



Chapter VIII

Web Organizations in the Professional Services Sector

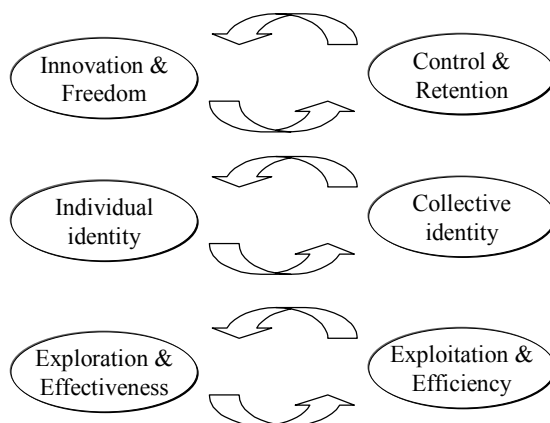
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This chapter covers a specific type of Web organization in the professional service sector. Due to the knowledge-intensive, project-based and service-centric characteristics, it acts as a prime example of possible new organization models. A general overview of all system elements is based on theoretical and practical experience out of three cases. Theoretical systemic models, academic literature and personal involvement as business architect in Web formation form the basis of this chapter. Many challenges lie ahead in developing the described Web organization form. Its limitations are not yet clear. The first signs are hopeful; its application in other sectors may well turn out to be limited.

INTRODUCTION

The new millennium brings many opportunities as well as new challenges. In this hypercompetitive market, bottom and top lines are driven by new solutions, shortening cycles, reduction in time-to-market, speed of response, as well as customer and employee retention. In response, organizations are changing faster and becoming more customer-specific, service-focused, community-centric, knowledge-intensive, responsively adaptive and project-based. As answer to the market changes, many new business models have emerged, but few new ways of organizing have been tried out. Traditional organization design principles are still being applied, having been deeply rooted and anchored in our thinking about organizing. Nevertheless, some new and exiting organization models are emerging.

The foundation of business in the 21st century is talent, information and innovation. A move is ongoing from an economy of hands to one of heads (Hamel, 2000). This implies that companies, struggling for survival and sustainability, will

Figure 1: Key paradoxes

have to become more people- and knowledge-focused. Management will increasingly become a high-wire balancing act of handling paradoxes (see Figure 1). Giving talents the space to explore by embracing change and unpredictability and letting them thrive on instability and dynamics force companies to search for alternative organization forms. With 75% of Western business being classified as service-oriented; guidance, motivation and inspiration for new organization models can come from one direction: the professional services sector. It consists of strong peer-to-peer relationships, highly educated and professional knowledge workers and project-based work with a fair degree of creativity and (ad)venturing. The sector is an excellent breeding ground for Web concept building with many practical examples. This chapter zooms in on professional service webs (PSWs), which might well turn out to be the disruptive technology (Christensen, 1997) of traditional organization principles.

This chapter consists of two main sections. The first is descriptive and conceptual; the second contains three practical cases. The first section starts with the applied worldview and theoretical background of this chapter. Using the embedded system model in conjunction with a simple Web-classification model, five different types of PSW are presented. One type of PSWs, called the Web organization (WO), is described in more detail. The first section ends with some of the key issues and challenges for forming a WO, ending in a brief conclusion. The second section starts with the Web-positioning model used to distinguish the three cases, after which each case is described.

THE LOOKING GLASS

Applied Worldview

We appear to be caught in a dualistic worldview. Descartes' mind and matter are closely linked with brain and muscle power. Whether we uphold the existential-

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