

# Information Society

...or, is IT just another tech?

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# Interesting times

- An old Chinese curse: *May you live in interesting times!*
- A bit similar to going from hunting and gathering to agriculture, or from there to industry
- The game is bigger!
  - Approaching the planetary limits (a.k.a. drowning in poo...)
  - Immense growth of powers – either for creation or destruction

# Immigrants to the new times

- The proverb *Let the young study, the old ones know* will lose the meaning
- Mindquake (or mind-quake) – a concept by Robert Theobald, an American futurist of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century
  - *Everything You Know Is Wrong* (Weird AI)
  - Old models do not work anymore
  - The ability to 'build a ladder' or to divide the jump into smaller parts is vital

# Handy's nine paradoxes

- Charles Handy, a British analyst/writer
- Nine paradoxes formulated during the 1970s/1980s – yet still surprisingly to the point today (some of them more so)



- 1. **Intelligence** – is supposed to be the new form of property, yet it's impossible to manage like one
- 2. **Work** – no one agrees to work for free or little pay, yet many people have got no work and much work is left undone
- 3. **Productivity** – organizations do the same work with less people, the rest of the people do nothing. The organization is effective, the society is not. The experts can also be too expensive for organizations!
- 4. **Time** – effective work takes less time (also due the technology used), yet people have in fact less free time than before. An explanation is the competition for jobs, so people agree to work for longer shifts



- 5. **Riches** – traditionally, economy is spurred by people buying and selling actively. Yet, the number of those people who have enough resources is decreasing. Also, there is a lot of important things that cannot be bought or sold
- 6. **Organizations** – they face a number of conflicting demands (e.g. have to be both global and local at the same time).
- 7. **Age** – the rapidly moving society is led by the elder generation with little transfer of knowledge. Also, the active working age as well as gender roles are changing
- 8. **Individual** - the conflict between individual initiative and 'team play'
- 9. **Justice** – capitalism seems to foster injustice; society rewards those who gain the most for themselves (especially evident in the US)

# Castells' network society

- Note: these are also quite old, but nevertheless valid
  - Information economy
  - Global economy vs the '4th world'
  - Network enterprise
  - Flexi- and telework
  - Social exclusion, polarization
  - The culture of true virtuality
  - Harsh and dirty politics
  - Timeless time
  - Space of flows

# Paul Redmond in 1995

- Traditional

- Clarity
- Employer
- Job
- Career
- Promotion
- Degree

- Future

- Variety
- Customer
- Adding value
- Portfolio
- Personal development
- Lifelong learning

In this sense, we are largely in the future already!



# Work

- The key is flexibility
- Less time spent at one job?
- Advantage: good educational base + ability to adapt
- A serious threat: McJob
  - A tedious, unappreciated, low-paying job, esp. in the service sector, with little to no prospect (Amitai Etzioni / Douglas Coupland)
- I hear someone saying: “We don't flip burgers, so we don't have those in IT.” WRONG!!

# Change

- At first there were labour-based jobs
- Then came skill-based jobs
- And then knowledge-based jobs
  
- And instead of going to work, we DO it

# Himanen's work ethic for information age

- The metaphor of monastery and academy
- The work ethic of the industrial age comes from the monastery:
  - Work has intrinsic value, there are strict schedule and harsh punishments. And there is the One Correct Way to do the work
- The work ethic of the information age should come from the academy:
  - Interaction, discussion, freedom of thought, word and organization.  
No One Correct Way

# A word of caution

- The greater freedom implies much greater responsibility
- The shorter duration implies more intensity and stress
- A great danger is to lose the border between work and rest!
  
- The result is a lot of burnt-out people

# A new kind of resource?

- Benkler insists that information is radically different from the key resources of previous ages (land, gold, minerals)
  - You have two apples. You give one to a friend. You now have one left
  - You know two jokes. You tell one to a friend. Both of you laugh and you still know two
- A big question to think about – is the post-scarcity economy possible?

# Case Study: King Koko and the mailboxes of Fantippo

- Hugh Lofting's Dr Dolittle stories tell us how King Koko of Fantippo heard from a white stranger about letters going to the right place when put into the mailboxes: “I understand: a new kind of magic!”
- The project ended in a major fuss (and Dr Dolittle had to do it all over)
- Internet is not a new kind of magic
- As important as the information infrastructure is the skill to make something constructive with it

# The Hacker Ethic (Himanen)

- Work as one's favourite pastime, hobby
  - and some lucky dudes actually get paid well for doing it!
- Playful cleverness
- Hoarding is not good
  - An old Red Indian once asked: “The white man only has two feet. Why does he have five pairs of boots?”
- Friday or Sunday?
- Passionate life
  - a little, big-eared, weird-talking guy in a famous movie said: “Do. Or do not. There is no try.”

# To sum it up

- Mindquakes have happened before – and will happen in the future
- Flexibility + good education
- Information society can only be achieved when the gaps in the society are not too large
- Two necessary things
  - Common sense
  - Good conscience



# Further reading

- Robert Theobald (The Rapids of Change)
- Charles Handy (The Future of Work)
- Pekka Himanen (Hacker Ethic)
- Manuel Castells (The Network Society)
- Yochai Benkler (The Wealth of Networks)

**Thanks**