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Counting on Knowledge:

Are You Ready for the Future?

By John P. Girard, Ph.D.

Half a century ago, management guru Peter Drucker coined the term knowledge worker for people who worked with information or were tasked to make use of knowledge. Since his revelation, organizational leaders around the globe have worked diligently to maximize the effectiveness of these so-called knowledge workers. One of the key challenges leaders have faced is how to share what their organizations know.

Today, organizational leaders continue this quest to find ways of sharing knowledge with both internal and external stakeholders. Their pursuit of this *knowledge utopia* is often hindered by issues such as downsizing, the impending retirement of baby boomers, globalization, terrorism, and a host of other organizational challenges.

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 managers, but usually the result of immature, complicated and expensive

tools, techniques or technologies. Further muddying this already messy situation is the prevalence of a culture based on a need-to-know rather than one based on a need-to-share. Together these technological and

cultural challenges have prevented the transparency necessary to achieve organizational knowledge goals.

Recently, we have seen some very promising results from third-generation

knowledge projects, which focus on connecting people and facilitating collaboration. Many organizations are now reaping the benefits of using social media such as wikis for collaboration and social networking tools 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.

Unlike first-generation knowledge projects, which focused on collecting and capturing knowledge, or second-generation projects, which sought to codify tacit knowledge, these third-generation projects are very social in nature. The projects seek to connect people with people who in turn will share what they know. Although much of what they know is in the tacit form the projects do not rely on codification but rather connection. Consider the following quote from *Clever: Leading your smartest, most creative people*, which emphasizes this point:


“The knowledge of clever people is tacit. It is embedded in them. If it were possible to capture their knowledge within the organizational fabric, then all that would be required would be better knowledge management systems. It isn’t. (In fact, as alluded to by Kamlesh Pande [an HR manager in organization under study], one of the great disappointments of knowledge management initiatives to date is their failure to capture clever knowledge). For the people we are talking about, a great deal of their cleverness resides not in what they know but who they know and how they know it.”

As executives look to the future to *manage* their knowledge, perhaps the focus should be on how to apply the social tools, techniques and technologies

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— **CLEVER: LEADING YOUR SMARTEST, MOST CREATIVE PEOPLE**

to better *know what they know*. This quest, knowing what we know from an organizational point of view, is not new. Two decades ago, Carla O’Dell and Jack Grayson, authors of *If Only We Knew What We Know*, empowered many organizational leaders by outlining successes in the transfer of internal knowledge. Their pioneering work sparked a knowledge revolution that substantially enhanced the state of knowledge management in many organizations. Today we are ready for the next revolution, one that focuses on the social side of knowledge transfer. Are you ready for the future?

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