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From Collection to Connection

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through the creation of interest-focused departments such as Asian, Native American, African-American, women's, and peace studies. Unfortunately, many of these hybrid departments are driven more by political concerns than intellectual ones; they often develop a specialized perspective and approach that, ironically, shuts off contact beyond the department and renders them just as insular as other knowledge producers.

I have come to realize, too, that interdisciplinary publishing is not especially popular with publishers, librarians, or booksellers, all who have pragmatic reservations. Librarians, it is believed, do not like interdisciplinary works because it is harder to catalog them and place them in the "right" place on the shelves. For example, where does one place a book like **Berkshire's** forthcoming *Community Building Handbook*? Under sociology? History? Anthropology? Community studies? Booksellers have the same problem: they can place a book in only one place in the store. Publishers, recognizing librarians' and booksellers' reservations, then reason that it will be more difficult to sell interdisciplinary works because librarians and bookstores will resist buying them.

From the perspectives of these three intertwined groups, a book must be either geography, or history, or sociology or New Age, or whatever, but not some combination thereof. (Electronic publishing, interestingly, makes interdisciplinary cataloging and placement much easier, as a document can be assigned to any number of classifications, and readers or purchasers can then find it easily.)

Publishers have another reason for preferring single-volume works that focus on a relatively narrow topic: such works are relatively easy and cheap to publish. They require only one author or a few authors who share the same perspective; they tend to be written more quickly and to require less editing. A multidisciplinary work that involves experts with different perspectives, methods, and priorities, on the other hand, is a much more difficult endeavor. I recall an editorial meeting for the *Encyclopedia of Human Emotions* (**Macmillan**), which I edited, at which the psychiatrist and lawyer disagreed over the meaning of "dependency." For the psychiatrist, it meant emotional dependency; for the lawyer, it meant economic dependency. We resolved the conflict by making sure both definitions were discussed in the book.

The specialization and differentiation I mentioned earlier also make it difficult — sometimes actually impossible — to communicate across disciplinary conceptual, theoretical, and methodological borders. For example, the core knowledge bases of anthropology, sociology, geography, and psychology are distinct, and history has no conceptual or theoretical core. Every time I talk shop with historians, I feel a strong urge to run home and write a primer on anthropology for them to explain such basics

as the fact that a matriarchal society is not the same thing as matrilineal descent or matrilineal residence. Conversely, anthropologists could well benefit from a simple history of the world that allowed them to see developments in the region, people, or culture they study in a broader context.

One big issue that chases people away from interdisciplinary work is that it can be very hard to agree on what the topic is. For example, experts on community do not share a definition of community or even a typology of communities. The same is true of the growing field of leadership studies. Experts in these new "disciplines" identify the topic in much the same way that **Justice Potter Stewart** identified pornography — they know it when they see it. Indeed, when **Karen Christensen** and I were developing the *Encyclopedia of Community*, we never did get a single definition of community that all the participating historians, anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, demographers, psychologists, and communication experts could accept. To get things going and to be as inclusive as possible, I developed a five-category scheme of community types. No

one objected, but I don't recall anyone praising the scheme either.

A more ambitious effort comes from our friend, the world historian **David Christian** at **San Diego State University** (author of *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*), who realized some years ago that he was unable to answer his students when they asked him, "When did the world begin?" and that history (which tends to view the beginning of the world as the beginning of writing) did not have the answer either. His almost single-minded search for the answer led him into astronomy, biology, religion, paleontology, and anthropology and to the development of the "Big History" approach to history, in which history begins with the Big Bang.

And what **David Christian's** experience offers is perhaps the most compelling reason to engage in interdisciplinary studies and publishing, in the face of all reasons to the contrary: we humans have been moving toward a world community since we first appeared in Africa 3 million years ago, and world community requires shared understanding and true communication. 🌱

From Collection to Connection

by **David Pollard** (Founder & Principal, Meeting of Minds, Former CKO & Global Knowledge Innovation Director, Ernst & Young LLP, Canada)
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Those of us who manage written information have a great challenge. How can we make what is written down more meaningful, more valuable? How can we have it "make more sense"? The great challenge in this task is enlightening management since the majority of executives still see **Information Technology (IT)** as a means to disintermediate information and get rid of the **Information Professional (IP)** role entirely. In my experience, no one in the modern organization is as underutilized and underappreciated as the information professional.

While this article focuses on work within corporations, the proposals I make here to "remediate" information professionals are relevant in virtually every way to the work done by IPs in academic and other libraries.

There are a wide variety of tools and skills we can use, but too many collaboration and "virtual presence" tools are over-engineered, not intuitive, and too complicated to learn. Even tools that offer the best features of wikis and other "groupware" (like **Jotspot** — recently acquired by **Google**) are cumbersome and intimidating to the majority on the other side of the digital divide.

Before these tools and techniques can begin to augment and partially supplant face-to-face conversations as a means of adding meaning and value to information, many more people need to become much more adept at using them. In my opinion, the best way organizations can do this is by reintermediating the role of the Information Professional, and to change the

role from "collection" to "connection." Here's how:



Revamp and upgrade the role of

Information Professionals from content managers to personal work effectiveness enablers. Most knowledge workers have figured out how to get the content they need to do their jobs well, without any help from **Knowledge Management (KM)**. Centralized content management initiatives offer little or no incremental value to them. What they need is hands-on help using the information and technology at their disposal more effectively in the context of doing their own unique jobs. This does not lend itself, in most organizations, to either classroom or computer-based training — it needs to be face-to-face, anthropological: The IP needs to observe how the worker uses technology and information now, and then advise them how to do so more effectively. And at the same time, the IP needs to help each worker organize their personal content so that they can manage it effectively and find (again) what they need when they need it. We need to get IPs away from their collections and help-desks and out into the field helping workers one-on-one. This is the essence of **PKM (Personal Knowledge Management)**.

Reintermediate Information Professionals

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to filter and add sense, meaning and value to information content. One of the initial goals of KM was disintermediation — getting rid of the layers between front-line people and useful information. The problem is, most front-line people are now overwhelmed with the volume of information coming at them, and find most of what is available on the Internet too raw for their needs: They need help making this information sensible and meaningful. IPs, as reintermediaries, can fill this need in two ways: They can massage raw information using visualizations, maps, tableaux, systems thinking charts, single frames, and decision trees; and they can add insight by synthesizing, analyzing, organizing, and providing context for this information so that, in the hands of the knowledge worker, it is easily understandable, compelling, and ready to apply.

Develop simple, automated mechanisms to facilitate peer-to-peer content-sharing with others inside and outside the organization. These mechanisms include:

- Customizable, easy-to-use, context-rich personal workspaces (similar to Weblogs, but with additional functionality, security, and flexibility, while still being easy to learn and use) where all personal information that is shareable with others can reside.
- Automatic peer-to-peer publishing and subscription mechanisms that allow employees' shareable content to be accessed by others, with high-value content from the Internet and from other employees and outside colleagues flowing automatically to the employee's desktop.
- Automatic knowledge harvesting mechanisms that pull employees' shareable content into a central searchable archive copy, to obviate the need for "submitting" knowledge to central repositories.

Develop mechanisms to enhance meaning and context of information content so that it makes more sense and has more value to users. These mechanisms include:

- Templates, e-mail lists, lists of "experts" and other aids for identifying and asking the right people for the right information on a quick-turnaround basis, in a single, easy-to-use just-in-time canvassing application.
- Templates and models for creating high-context stories and narratives.
- Templates, models, and self-study modules for creating visualizations, maps, single frames and other compelling, meaningful representations of information.
- Templates, models and self-study modules for creating systems thinking charts, structured thinking documents, analytical reports and other insightful distillations and interpretations of information.
- Templates, models and self-study modules for creating mindmaps, open space events and other support mechanisms

against the grain people profile

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Dave Pollard

BORN & LIVED: Leicester UK, Winnipeg MB, Victoria BC, Caledon ON.

EARLY LIFE: Grew up in a middle-class suburb of Winnipeg.

FAMILY: Welsh mother, Canadian father. First one in my family in four generations not to go into the family printing business.

EDUCATION: Carleton University and U. of Manitoba, B. Sc. (Comp Sci); CA (BC, Ontario), post-grad courses in securities, actuarial, corporate finance, French, admitted as Fellow of World Innovation Foundation.

FIRST JOB: Gardener.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: 27 years with Ernst & Young LLP, mostly in Entrepreneurial Services and lastly as CKO Canada and Global Director of Knowledge Innovation; since then consultant with my own firm Meeting of Minds (KM, innovation consulting and entrepreneurial coaching).

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Write (books, stories, music, and my blog How to Save the World).

FAVORITE BOOKS: John Gray's *Straw Dogs*; the fiction of Frederick Barthelme; the poetry of T. S. Eliot.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: dishonesty, unfairness, people who get pleasure from others' misfortune and unhappiness, cruelty.

PHILOSOPHY: Our civilization is in its final century, and we should act accordingly (explained in more detail at <http://blogs.salon.com/0002007/stories/2006/07/05/aboutTheAuthor.html>).

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Helping entrepreneurs succeed who might otherwise have failed.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Teach my grand-daughters models and principles for survival after civilization's crash.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Which industry? The second Great Depression is probably more than five years off, and it will precipitate massive changes in all industries. Until then, most industries will continue to be un-innovative and change only when and to the extent they have to, and that won't be much. 🐻



that enhance the effectiveness of, and document, conversations.

- Templates, models and self-study modules for improving observation, listening and attention skills (e.g., cultural anthropology tools).
 - Tools for surveying employees, customers, and the "informed" public and otherwise tapping the "wisdom of crowds" (including "prediction markets" and decision support applications).
- Develop mechanisms to enable peer-to-peer expertise finding and connectivity. These mechanisms include:
- Simple, one-click virtual presence applications for connecting person-to-person with people (individually and in groups), with full audio (including ability to record), video, whiteboard (see what others in a conference are looking at and doing) and application sharing capabilities.
 - Simple, intuitive collaborative workspaces and tools (enhanced, simplified

versions of wikis, BaseCamp etc.)

- Well-designed, automated people-finding applications and directories.
- Simple presence-detecting and peer-to-peer introduction applications (such as enhanced, simplified versions of Dodgeball).

To demonstrate the opportunities offered by this new approach, IPs themselves will have to take the initiative by championing small-scale experiments that use some of the above-mentioned tools and techniques, and demonstrating how much value they can add. The peer-to-peer networks of IPs are strong (perhaps because no one else in most organizations knows or cares much about what IPs do). That's why I'm optimistic that, working collaboratively, IPs will be successful introducing such initiatives and experiments, ultimately taking their rightful place as the highly valued stewards of the modern organization's most important and strategic resource—what it knows. 🐻