



WORK SUPERHERO ORGANIZATIONS

Work processes have been transformed by faster, better network communication, an increasingly heterogeneous workforce, and new markets for talent and services in developing economies. Businesses have sped up their operations and squeezed inefficiencies out of their supply chains. But no organization has yet figured out how to create true competitive advantage by using new tools and networks to supercharge its workforce—to take advantage of the emerging superhero skills in young digital natives. The next ten years will see the emergence of the first such superhero organizations.



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HUMAN PRODUCTION: THE NEW GIVENS

The workplace of the future exists in a new techno-social world defined by four key innovations:

- Social networks are now explicit. All the “friending” in social networks has laid the tracks for high-performance communication and collaboration.
- Information can take any form and arrives in a torrent. Some people thrive in the info-firehose. They can use a wide range of media to capture and express emerging realities.
- Work happens in real time. Instant prototyping is the norm, involving real customers, not just a few colleagues. Information finds its way to the right hands quickly and turns into actions right away. No delays, just constant adaptation and course correction.
- Openness creates leverage. Collaboration among employees and with outside stakeholders improves when they share information openly. Credibility, trust, and long-term memory all get a boost.

People adept at working with these innovations will outperform their peers: they will decide faster, act faster, and mobilize more people around shared, constantly improving resources.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: THE NEW COMPETENCIES

Today’s organizations are structured around the core competencies of the past 50 years: communications, sales, logistics, and project and people management. As superheroes enter the workforce, some organizations will reshape themselves into superhero organizations built around a set of core organizational capacities. *Open leadership* will leverage multiple capitals to mobilize diverse stakeholders across organizational

boundaries. *Sociability* will mobilize groups and networks to create ad hoc organizational structures for innovations. *Collective sensemaking* will combine skills such as pattern finding and big-picture synthesis with group facilitation and collaborative creation of persuasive artifacts. *Transliteracy* will bring the distinctive affordances of new media to the creation of shared contexts and concepts that mobilize action. And *beta building* will develop platforms to create offerings that are never finished but always evolving in a public, collaborative space.

In this organizational environment, training moves beyond the walls of the organization and into networks of peer-to-peer learners. Social networks perform the sorting function—building affiliations of people that leverage different sets of superhero skills. These are the guilds of the future, loosely structured around different styles of collective sensemaking, sociability, transliteracy, beta building, and open leadership. The online trails that people leave as they navigate these networks become their long-lasting resume.

COUNTER TREND: THE KRYPTONUMERITE SCENARIO

These superhero organizations celebrate human skills and capacities. But some of the same new capacities—pervasive monitoring and visualization, harvesting of open information sources, and social network tracking—could take a different form. We might think of this as the kryptonumerite scenario in which automation of these processes leads to deskilling of professionals and increasingly inflexible systems for everything from education and health to financial and security services. Like Superman’s kryptonite, these systems could undermine the powers of tomorrow’s superhero workforce and ultimately create a less robust economy.