



FROM MY PERSPECTIVE

21st Century workers: How will they be organized?

Clifford Wymbs*

Baruch College/CUNY, One Bernard Baruch Way, Box B 12-240, New York, NY 10010-5585, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 April 2010

Received in revised form 2 April 2011

Accepted 10 April 2011

Available online 8 May 2011

Keywords:

Creative class

Organizational structure

Firm theory

Service firms

ABSTRACT

The study posits an organizational structure that shows how creative workers will lead in the 21st century. The growing importance of this group shifts the locus of analysis from a product/output physical perspective to a problem defining/solving creative one. The analysis next clearly identifies who is responsible for wealth creation, i.e., creative workers, and how to differentiate value among them, i.e., problem identifiers and solvers are most valuable. It next addresses how these workers are organized (finders, minders and grinders) looking at an emerging knowledge structure rather than the traditional 20th century hierarchical organizational structure. Finally, the firm as a unit of analysis is evaluated in the context of a free agent/creative workers structure and a problem-centric world.

© 2011 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

From my perspective, much has been written about the advances in technology that are shaping the global marketplace of the 21st century, but comparably little has been published regarding the profound influence this is having on the nature of work, its creative class workers (ones who add economic value), and the organizational typologies and social business structures that make these technological advances possible. Alfred Chandler almost fifty years ago addressed this issue for the industrial age when he concluded after extensive case study research that “structure follows strategy,” i.e., a firm establishes its strategic direction and creates its organizational form to execute that strategy. However, the radical progression from an industrial to an “information-based” or knowledge economy requires fundamental organizational shifts, particularly in the non-manufacturing sectors, because today’s critical components are the ability of people to anticipate and respond to complex and shifting customer requirements and problems rather than raw material and energy [1].

Malone in his book, “The Future of Work,” begins to guide us in the right direction, when he says we need to shift our thinking from command-and-control to coordinate-and-cultivate and look to skilled workers to organize, disband, and regroup around different assembly projects. I extend this line of reasoning by addressing two related questions: How does the evolving organizational structure and increasingly porous firm boundaries associated with the creative class workers in the 21st century, and the loss of power by the firm to dictate strategy to entrepreneurial stars in selective knowledge intensive industries, change the strategy/structure causal relationship? Does the free agent mentality and finder/minder/grinder organizational structure of discrete specialized unit within firms now dictate what strategies they can pursue? [2].

Almost 20 years ago, Lester Thurow predicted that education and the skill of the work force is to be the dominant competitive weapon of the 21st century. More recently, Gary Hamel put forth the challenge: “against the backdrop of the digital age’s dramatic technological change, ongoing globalization, and the declining predictability of strategic planning models, only new approaches to managing employees and organizing talent to maximize wealth creation will provide companies with a durable competitive advantage.” To achieve this advantage, organizational scholars must develop new theories and methods for tracking and

* Tel.: +1 646 312 3299; fax: +1 646 312 3271.

E-mail address: Clifford.Wymbs@baruch.cuny.edu.

understanding the emergence of new organizational forms. At the very core of these challenges is how creative/knowledge workers, a term created by Richard Florida in his best seller “The Rise of the Creative Class,” learn and how they mobilize their creativity and commitment in the growing service economy of the 21st century [3].

I posit an organizational structure that shows how creative workers will lead in the 21st century. The growing importance of this group shifts the locus of analysis from a product/output physical perspective to a problem defining/solving creative one. The emerging knowledge architecture provides the context for the analysis, while the free agency tendencies of the creative class¹ workers provide the dynamics. Organizationally, creative service workers appear to populate three distinct categories or fitness landscapes, finders, minders and grinders. Finders, who have the main customer relationship, will lead a networked group of minders and grinders who collectively solve particular customer problems. Information technology is permitting the span of control of finders over grinders and minders to increase because geographic distance is becoming less important for less creative, specialized work. Workers in each group seek to enhance their own brand and the firm, as an employee containing entity, will become less importance.

2. Knowledge and creative work

Creative workers obtain their value by learning and accumulating knowledge. Karl Weick addresses the learning aspect when he states that to think or learn better is to see better, not to calculate better. Learning and thinking involve seeing through pattern matching, observation of the outcomes of mental simulation, seeing situations as examples of prototypes, developing and maintaining situational awareness, seeing things that others miss and sensing limitations of frameworks, and redoing the frameworks. Perceptual learning, rather than accumulation of facts and rules, is the key ingredient for knowledge workers to gain expertise. Thus, the key problem for organizations is not to accurately assess scarce data, but rather to transform an abundance of data into actionable knowledge [4].

Knowledge is not something people possess in their minds but rather something people produce together, i.e., knowledge is created via a dynamic, directional process of public sense making. Sense making, particularly in unknowable and unpredictable contexts, requires leaders to guide and energize the organizational unit to stay in motion, have a direction, look closely, update often and converse candidly. In the sense making process, knowledge and errors flow from the same sources (both involve attempts to interact successfully with the environment) only success (that only can be determined in the future) can tell one from the other [5].

Taken together, Thurow, Weick, Florida, and Hamel appear to be calling for an increased understanding of how creative workers learn and apply knowledge both within and among organizations; leverage coordination and communication economies; and amplify and aggregate organizational capabilities in ways never before thought possible. In creative work, the involved parties must define a problem, they must gather information, and they must progressively refine and extend initial ideas to permit successful implementation. In creative, knowledge-intensive industries such as financial services, health care, business management, engineering, advertising, law, accounting, high tech, etc., creative workers possess instant access to explicit and tacit knowledge residing with colleagues among their global network of peers. In these industries, innovation becomes a social process of knowledge combination. Among creative class workers, traditional organization boundaries are not particularly meaningful because these workers seem to respect professional boundaries more than firm ones and use reciprocity and knowledge sharing as exchange currency. They know that they do not possess all the answers in an increasingly specialized world, so they often tap their extended social networks to obtain timely information, cues and solutions to their client's problems. Creative workers are well aware that their reputation and the loyalty of customers to them, not organizations, are the only things that can guarantee them a job in the long run [6].

3. Organizational leaders in the service economy

Managerial and organizational research is only beginning to analyze the problem-solving capabilities of creative workers and their associated intra and inter-firm teams and how they function in the context of a rapidly changing, knowledge-based environment. In most cases, creative workers in knowledge intensive industries are organized around a customer unknown/problem/project with one key interface, the expertise leader that assembles a team with the necessary skills to provide a solution. (Often, the call to action, i.e., the identification of the problem, for a service firm comes from an external customer, unlike in the product firm where the call, i.e., identification of an unmet consumer need, is usually internally generated.)

3.1. Service firms

For the service firm, the key interface (problem solver or innovator) often presides over a group of related problems (areas of expertise) that are linked via a common thread of knowledge, but require individualized solutions, e.g., a litigation partner in a law firm oversees the discovery phase of many cases, but tries each case individually. This approach is dramatically different than the traditional planning approach of the 20th century that had the firm and its strategic plan as the main catalyst of action. Scholars

¹ R. Florida in “The Rise of the Creative Class” defined the Creative Class to be economic in origin and consisting of people who add economic value through their unique creative inputs to problem solving. He found that the Creative Class then included some 38.3 million Americans, roughly 30% of the entire U.S. workforce.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/896989>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/896989>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)