

Culture 2.0: viral, beta, collective sense making, long tail.

By Leandro Herrero

Part I: Collaboration and the enterprise's DNA: a cultural mutation, as opposed to evolution, may be what is really needed.



Collaboration between employees as an organisational goal is hardly a new topic. So why is that today, when 'social observers' say that 'collaboration is the real hot topic' they do so without the expected red face of 'déjà vu'. I'd like to examine what I believe are the key parameters that are driving a new enterprise agenda where collaboration is not just at the core, but 'the core'. Consider these two corporate weather storms

Technology gone public

Storm one is what I call 'technology's gone public'. In the old days, email was a sophisticated communication tool that you had in the office, whilst a fax machine was something of a luxury that only sophisticated people had at home. Today, online, real-time talking-to-anybody-anywhere is something that everybody, sophisticated or not, can do from home whilst real time social networking (tools) in the office is something that only sophisticated companies have. Web 2.0 and the likes have shifted the collaboration power from the enterprise to home, from big IT departments to a free download from your bedroom, from training manuals to plug-and-go use. The new(er) digital generation of employees are ready to embrace social networking and mass collaboration, if only they had the same tools in the office that their teenage daughters have at home. Some of these companies do have Web 2.0 tools but they are stuck on Culture 1.0.

In a recent presentation to a large audience of sales professionals I launched these questions to managers, posing as an imaginary employee: *Why can I google something and get an answer but it takes me 1 hr to navigate the corporate intranet? Why can I text my girlfriend to say 'I'll be there for dinner' but need to open the laptop>email>server to reply to my boss on a simple question? And once I have my laptop open, why can I Skype my mates for a real time discussion but need to send emails to my co-workers?*

And I carried on pushing the envelope: *Why can I log into LinkedIn/MySpace/Facebook to find 'my people' but I don't really know who's who in HQ (yellow pages no please, static CVs in the intranet a pain, nice picture though). Why can I blog on a conversation outside but I have to go to MyCoPortal>communities>my community>my comments page in the company? Why can I edit Wikipedia but I have four consecutive versions of a meeting agenda in one week via email in my company? And the minutes get circulated for comments, with a final 'approved' version one month later?*

When that teenager daughter of yours is socio-technologically better equipped than your cross-functional project team, you have a problem. But it would be nice and easy if a technological solution could deal with all the collaboration problems in the enterprise. Handing over Blackberries to individualistic managers increases the speed of response of individualistic people but doesn't create collaborative people. Collaboration must be in the DNA of the company or collaborative tools become *nouveau riche* exhibitionist tokens. Incidentally, 'having teams' does not make you a collaborative enterprise either. But this is a theme for another day.

No rehearsals for change

Second storm: it is a real time world, no rehearsals. Change, whether structural, cultural, ways of working, change of directions, 'creating a collaborative culture', etc is something that is required now. The old rhyme "there are five frogs sitting on a log, one is ready to jump to the pond, how many are left? (five, because one thing is 'thinking of jumping' and another is doing it) is more relevant than ever. Today we can't even afford any frogs on a log, they all should be paddling along the pond (perhaps all the logs were taken out in the last log rationalisation process any way). We can't afford either the sequence: analysis of the viability of jumping, cost-benefit study of jumping versus staying on the log, or the zero error, *six-sigmas* of 'jumping right the first time', so please delay until risk is minimised.

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Organisational change is no longer a process that starts with 'building a burning platform' (either you are very hot by now or your death certificate has been signed) that is sequentially followed by creating a clear vision, building a coalition, communicate to all etc. Change today is Woody Allen's concept of London- 'all seasons in one afternoon' – applied to organisations: all happening now and results pronto, thank you.

Shakespeare wrote in *Coriolanus*; 'when the sea is calm, all ships alike, they show mastership in floating'. Most of the 'change management programmes' that had been sold for the last fifty years seem to have been designed for a better, more cost-effective, more rational, zero-defect, more efficient floating. When the art of floating has become irrelevant the redesign of life jackets is hardly the best that a consulting firm can offer. Yet, we still have them presented as green, yellow, pink, mini, self-inflatable or disposable corporate tools.

If you add one and two above, complete democratization of technology and higher risk, 'real-time corporate life', collaboration becomes a serious objective beyond 'we should work as a team'; something that requires a cultural shift and something that needs to be implemented yesterday. The new enterprise, big or small, should look like an operation (a) in continuous 'beta mode', experimenting with itself, never quite settled or complacent and (b) one where collaboration is the key non negotiable behaviour above any other single credo, value or belief system.

The collaborative fabric of such new enterprise (people skills, tools, process of creativity and innovation, reward and recognition focused on collaboration, specific collaborative behaviours that must be visible, every day, every minute, in every process, etc) must be built so that collaboration becomes truly coterminous with corporate culture. This new culture goes well beyond the old stereotypes of ‘we are all together’ and ‘we need to help each other’ stuff. It is co-laboration, co-operation and co-creation as a way of life.

The journey to the Culture 2.0

How can you get there? I deeply believe that Viral Change™¹ is the answer to the inevitable cultural shift. In Viral Change™, a small set of non negotiable behaviours is championed and spread by a relatively small number of people who have real influence within the organisation, creating social tipping points where the desired behaviour is visibly established. Those (collaborative) behaviours are spread within the firm via imitation and social copying in the same way as a viral epidemic spreads or a social fashion swarms. In Viral Change™ the role of leaders is to make sure that people with influence (internal activists, behavioural champions...) are supported and their infective role facilitated. It is not to deliver a sixty minute, two hundred powerpoint presentation to the troupes in the country house hotel (the content of which may be forgotten by the time they get to the car park on the way back home) and then pray.

The old management of change model reads: big initiatives, communicated top down, all management levels, massive communication programme and lots of hope. The contrast with Viral Change™ is evident. The traditional me-too-management-of-change motto is ‘big is better, put up with slowness, pain and big budget’. Viral Change™ motto is: life is short, take charge, you can do it, do it now.

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In the non-rehearsal, real time change that the Viral Change™ ‘way of life’ provides, we also need tools to tap into the human capital of the organisation, to use its collective imagination and to integrate brainpower and mental bandwidth. Imaginatik² is a company that has developed one of those tools, ‘Idea Central’, that captures real time collective brainpower. Idea generation is suddenly no longer something happening in selective workshops with hundreds of yellow post-its in the wall following old fashioned and very tired brainstorming methodology, all over a relatively long period of time. Hundreds or thousands of employees can bring their ‘idea post-it’ to the party in real time like a massive idea-search engine crawling the collective imagination of the enterprise.

¹ See Viral Change™: the alternative to slow, painful and unsuccessful management of change in organisations, by Leandro Herrero; 2nd edition, meetingminds, 2008. Numerous resources on Viral Change™ including audiovisuals and background papers can be downloaded from www.thechalfontproject.com and/or tracked at www.viralchange.net

² See www.imaginatik.com

Web 2.0, Enterprise 2.0 and other forms of social media applications to organisational life have distinctive fingerprints: real time, social networking, mash-up of applications from different sources, intuitive, user-is-king (not the IT department), user generates content, (training? what training?), collective collaboration, and vikinomics. To pretend that all that can cohabit with what I call Culture 1.0 (top down, command and control, manager knows best, email-itis, designed collaboration ('we need a team') and 'you can have any corporate portal/CRM you want as long as is the one we have specified for the 23 affiliates', is wishful thinking.

The journey to Culture 2.0 is not a slow moving, evolutionary, mother-of-all-ROIs process. That's the frog-thinking-of-jumping. It is a sleeve rolling, bullet biting, risk taking, Viral Change that can deliver new ways of capturing and harnessing the collective imagination and all spontaneous collaboration in the firm fast. I have said to many clients and in many public presentations that a 'cultural change programme' that is sold on the basis of six months analysis, three months mapping, one year roll out, two years will see results, is not worth the money.

Viral mode plus collective brain is the best recipe for the new enterprise. In its new behavioural fabric, new skills, particularly synthesis skills are desperately required. This topic and 'the economics of abundance' in the new enterprise will be addressed in Part 2

Part 2 to follow:

Right Brain enterprise and its long tail of ideas.

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To make sure that you don't miss the publication of Part 2, send an email to ukoffice@thechalfontproject.com

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