Cross-thinking all over
- The future belongs to those who connect-

by Victoria Schlusche

*"Communication is not between 'me' and 'you'.
It is always from one member of 'us' to another".[1]*

But why is it so complicated to create this "us"?

This very essential question that everyone in business today has to face is one of the most difficult ones. And - as many other important issues, it was being asked by Peter Drucker before.
While reading his remarks on Management, I was astonished about their actuality, about how few things have changed since they were written.
Known as the "guru of management", Drucker spoke about so many topics in this vast field that it is quite difficult to cover them all. But what unifies them is bringing the "knowledge workers" to center: Their motivation, their needs and the impacts they have on future managers.
It is actually the *people* he spoke of, about what they want and need to perform in the best way they can.

He especially emphasized the future task to make strenghts effective and weaknesses irrelevant - which might be seen as a circumscription for: Connecting people at their best.
The effort to be made is to bring *domains* together, to be a connector in between all the different areas of knowledge that your employees are being specialized in - which is certain to be no simple mission at all.

There are so many different areas that - at first sight - do not have anything in common. But that in turn means that there are reams of connections that are waiting to be discovered. It is a huge chance and still a fallow field.

In this essay I would like to explain how various people and domains might be connected. I will particularly focus on the most important factors how to attire and to keep customers as well as employees: Just by the art of connection.

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1. Connecting employees' needs with employers' goals

Corresponding to author Daniel H. Pink, the future belongs to "creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers, and meaning makers"[2]. He names the following six senses to be the essential aptitudes: *Design, story, symphony, empathy, play and meaning.*
What will count more and more will thus be the noneconomic satisfaction[3]: Interactions should be fulfilling, gratifying, easy; contacts with the other party are appreciated and the most important thing will be a two-way communication - just as the above-mentioned quote of Drucker implied. Still, it is not yet self-evident to be a knowledge worker in such an environment, as it is still seen not to be serious, not to be businesslike. But it certainly will be the standard in the future. Fairness, a "human" treatment, and, last but not least, fun and a balanced private life are more and more seen as equal factors to a good salary. A lot of young graduates indicate they want responsibility and power about their own time management when being asked about what is important for them in their future job.

Why is there so much glass in the buildings of creatives and designers? Why do companies offer embedded playgrounds to their employees, provide spaces where one can simply relax or get in contact with others? It is due to the fundamental change of mindset which is already being in motion: The "natural environment" of the knowledge worker is very different to most of the workspaces in the past or the present.
Another important point is that for future, design is not only an empty shell. It is not only the exchangeable decoration of a business hall, but works itself to generate motivation,[4] aiming at minimizing hierarchies, or at least the apparent demonstration of it.[5] So in this case, *connecting* means to design patterns, instruments and surroundings to enable interaction among people, to create an atmosphere which allows them to come together.

"A purely technocentric view of innovation is less sustainable now then ever"[6], says Tim Brown, author of *Change by Design: How Design Thinking transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation.*
In order to achieve the best output of the knowledge worker's skills, employers thus should not underestimate this "software" or rather content factor. The company itself has to be the attractor and bonder of the single employee's needs and outputs. The more important mobility is for today's employees, the more important it is to keep them in touch with the enterprise, being the center, the collector and connector, but not the supervisor, as it is still the case in many companies.

Aditionally, the playgrounds and social spaces mentioned above are signs of a dissolution of the typical work concept. The common Nine-to-Five-Job will have to give way to new schemes of how working with knowledge can be managed. According to Drucker, the future organization will be result-driven. It should disregard the single worker's manner of how he or she is getting things done, yet focusing on the results they are producing.

Draft of Project Process[7]:
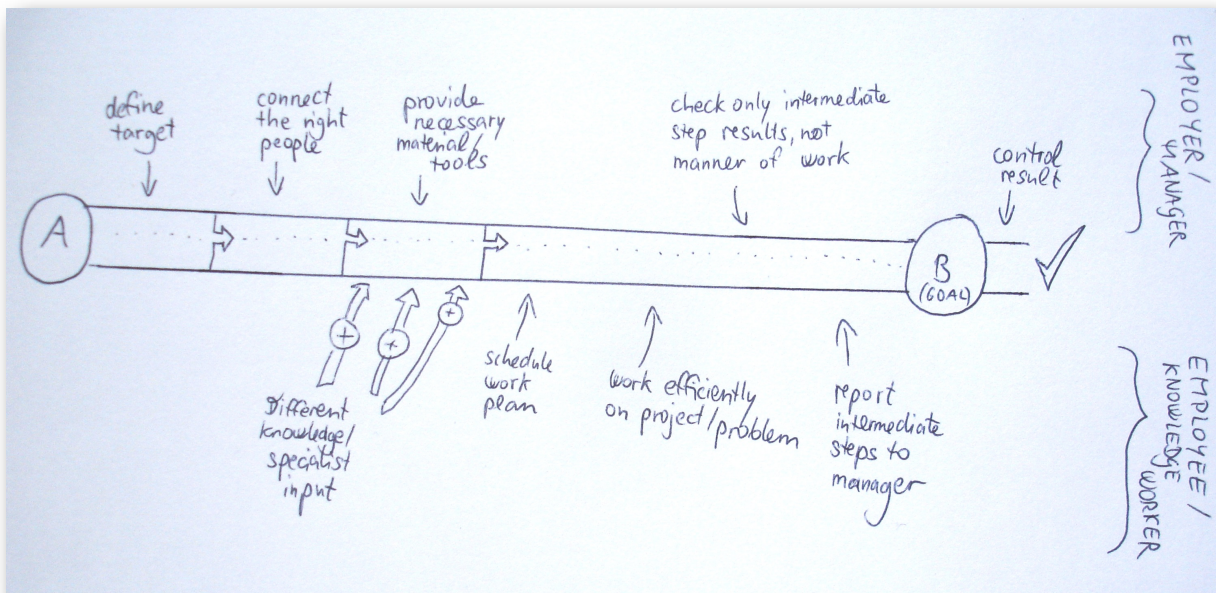
The prospective manager will approve several employees' individual working schemes and concentrate on the results they produce. The more different types of specialists work together on a problem, the more effective the solution will be.

2. Connecting knowledge with a story

In almost all fields of business, the numbers and facts are fundamental basics. They are the ground that we reared on and on which we must now continue to build. Or, in simple words: Now that we have spoken as much of the "hardware" of business and management, we have to take a closer look and go deeper. This is what Drucker did and started a long time ago - an accomplishment we cannot be thankful enough for. Because it is the software and more and more its content that will matter in the future[8]. Everything tangible will lose significance. (Yet not become obsolete, for sure.)
"Today knowledge has power. It controls access to opportunity and advancement," Peter Drucker said. Yet today the "simple" knowledge is not enough any more. People need to develop the ability to connect things they know with matching others in order to create new values.

An important keyword in this context is the so-called *storytelling*. Information often appears to be rational. People are not. Especially when speaking of B to C communication, the rational processes go down to a minimum. You do not sell a *product* any more. Everyone can produce products at a high quality level. You make people want to buy your product by creating an aura of mystery or desire that every good story contains.
It is the same with the employees. You do not simply *hire* them. You make them *want* to work for you by being a firm that puts their personal strenghts into a collective context. Thus it is all about being different and special: Magazines such as German "Business Punk" with its Claim "Work hard, play hard" also show a need for options beyond the conventional careers and company structures, telling stories of people who "have made it" without following any common career counsels.

The products have become about the same, the stories around them have not. The more they differ from each other and the better they are, the more they will be able to attract both employees and customers. People will pay highly to belong to a community they can choose themselves. (Yet it has to be stressed that the quality of the "hardware" is an imperative requirement before one should even think about anything else.)
Rolf Jensen, a Danish researcher from the Copenhagen Institute for Future studies, already presented the thesis in 1999 in his book *The Dream Society*[9]: "Future products will have to appeal to our hearts, not to our heads". This might not be a novelty at all - but how many products or brands really comply with that simple genuine truth?

Information might be the important factor - yet the "naked" information is available for almost *anyone*. Knowledge is not. And a functioning "story" for a product, brand, company or service, a really *good* one - is probably the most difficult goal to achieve.

Information is also easy to share. In contrast, stories, dreams and imagination are not. The feeling when a person absolutely wants to be part of something isn't either. It takes much longer to make people want to get connected to you then to push a product in their direction, hoping to be considered. In terms of that, the internet has made it very easy to find the cheapest price for a simple product - but a story? How could you possibly compare the values of a feeling that comes along with the purchase or use of a specific product? Products or brands are hence so much more effective if they succeed to create an own "world", a unique feeling when a customer seizes its logo or even only the shape of a product.

Last but not least it has to be underlined that information does not have to be shallow just because it is well formated and put into graphs, pictures - or stories. Drucker's own art of storytelling when lecturing is the best example of how to get across a message in a very personalized way with charm and humor - without any loss of meaning and depth.[10]

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3. (Re-)Connecting employees with their thirst of knowledge

"Learning tomorrow (...) will utilize and put to work the individual's own rhythm, his own learning speed, his own pattern," Drucker said in one of his lectures about future schooling[11]. "(American) education tomorrow will have to think through who its constituents are. It will have to learn to eastablish relations with them." Which is just another word for: Connecting them. Today, people often consider it as difficult to differ between specialization and a broaden education - because it is often said to be inconsistent with each other. Yet people such as the "pattern recognizer" Daniel Pink spoke of can only exist if they have seen many things, spoken to many people, been engaged in various study contexts and worked in different fields of knowledge. The "meaning makers" must understand the views of very diverse types of people and be able to build up a message that appeals to a plurality of them.

To create all future products, it will need people that understand both people's wishes, but to play it out for business as well. The "single-track" business education will not be sufficient any more - because it is not (only) about skills any more. The best people of tomorrow will be able to connect all they learn with a more shifted context - both being specialized in a particular field and yet able to see what is happening around them. University should no longer be the place where one has to stupidly learn by heart but to inspire students to go further and beyond the given material. To provide the basics, yes. (Drucker himself always stressed one could not know enough of the basics.) But furthermore not to stop at the basics - the numbers, the things to know - but to continue to want to now everything else as well and even challenge some of the learnt and seemingly given facts. Only then they can meet the challenge to be future connectors. Therefore students "need to develop, preferably while they are still young, a noncompetitve life and community of their own, and some serious outside interest (...)"[12], as Drucker said.

"Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things." This was not said by Peter F. Drucker, but by Steve Jobs, who himself perfectly adopted the art of connection as a fundamental core of the Apple brand.

It is exactly the same thing which concerns the studies of people already working - as the future knowledge worker never stops learning. In Drucker's opinion, knowledge has to be improved, challenged, and increased constantly, or it vanishes. "Results are interdisciplinary. So yes, you have to be a specialist. But knowledge has another very peculiar characteristic, which is that the important new advances do not come out of the specialist's discipline. They come from the outside."[13]

But where is that "outside"? The awareness of being a knowledge worker - or, to seize the suggestion of Jensen to talk of the dream or imagination worker - will make people selective about who to work for. The employees do not need the specific company they work for and will not stay there if they do not feel it matches perfectly to their skills, needs and characters. They want tolerance for their own way of working. Knowledge workers are no uniform mass but very individual specialists whose needs vary a lot from each other.

In point of fact, the organization of tomorrow will not only have to keep good relationships to customers, but at the same time make itself a place that employees love to work at. It won't be necessary to keep them physically in

their grey and cheerless offices, but to surround them with an inspiring ambiance, and even send them out everywhere to get new impressions and inputs. The future manager has to re-connect the employee with his own natural curiosity and thirst for knowledge. Moreover, the employer shouldn't be anxious for observing the efforts, but to get the *results*. This means that more and more people will work from home or different places, or find new ways to combine both or travel around all year long. Nevertheless a lot of people still prefer to work in a well-ordered, regulated office environment, so both will be kept in a co-existence.

Each member of a future project team will be highly specified and at the same time work as close with other experts as possible. One person alone in his or her very limited field of knowledge is already important. But connecting people of all imaginable different areas will broaden the horizon of the whole team several times over. If you oversimplify, the "only job" the employer has to do when having found the perfect team for a project is to provide the necessary tools and material - and check the results they present in the end.

So this is it, the modern task all firms have to face: Building a motivationally rich environment.[14] The future organization, instead of keeping to a fix pattern of working processes, has to try to encourage their employees to deviate from the common sample. To empower them to find their own solution to problems they're facing[15]. Instead of controlling employees, it is much easier to place them where they feel they can operate best - and they will control their performance much more on their own.

But how is it possible to keep people together and at the same time give them the opportunity to go away?
It will be about the mix and balance of control and tolerance on which the sucess of a knowlege company in the future will be based.

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As a final assumption, I would like to suggest that management might be the future term for "center of connection", the professional melting pot that brings together and consolidates several single knowledge worker's inputs. Reorganizing the common processes and combining everyone's specialized knowledge and ideas will lead to much better outputs than, as

most firms do now, just keeping different parts of a company, departments or groups apart from each other.

We will be in need of special characters, who are, for sure, not easy to find or "educate".[16] It is about everyone of us to try our best to meet these requirements as perfectly as we can and to find an individual answer: Be it as an employee, finding a place where one can integrate their knowledge and skills wholeheartedly, or be it as a manager, bringing together all the different areas of knowledge - just by the art of connection.

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