’s ideas and powers of persuasion, not job titles, says May. Decisions on promotions and raises are often made by consensus among peers and superiors. An employee isn’t necessarily going to obey a manager just because he or she is a manager. This is radically different from most traditional corporations, which have a top-down, hierarchical style of management. ~ eLearning. This sounds like a wirearchy, “a dynamic two-way flow of power and authority based on information, knowledge, trust and credibility, enabled by interconnected people and technology.”

Perhaps we are seeing the future of work appear on the edges of the economy, as Google is definitely a new economy company. Freedom (democracy) seems to be a requirement for success in the network era, as Jason Fried writes about an experiment to let employees decide what they do for a month at *37Signals*. “How can we afford to put our business on hold for a month to “mess around” with new ideas? How can we afford not to? We would never have had such a burst of creative energy had we stuck to business as usual.” Bottom line: If you can’t spare some time to give your employees the chance to wow you, you’ll never get the best from them.

John Hagel shows that standardized work is obsolete. “Now, think about this. If we reduce work to highly specified and standardized instructions that can be performed efficiently and predictably, what have we done? We have reconceived work so that it can be performed by computers and robots. In fact, computers and robots are far more preferable than humans because we humans are ultimately unpredictable and have a really hard time following instructions to the letter, day in and day out.”

We are moving to a new economy that does not value any work that can be automated & outsourced. Taylorism is dead. Stephen Gill describes how we have to focus on work that cannot be done by robots. This new robotics “megashift” has huge implications for the workplace. Employers will need workers who are better educated, more willing to change, and more flexible in their schedules and work habits than ever before. These workers won’t be needed for simple, repetitive jobs. They will be needed for computer-assisted jobs and for jobs that require creativity, innovation, and teamwork. They will have to be continuous learners, keeping up with technology, globalization, and new ways of organizing work.

So what’s the point?

1. Shared power is necessary in a networked economy.
2. Autonomy is essential for an engaged workforce.
3. The social contract for work needs to change.

How will we manage? We will manage by bringing democracy to the workplace.

3 Attributes of leadership in a connected world

³ *Too Big to Know: Rethinking Knowledge*, David Weinberger, Basic Books, 2011

In a connected world defined by speed, complexity, transparency and new sources of expertise (and there are others), how do you lead?

There are plenty of lists you could compile of specific attributes of a “connected leader”. But there are **three dominant ideas** that seem to characterise the kind of leadership that can not only survive in a networked world, but which can thrive and, more importantly, help others to thrive as well.

Those ideas are:

- Cultivating an instinct to privilege the edge
- Finding new and effective ways to connect the edge to the centre
- Creating new tools and platforms on which better decisions can be made more rapidly from diverse and proliferating sources of information, insight and knowledge.

Privilege the edge

Any organisation or system is defined, in broad terms, by a “centre”, which tends to host aggregations of power, control and authority as well as enjoying access to at least some types of resource, and an “edge”, which embraces places at a physical or institutional distance from the centre where most day-to-day life is lived and where people experience and use the programs, services and products that emerge from governments, business and civil society.

In simple terms, the centre is all about large systems, overall coordination and design. It tends to move and change slowly but, when it does, it can engage large engines of change and reform. The edge is all about innovation, experience and small scale expertise and knowledge. It is at the edge where the need to discover a new way of doing something or finding a better product or service is at its most intense, driven by the immediate experience of people who are highly motivated to experiment and to stitch together the resources and skills to try things out. At the edge, things move and change quickly and people have the room and often the implied or direct permission to be agile and creative. But it is often hard for the edge to move whole systems or to shift the larger organisational or social contexts of which they are a part.

And again, oversimplifying considerably, the recent exploration of how organisations, cities and whole countries thrive in a more connected, open world has focused increasingly on the edge as the space from which innovation and new practice will emerge. The work of people like Eric von Hippel,⁴ for example, has helped to sharpen the focus on the particular advantages the edge can manifest in the search for mould-breaking innovation. Von Hippel argues that “if the information needed to innovate in important ways is widely distributed, the traditional pattern of concentration innovation-support resources on a few individuals is highly inefficient (von Hippel, p14)

One of the ideas that should increasingly be guiding public sector leadership for a connected world is the need to find, understand and nurture the edge because it is an unusually productive, but sometimes fragile source of new thinking and practice. The ability to move quickly to respond to changing conditions and new risks and opportunities in the policy and program environment is a function of not just understanding, but actively privileging, the edge.

To reinforce the point, new thinking about how to lead more effectively in one of the most centralised, command-and-control institutions we’ve ever invented – the military – betrays the same instinct to privilege the edge as part of a new and disruptive leadership doctrine. The implications are powerful. Many of these insights are captured in a study that explores how “the power to the edge” is rewriting the leadership and command doctrines for an information age.⁵

The authors note, for example, that “the security environment has forever changed and this new security environment requires orders of magnitude faster “sensemaking” and

⁴ *Democratising Innovation*, Eric von Hippel, MIT Press, 2005

⁵ *Power to the edge: command, control in the information age*, David S Alberts and Richard E Hayes, Information Age Transformation Series

responses. Furthermore, to make sense of the situation requires that we are able to quickly bring to bear (1) information from many sources, including new sources, (2) a wide variety of expertise and perspectives (to understand, filter, and integrate the available information and knowledge), and (3) synchronized effects over multiple domains”.

The study explains that the complexity of the situations faced and the responses needed have outpaced not only decision theoretic approaches, but have also outpaced the ability of even the best of experts (super stars) to deal with the complexities involved. The reasons are clear. First, they suggest, the sources of complexity are accelerating. These sources of complexity include the variety of events and entities that are connected, the density of the interactions, and the speed of interactions that make it difficult to relate a cause to an effect and almost impossible to predict cascading effects. Second, it takes a long time for individuals to become experts and senior decision makers in industry and the military, spending decades to arrive in positions of leadership. The implications are that “the bulk of their experience is well aged, increasingly out-of-date, and of questionable relevance (and) at some point, these individuals face situations that bear little resemblance to anything that they have previously experienced.”

What the study describes as a revolution in military doctrine starts from the premise that, rather than rely on individual genius, information age processes tap collective knowledge and collaboration. In a very practical way, it is not possible any longer to fall back on traditional approaches to strategic planning, without being able to rely on intuition, where does leadership and direction come from?

The new doctrine which the study describes as “power to the edge” enables an enterprise to bring all of its available information and its brain power to bear “by allowing information to be recombined in untold ways and by allowing individuals to interact in unplanned ways to create understandings and options not previously possible.” This is an important insight for leadership in connected organisations in which there is a new premium on the ability to seek options and answers from a process of “unplanned” connections and interactions.

The study draws some very powerful conclusions about the implication for the way power is conceived and used in a “power to the edge” doctrine. “Power is an expression of potential,” it argues, and “accomplishment is the realization of power.” In this sense, the reason for moving power to the edge is to make the organization “more powerful.” This additional power is related to a corresponding increase in organizational agility. The source of the increased power comes from (1) an improvement in an organization’s ability to bring *all* of its information and *all* of its assets to bear, instead of only a fraction of its information and assets, and (2) the ability to recognize and take advantage of fleeting opportunities. In other words, *power to the edge* allows an organization to fully realize its potential power by making the most of the resources it has and the opportunities presented.(p.243)

Attachment 1 provides a more detailed summary of the “power to the edge” model.

Connecting the edge and the centre

On its own, no matter how creative and agile it might be, the edge can't be as effective as it might be unless it can connect to the centre and infect the larger engines of system change and large-scale reform.

So the centre still matters, but it matters in a different way than might have been the case in simpler, less volatile times. It certainly can't demand control and spit out commands to what are assumed to be the passive and powerless edge. It can't keep secrets the way it might once have done, although it will always have to exercise judgement and discretion about issues of security and privacy. And it can't prosecute a "black box" approach to policy and decision making, hoarding information and power behind closed doors, working on its own to make sense of what it thinks it knows and then making grand pronouncements that haven't been tested or refined through exposure and open discussion.

In the more formal description from the "power to the edge" analysis, "information age technologies have enabled the flattening of organizations and the creation of virtual organizations that redefine the relationships within an organization, and the development of new business models that redefine the relationships among organizations and/or individuals and organizations in a competitive space. The hierarchical organization is a centralized status-power topology with its small but powerful center, a significant middle that serves to operationalize command and exercise control, and an edge that has very limited means and opportunity (power)."

The traditional "green paper" and "white paper" process in Westminster style governments is one traditional technique by which to connect the edge and the centre. In the more de-centred world of a digitally connected world, especially through the influence of social media, those traditional methods have to be augmented by more radically open and engaged models of conversation, debate and analysis. In a world of Twitter and pervasive (if often inchoate and confusing) Big Data, one of the biggest tasks for the centre is to listen more assiduously and comprehensively to the communities producing ideas and information and to use the grunter analytical tools and capabilities to analyse the flows of knowledge that emerge.

In a recent media story about the power of social media and protest, three examples of the emergence of unexpected, but powerful protests based on rapid, connected action in and with the edge reinforced the new dynamics now impacting the relationship between the edge and the centre⁶. In one story, a young farmer's wife used the Coles' Facebook page to unleash a bitter and frustrated tirade against the impact of the supermarket chain's milk pricing policies on hard-pressed and increasingly unviable dairy farmers. Almost literally overnight (on a weekend, in fact), Jane Burney had become a celebrity, concentrating the pent-up wrath of literally thousands of people who used her Facebook post as the platform on which to join the protest.



"An old order is coming apart, a new one—for better or worse—self-assembling. To help build and succeed in the new order, leaders in the private, public and citizen sectors need to switch from thinking about incremental change to transformational, systemic change. And to do this they will need to connect wider, analyze deeper, aim higher and invest longer...

...It is in the very nature of things that a proportion of leaders will fail, but when the rate of failure increases dramatically, the chances are that system failure is at the heart of the problem. The current generation of leaders have fought their way to the top of the pile in a system whose rules they understood, indeed helped to define and police.

As a new order begins to emerge, their instincts, reflexes and well-honed solutions increasingly fail to address the increasingly complex challenges. The question is: do our leaders have the skills and ability to adapt to the new order?"

Future Quotient,
<http://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/?p=6133>

⁶ *Power to the people*, Kate Legge, The Weekend Australian 1-2 September 2012

The numbers are instructive. She wrote her original post in a mixture of anger and frustration late on a Friday night. By the following morning, the post had 12,000 "likes". By the end of the day on Saturday, she'd clocked up 50,000 "likes" and by Sunday, her fan base had climbed to 73,448 "likes" and 4500 comments. In the end, a senior executive from Coles travelled out to the farm and sat down to talk through the issues.

Will Coles change its milk pricing strategy as a result of this outburst of energetic digital protesting? I have no idea and, to an extent, that isn't the point. What the story illustrates is that the centre is no longer in a position where it once was to call the shots and make decisions in relative isolation and without being called to a disconcerting new type of account by the edge. This is a dynamic captured well in a recent post on a blog focusing on what it means to "manage in a networked world". The writer pointed out that "virtual relationships are real and have significant impact on organizations. A song on the Net can drop stock values and a dispersed group of individual activists with networked computers can embarrass nation states and corporations. Virtual relationships can create significant business value...separating relationships by medium is rather fruitless, so managers need to understand the virtual very well."⁷

New rules about this crucial dynamic are being written and leaders, public or private, have to understand the implications of those new rules and, in some measure, have to accept they will be part of how those rules are being written.

Making sense for better decisions

The third defining idea around which new attributes for public sector leadership for a connected world are being defined is about sense-making for better decisions.

The Planetary Skin initiative - <http://www.planetaryskin.org/> - on which Cisco is working with NASA and other public, private and academic partners around the world, is harnessing the new capabilities of sensor-based networks to monitor and understand changes in a range of large scale natural and human systems...what is happening to forest cover, how cities are managing air quality, the ebb and flow of droughts and the impacts of large natural disasters on fragile natural and human ecosystems.

All of that data, fuelled increasingly by the widening reach of the "internet of everything", is augmented by people themselves using simple, cheap and pervasive mobile and social technologies to provide their own streams of data and even of knowledge that add to the data to be analysed and understood.

Big data analytics then crunch the rivers of data from whose swirling torrents some kind of sense has to be extracted so that better knowledge can inform better decisions by governments and corporations and cities and communities and so on.

Although not all nodes in these proliferating networks will be equal, similarly none can manage this process on their own, no matter how large or influential their contribution and capability renders them. As David Weinberger argued, these are systems which are "too big to know" and in which new knowledge is an "infrastructure of connection". Connectedness of things and people and institutions and communities and networks of people is what counts. And leaders have to learn the dynamics of that new connectedness and work out how to make it work well, how to resource and sustain the capabilities on which it relies and ensure that its performance is always improving.

4 Leadership architecture for a connected world

Is it possible to design public sector leadership for a connected world? Perhaps we can think of it by combining a "business architecture" and a "technology architecture" of tools, processes and cultures that provision, at least in large measure, the kind of leadership that makes sense in these new conditions.

The business architecture for leadership in a connected world consists pretty much of the elements that have been spelled out earlier in this paper.

⁷ <http://www.jarche.com/2011/05/managing-in-a-networked-world/> From the blog of Harold Jarche, a Canadian consultant and writer on organisations and learning

In summary, they define the kinds of capabilities that leaders need and they include:

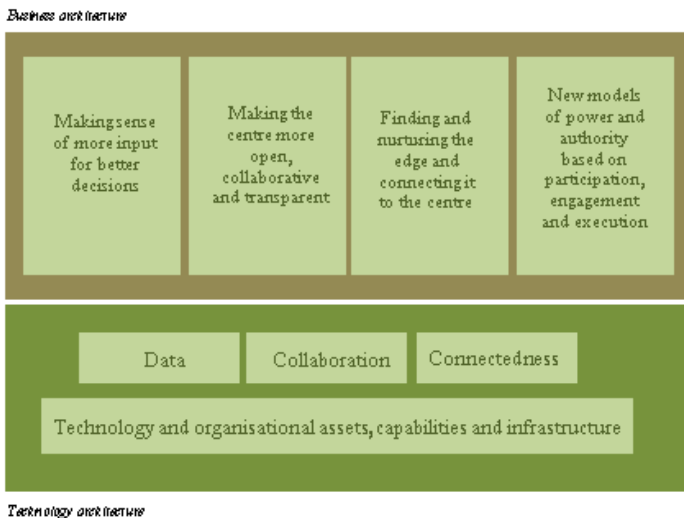
- Activating effective models and tools of collaboration that can reach more people and turn disparate ideas, preferences and insights into meaning that informs sound judgement
- Learning new techniques to find and nurture the edge communities of clever, creative but sometimes messy innovators and then connecting them back to a larger momentum of institutional and systemic change
- Making the centre itself more open, collaborative and transparent.
- Adapting to different models of power and authority which harness the instinct for participation and engagement without jeopardising the capacity for decision and execution.

That business architecture can't be effective without a base of "technology", broadly defined, which itself can be defined in architectural terms. In some cases, these platforms are designed around powerful combinations of new and old technologies at the heart of systems that are more open, networked and collaborative.

For more and more people, "digital by default" or at least "digital by design" is becoming both an instinct and a clear preference in terms of how people want to communicate, consume and collaborate.

The (overly simplified) technology architecture consists of four components – data, collaboration, networks (or, broadly, the power and practice of connectedness) and a set of underlying assets and infrastructure on which the whole rests.

The true power of this kind of design or architectural approach starts to become evident when these capabilities combine to deliver whole or integrated solutions that make sense in the context of the "business" outcomes that leaders want to achieve in a more connected world.



It's also possible to construe the human elements of this architecture as "technology" as well, or at the very least as key techniques of human behaviour – how people listen and respond to new ideas, how people argue and contest, how people use (or abuse) their power, status and authority for example. In that sense, the technology that provisions the new habits and capabilities of connected leadership represent a powerful mix of 'real' technology and the human or cultural techniques and behaviours which they enable, augment or even extend.

5 Implications for public sector leadership

Giving effect to the new architecture of connected leadership in the public sector is not going to be easy. In many ways, the ethic of at least some aspects of leadership for a connected world runs counter to some of the core values and attributes of public sector leadership. In simple terms, where the connected world is, for the most part, open, collaborative and emergent, the world of public sector leadership can often be relatively closed, siloed and with a heavy premium on "no nasty surprises".

The question is how far can the world of public sector leadership embrace the new demands, and opportunities of a connected world? The answer is much further than some might think and not as far as others might like.

One way of framing this challenge is set out in the “new synthesis” framework for a 21st century public administration, based on a 6-country research project lead by Jocelyne Bourgon⁸. The framework is a bold attempt to reset the practice and profession of public administration to integrate some of these new networked and open dimensions – defined as “emergence” and “resilience” – with more traditional concerns with performance and compliance.

Another frame is set out in a paper published last year by the Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) which sets out a number of the challenges facing modern government and some of the traditional and emerging values on which the process of change and reform would have to rely⁹.

The Institute acknowledged that, in the face of risks and opportunities of unprecedented complexity, scale and unpredictability, many of our public sector systems and institutions need considerable reform and renewal. It agreed with the UK Public Services 2020 Commission that a combination of long term demand, fiscal constraint and outcome failures have brought public services to a critical moment.¹⁰

But the paper accepts that, just as society has changed, so have the means that can be used to create value for citizens through public services. And many of these are driven by how technology enhances our lives. However governments decide to set about the consequent programs of reform, they should, the Institute argued, reinforce important attributes of open, accountable, fair and ethical government. These are core values of public that cannot be compromised, but should be capable of being augmented, by the tools and capabilities especially of interactive and social technologies of “Web 2.0”, to deliver the mix of better policy, improved services and new levels of citizen engagement and participation that are the hallmarks of good government in a more open and connected world.

IPAA suggested that the next wave of public sector reforms will be formed around distributed systems, rather than centralised structures. The challenge for governments, as it is for business too, is to deal with complexity not by standardisation and simplification imposed from the centre, but by distributing complexity to the margins. The role of the citizen changes from passive recipient to active contributor in the development of policies and improved public services.

The practical implication is that government has to adjust to a world in which power and authority becomes, at least in some contexts, a function of the way people connect to share ideas, knowledge and commitment. Connectedness and contribution, not necessarily position and status, are key. And, in an important observation for its direct and practical leadership implications, the paper argues that organisations and institutions will always be important, but only if they accept the importance of engaging with the networks and communities around them.

The paper made some other important observations which also have significant implications for public sector leadership in a connected world. For example, improving public services, the paper suggests, will balance earlier models of contestability and competition with the use of social media which, made possible by the Internet and drawing on instincts for open and collaborative communication, could unleash more powerful assessments of public service failures. This kind of feedback has the potential to get wide publicity that can embarrass politicians and public servants into action. Public leaders, in other words, work in a world drenched in transparency in which people, mostly, will find out.

More positively, the IPAA framework showed how solving public problems drew on new combinations of experience and insight. That demands more convenient and appealing ways to talk, argue, design, test and then scale solutions. Open and connected governance assumes an ability to rapidly find people, connect them in purposeful conversations, give them access to the right mix of knowledge and ideas (to which they will often contribute) and keep them working productively in complex coalitions.

⁸ *A new synthesis of public administration: serving in the 21st century*, Jocelyne Bourgon, 2011

⁹ <http://www.ipaa.org.au/documents/2012/05/the-future-course-of-modern-government.pdf>

¹⁰ http://clients.squareeye.net/uploads/2020/documents/PST_final_rep.pdf *From social security to social productivity: a vision for 2020 public services*

If that is true, it raises big questions about the kind of leadership that can not only make that happen, but do so in an appropriately open, accountable and ethical way.

The truth for big organisations, whether public, private or civil society, is that the people and the expertise they need (to create, in the case of government, the good policy and service design outcomes they seek) will be anywhere and everywhere. Often, they will work in smaller, more distributed networks which come together to solve problems or share ideas. Often, they organise without organisations, as Clay Shirky would describe it¹¹. And that is an especially challenging context within which to even define, much less exercise effective public sector leadership.

But IPAA offers a timely reminder that however complex and ‘wicked’ the problems are which call out our collective wisdom, we still want public servants to be impartial, efficient and responsive, striving to achieve the best results for the Australian community. And we still want them to perform impartially and in the public interest, providing advice that is frank, honest, timely and informed. In other words however connected, flexible, agile and responsive we might want them to become, we also want them still to be good public servants, imbued with some timeless values and instincts that we think make for a system that is likely to be fair, accountable and effective. But on their own, these timeless values won’t be sufficient.

Underlying these discussions are three challenges.

The first challenge is the need to rethink and redesign the nature and practice of **power, control and accountability** within which public sector leaders work. These are big topics. But they are the big cultural pillars on which leadership in the public sector is based and, to the extent those pillars are changing, then so too must the art and practice of public sector leadership which they support and inform.

The locus of control in public policy systems is shifting away from the centre and out to the edge. That doesn’t mean the centre doesn’t retain important and sometimes preeminent tools of control and direction. It does and for good reason, when you think about areas like defence, policing, immigration and border controls, the justice system and some aspects of taxation and financial policy.

But take the area of human and welfare services. For the past 20 years, many public policy and service delivery systems have been carefully and deliberately designed to separate out the “thinking” from the “doing”, in other words splitting out making policy from service delivery. Central agencies craft policy frameworks and rules and then ask often large transactional “factories” to focus on the essentially operational business of getting the “products” out of the door.

The problem is that, in a more connected and complex world, much of the most important information and knowledge that is needed to fuel policy and innovation doesn’t reside in the central policy agencies. To the extent that information and knowledge comes from front-line delivery staff and, even more importantly, from customers and service users who experience the sharp end of the policy process in their day-to-day lives, a rich seam of policy-significant information and knowledge lives at the edge. That puts new pressures on the organisational ability to look for and listen to that information and knowledge and then (and this is the tricky bit) to get that information and knowledge back up the system so that it can inform the next round of policy and program design.

Compounding that problem is the result of the two decades of institutional design, which has had the effect of attenuating the lines of communication, so to speak, between the service front line and the ‘staff’ resources at the centre. As others are starting to point out, including for example the recent comments by Gary Sturgess, ANZSOG Professor of Public Service Delivery, former Director General of the NSW Cabinet Office and more recently senior executive with Serco, this distance is becoming a problem¹².

¹¹ *Here comes everybody: the power of organising without organisations*, Clay Shirky, Penguin, 2008
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Here_Comes_Everybody

¹² *Doing Australia a public disservice*, Gary Sturgess, [Australian Financial Review](#), 23 March 2012

Narration is only the first step

Posted on Tuesday, 7 August 2012 by Harold Jarche

<http://www.jarche.com/2012/08/narration-is-only-the-first-step/>

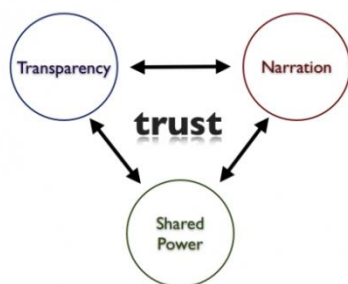
I think that narration is one of the key principles of an effective networked workplace, or social business. Narration is making one's tacit knowledge (what one feels) more explicit (what one is doing with that knowledge). Narrating work is a powerful behaviour changer, as long-term bloggers can attest. In an organization, narration can take many forms. It could be a regular blog; sharing day-to-day happenings in activity streams; taking pictures and videos; or just having regular discussions. Developing good narration skills, like adding value to information, takes time and practice. Narrating work also means taking ownership of mistakes.

Jane Bozarth discusses the nuts and bolts of narrating our work in this Learning Solutions Magazine article:

“By sharing what we are doing and how we are learning, we distribute the tacit knowledge otherwise so hard to capture; invite feedback and encouragement from others; invite others to learn with us; document our work and learning for future use; and tie our learning to the efforts of others. Here's a true story about physical rehab turned learning turned hobby turned community of practice turned two successful businesses, all via informal, social means. And all within six months.

The story that Jane tells happens outside the walls of an organization. I think this is important to note, because one of my other principles for an effective networked workplace is shared power. Shared power enables faster reaction times so those closest to the situation can take action. In complex situations there is no time to write a detailed assessment. Those best able to address the situation have marinated in it for some time. They couldn't sufficiently explain it to someone removed from the problem if they wanted to anyway. This shared power is enabled by trust. Power in knowledge-based organizations must be distributed in order to nurture trust.

But sharing power is really difficult. In the video Dare to Disagree, via Jim Hays, Margaret Heffernan describes how people inside organizations, and professional communities, are afraid to challenge conventional wisdom, even when the data are overwhelming. The power structure exerts great pressure to conform. Only organizations that share power and encourage conflict can advance different ideas. As she says, “openness alone can't drive change”.



Power-sharing decreases the fear of conflict. When those at the top hold most, or all, of the power, then those near the bottom will try to avoid conflict. But conflict is essential for learning. As Heffernan describes in the video, only in trusted relationships can conflict for learning happen. Sharing power creates trust.

Unfortunately, power is addictive. For example, simulations reveal that when there are no levels of hierarchy, everyone shares in 89% of the rewards of the system. When only one level level is added, then those at the top get 98% while those

only one level below gain a mere 6%. No wonder hierarchies are so appealing.

Power, and its effects on organizational performance, is holding us back. This is why we need to experiment with new and much flatter work structures.

As Heffernan says, the truth will not set us free until we have the courage to use it. Our organizational structures, and their power systems, are a major part of the problem. Command and control are the barriers to an effective networked workplace. I have written that Enterprise 2.0 and social business are hollow shells without democracy because without power sharing, narration of work & transparency are a useless two-legged stool.

The policy and innovation synapses, in effect, that should be firing in increasingly rapid patterns are often actually slowing down the flow of intelligence and knowledge up and down the policy and service “value chain”.

This dilemma is impacting many different public policy systems. Redesigning them will take considerable effort to change the underlying patterns of power and control. These will have to be re-thought (but certainly not discarded) so that they more accurately reflect the new flows of influence and contribution across the different stages from context, to trends and challenges, to policy and program design and testing, to implementation and then to evaluation and monitoring.

As an inevitable consequence of remapping the control systems that will deliver better and more responsive policies and programs, the underlying architecture of power and accountability will also have to evolve. In both cases, the design will have to reflect the design principles of the connected world in which they have to operate more generally – de-centred, distributed, shared, open, transparent and accountable outwards and downwards as much upwards through the traditional accountability chains that lead up to Ministers and Parliament.

In the “power to the edge” analysis, the proposal is for an alternative to hierarchical, command approaches to control (whose weakness is that they rely on well-crafted plans that can last long enough to survive the process of cascading the commands or instructions up, down and across the various chains or hierarchies and hope that the conditions they were intended to deal with are still in place when the people who eventually get the instructions can do something about them. The trouble is that this is less and less likely to be true in many policy, program or service delivery situations.

So what is the alternative? Basically, don’t focus so much on control, but rather seek to influence behaviour. In more detail:

“Control is not something that can be imposed on a complex adaptive system, particularly when there are many independent actors. Control, that is, ensuring that behaviour stays within or moving to within acceptable bounds, can only be achieved indirectly. The most promising approach involves establishing, to the extent possible, a set of initial conditions that will *result* in the desired behaviour. In other words, control is not achieved by imposing a parallel process, but rather emerges from influencing the behaviors of independent agents. Instead of being *in control*, the enterprise creates the conditions that are likely to give rise to the behaviours that are desired.” (p237)

A second core challenge is to unravel some of the difficult questions about the public sector’s attitude towards, and ability to manage, **risk and innovation**. How realistic is it to exhort the public sector to become more comfortable with the risk-laden models of innovation, especially at the edge, while the underlying rules of accountability and control remain largely (and often for good reasons) in favour of predictability and incremental change? And if it’s true that there will always be limits to the innovation quotient in the mainstream public sector, how does the public sector become more comfortable with an outsourcing or commissioning model that allows others outside government (at the edge) to do the innovative work.

Recent contributions to the discussion based on work in new innovation spaces like Mindlab in Denmark¹³ build on similar earlier contributions from organisations like NESTA in the UK¹⁴. In Australia, new platforms for public sector innovation are emerging - <http://innovation.govspace.gov.au/> - and, in the federal government, new initiatives like the Centre for Excellence in Public Service Design is shifting the balance towards more open and design-based innovation.

The third challenge is really an implication of the first two and, in some ways of the other ideas that have been presented earlier. Public sector leaders are no different to leaders in the business world or in civil society organisations to the extent they will have to discover new ways to **look, listen and learn** as the only viable basis on which to construct powerful and influential leadership models in an open and connected world.

¹³ *Leading public sector innovation: co-creating for a better society*, Christian Bason, Policy Press, 2012

¹⁴ *Ready or not; taking innovation in the public sector seriously*, Geoff Mulgan, NESTA, 2007

Policy agencies will have to learn new ways to look at the implementation and delivery of policy so they get better at seeing what actually happens when their ideas hit the street (or the suburb or rural community or city). To the extent that new digital tools are opening up new and often unexpected windows that offer much more direct visibility of the lived experience of people affected by the actions and decisions of public agencies, how do those new insights become tractable as useful evidence that can be built into subsequent ‘early releases’ of new policy and better programs?

How do public sector leaders listen to the growing number of often confusing and contested voices actively contributing to the debate about any given issue? How do leader distil the oceans of ‘noise’ in cyberspace into some actionable ‘signals’ that don’t discount or betray the complexity and variety of ideas and insights that are now legitimately clamouring to be heard? How are the new sources of influence and contribution to be properly weighed when simple, but still important notions of ‘representation’ and ‘balance’ may not be sufficient? How do public sector leaders gain the almost anthropological detection tools to discern where the cleverest, most interesting and potentially most useful ideas are coming from when old notions of size, status, longevity and institutional position might not help and could even be positively misleading?

And how do public leaders craft inside their agencies new models of learning, of sorting and sifting the evidence from so many different and sometimes unexpected sources from which sense has to be made and then sound judgements have to be made?

If knowledge is “an infrastructure of connection” and if we’ve reached the stage where especially the big, nasty and complex problems we want governments to solve are just “too big to know” and where experts are everywhere and the smartest person in the room is the room, how do public sector leaders curate the skills and culture within not just their agencies, but across the longer and more tenuous ‘supply chains’ they are expected to manage can learn in fundamentally new, more connected ways?

6 Public sector leadership for a connected world: some principles

There are risks in turning a complex and nuanced debate about public sector leadership into a prescriptive checklist of principles that appear to offer a kind of programmatic menu for success. The good and the bad news is that such a list does not exist and, if you’re tempted to find one, or worse still, to write one, you’re probably on the wrong track.

So let me ignore my own advice try anyway, not because I am offering a simple “10 point plan” but because it helps to conclude the discussion and in some measure disciplines the discussion into some useful headlines.

Some of these are drawn from the earlier discussion, and some are drawn from other sources such as the work of the Government Digital Service in the UK Cabinet Office (for example, from their 10 design principles for effective digital transformation).¹⁵

1. Do the hard work to make things simple

Public sector leaders need to make complex issues simple to access and engage without becoming simplistic or denying diversity and difference.

2. Launch to learn

Designers tell us that one of the most powerful ways to find out if an idea, a product or a service is going to work is to launch it, even if it’s not quite ready but to get an early and direct feel from the ‘market’ about how it might work. That process is expected not to be either perfect or even ultimately successful. But it is expected to yield insight and intelligence that can’t be gained any other way.

3. Find the edge and feed it

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/designprinciples>

In the connected world, innovation and reform will almost always start at the edge and larger institutions, who often have money and power, have to find better ways to look and listen to what is happening there in terms of new thinking and new practice.

4. Navigate the collision of the unfamiliar

Sometimes the best solutions or most promising ideas to solve problems or exploit opportunities will come from unexpected places. Solutions spaces like InnoCentive (<http://www.innocentive.com/>) and Kaggle (an Australian “platform for data prediction competitions”... <http://www.kaggle.com/>) have made a virtue out of a competition-based approach to sourcing unlikely people who have unexpected solutions that can solve difficult problems and calculations.

5. It’s not about you

The lesson from Linus Torvalds and the story of open source software is partly about the importance of a leader – clearly Torvalds as an initiating and convening force was and remains critical to the success of the overall venture – and partly about their unimportance.

Raymond explains that Torvald’s biggest breakthrough was not the Linux kernel itself, the actual code, but rather his invention of the Linux development model. Torvalds’ explanation is suitably self-deprecating. “I’m basically a very lazy person who like to get credit for things that other people actually do,” he told Raymond. Leadership as laziness, perhaps.

6. Digital by design

Leaders in the connected world have to be not just “digital by default”, to borrow the mantra from the UK’s Government Digital Service (<http://digital.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/>), but just as importantly “digital by design”. The digital dimension is not just an enabler (although it certainly often is that) for other business solutions and strategies. In many and increasing cases, digital IS the solution and the strategy. But getting it right is a question of choice, experience and experimentation. In other words, a question of design.

7. Give to get

In the connected world of the “bazaar”, generally most of the things that leaders want more of – control, power, accountability, creativity – comes from a willingness to let go a little and give people more room to exercise these attributes for themselves. Linus Torvalds and others at the heart of the Linux venture, or the small group of editors and designers at the heart of Wikipedia, are in control in one sense but in many ways are not in control of a much looser community of contributors. The best way to control or lead people in those circumstances is to let them control most of the variables that contribute to their success and not to get in the way.

8. More accountability, less control

Accountability in the connected world is increasingly not a function of more and more process, although clearly some process is both good and necessary, but rather of more and more transparency; people will hold you accountable by what they see and find out, which will eventually be everything, not by the elegance of the systems and processes you construct.

9. Contribution, not status

Be prepared to reward and nurture people who have useful ideas, show commitment and make a contribution rather than those who rely on status and conferred authority.

10. Collaboration by default

The claim often is that “collaboration is an unnatural act between non-consenting adults”. It’s a little glib, but resonant with anyone who has ever tried to do it well. Leaders in a more open and connected world have to create a culture where collaboration is the default option because it is more efficient and productive.

As a final contribution to the risky business of list-making, I’ve attached ([Attachment 2](#)) another post from the Harold Jarche blog, this time on the challenges of “ideas management” in networked, complex settings. It combines common sense and some well-worn but important insights with some useful thoughts about practical ways leaders need to work in this context.

Power to the Edge

This is an excerpt from the book in which the authors define the whole notion of “edge” and draw some powerful implications both for the immediate focus on transforming military doctrines of command and control and, I would argue, for broader questions of leadership in the kinds of open, connected and complex conditions which they correctly sense as increasingly pervasive for all organisations.

“In common usage, the word *edge* refers to the cutting part of a blade, a sharpness of voice, an extreme position, the brink of something, an advantage, or a boundary. Boundaries are meaningful only in the context of a topology. A topology is defined by those factors that determine the distribution or location of entities within the space of the topology. Thus, the meaning of *the edge* depends upon the organizing principle of the topology in question. In an Industrial Age organization, being at the edge can mean being (1) far from the center, at the “pointy end of the spear” (2) lowest in rank, or (3) in contact with the customer.

Paradoxically, the first two are associated with a lack of power while the third is focused on the ability to make things happen. Often, the phrase “pointy end of the spear” is used to distinguish a critical mission (line function) from a supporting (or overhead) activity. This distinction is no longer useful because all of these functions are now integral to operations. For example, information/analytic functions were not considered to be at the pointy end of the spear. Now they provide, sometimes in real time, crucial information such as coordinates that are needed to guide ordinance to their targets (information is now literally at the pointy end of the spear).

In a hierarchical organization, one with a topology organized by status and power, those at the top are at the center and those at the bottom are at the edge. In addition, there is a significant portion of the organization in the middle. Those at the top have the power to command, to set the direction for the organization, allocate its resources, and control the reward structure. Information flows along the axes of power, hence these flows are vertical. Information collected at the bottom flows vertically to the top, and directives flow vertically from the top to the bottom. The middle is needed to deal with the practical limits on span of control. The middle serves to mediate and interpret information flows in both directions, allocate resources, and delegate authority. Some think of the top as exercising command and the middle as exercising control. (p203)

An edge organization encourages appropriate interactions between and among any and all members. Its approach to command and control breaks the traditional C2 mould by uncoupling command from control. Command is involved in setting the initial conditions and providing overall intent. Control is not a function of command but an emergent property that is a function of the initial conditions, the environment, and the adversaries. Loyalty is not to a local entity, but to the overall enterprise.

Edge organizations have the attributes to be agile. This is because agility requires that available information is combined in new ways, that a variety of perspectives are brought to bear, and that assets can be employed differently to meet the needs of a variety of situations. While they are not optimized to accomplish familiar tasks as hierarchies have evolved to do, edge organizations may even be able to develop more innovative solutions to familiar problems over time. This is because hierarchical processes are optimized subject to a set of constraints that do not bound the behaviour of edge organizations.

Edge organizations are particularly well suited to deal with uncertainty and unfamiliarity because they make more of their relevant knowledge, experience, and expertise available.”

Power to the Edge: Command and control in the information age

David S Alberts and Richard E Hayes
CCRP Publication Series, 2003

Idea management requires shared power

Posted on [Thursday, 9 August 2012](#) by [Harold Jarche](#)

Nancy Dixon discusses [The Three Eras of Knowledge Management](#), an excellent read on how *lead organizations* are using *idea management*.

(MSW add from the Nancy Dixon blog...“So I am using “Idea Management” as the label for the third era...The first two eras, Information Management and Experience Management dealt with existing knowledge, that is, knowledge that an individual or a group has gained and is available to be shared with others. The third era is about the creation or development of ideas that have not existed before. It is not the management of anything organizational members have learned through their work experience, but what they create jointly when they are brought together in an environment that supports the use of collective knowledge. That support includes convening, cognitive diversity and transparency.”)

This post confirms, in my mind, the **three principles** of net work, or how work gets done in the network era. The description of *convening* is similar to openness, though in the explanation below, it is a more deliberate process than what might be thought of as a community of practice. .

The NASA example illustrates the three enablers of the third era, 1) convening, 2) cognitive diversity and 3) transparency.

1. Convening

Convening is the skill and practice of bringing groups together to develop understanding of complex issues, create new knowledge and spur innovation. It is about:

- designing meetings as conversations rather than presentations
- identifying who needs to be in the conversation, including those who do the work and are impacted by it
- framing the question in a way that opens thinking
- arranging the space to facilitate conversation
- using small groups as the unit of learning

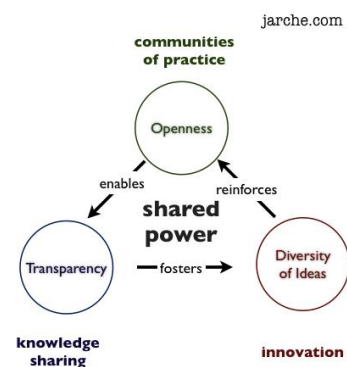
I have written about convening and the role of the leader in [The Power of the Conversation Architect to Address Complex, Adaptive Challenges](#)

2 Cognitive Diversity

Cognitive diversity is the deliberate use of difference to bring new understanding to an issue. When faced with complex issues our inclination is to collect more data, survey, or assign a task force to conduct interviews; when what is needed is a new way to frame the issue. Cognitive diversity brings people trained in different heuristics, problem solving strategies, interpretations, and perspectives into the room. Cognitive diversity can be found in different parts of the organization (e.g. marketing, finance, engineering), in different disciplines (e.g. biology, neuroscience, archeology), or outside the organization (e.g. suppliers, customers, consultants, academicians, alliances).

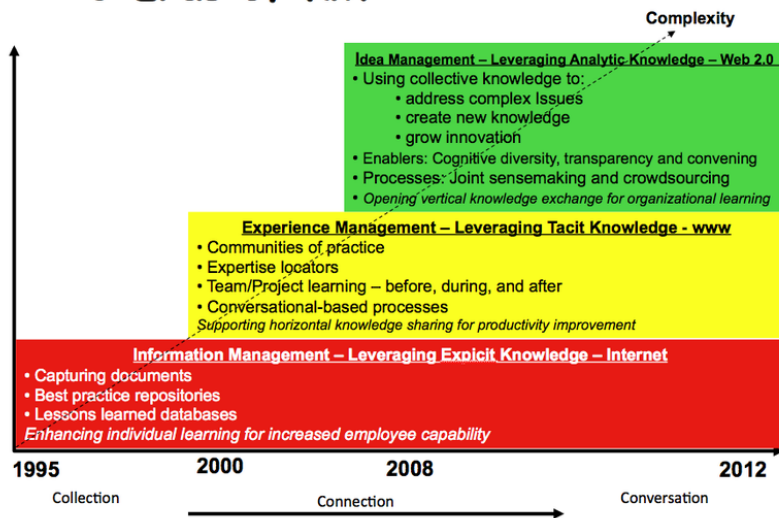
3 Transparency

Transparency includes the willingness of management to say, “I don’t know” and therefore to employ the organization’s collective knowledge. It is also about management providing all the available information and data on an issue so that those convened have what they need to do the work of sensemaking. Organizational members also have a role in transparency, that is, to be open about what is happening at their level, rather than hiding or discounting bad news to appease management – to bring the best available knowledge to bear on organizational issues.



What I find implicit in the notion of *idea management* though, is **shared power**. Just doing *idea management*, like **narration of work**, is not enough. If the high-value work today is in facing complexity, not in addressing problems for which a formulaic or standardized responses have been developed, then learning and solving problems together is a real business advantage. If *idea management* requires those in control to say, “I don’t know”, then there are many organizations where this will not happen. If idea management requires employees “being open about what is happening at their level”, then **personal knowledge management** skills need to be widespread (something I have yet to see in most organizations). Command & control remain the major stumbling blocks in effective *idea management*. However, it is great to see that there are lead organizations, like NASA, setting the example.

3 Eras of KM



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Note... this is the chart that Nancy Dixon used in the post reference above to describe what she calls the three ears of knowledge management