

Recognise the era of knowledge workers

By Martijn Aslander

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Over the past 40 years our workforce has transcended from doing labour with their hands to working with their brains. We haven't got the slightest clue what knowledge work is and that's an enormous problem.



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The majority of today's workforce are knowledge workers and for the past 25 years, they have been using computers to do their work. Today, it has extended to tablets and smartphones.

Unfortunately, in most cases, they are just fooling around, trying to make sense of all the possibilities of these devices and the software and incorporate it into their workflows. As a matter of fact, most of these people are using their computers as a modern typewriter, using only a small portion of the true power of what these powerful devices can offer.

It's really bizarre that training and developing digital skills is nowhere on the strategic agenda of HR, management teams and board members. If the biggest cost in any organisation is salaries, it's strange that they don't get how much time, money and talent they're wasting every day.

I actually think there's a bigger issue than just neglecting digital skills. It's my belief that all organisational models and insights were developed in a time when people worked with their hands. In that case, working 9 - 5 makes sense, also changing time for money, still the dominant payment system worldwide.

But if you work with your head most of the time, it doesn't make sense. We just never really considered that working with your brain is something totally different and needs a different approach. Research shows that one third of the people are more sharp, keen and awake at 8pm than at 8am.

What a total waste of human energy and talent to force them to join the traffic jams, deploying your most valuable assets - your people - and a time that they are the least productive.

Roughly 25% of our energy is being consumed by our brains. So from a bio-chemical point of view, it would be wise to figure out how to deal smartly.

In case of matters of the mind, the mind that is supposed to juggle with snippets of knowledge, information and ideas. Processing that data mentally to solve problems, creating opportunities and going after big challenges.

A lot of people have burn-out problems. Burn-out means that the brain can't function anymore and that the willpower muscle is depleted by wrongfully using the energy reserves of the brain.

Most of the time because superiors had no idea that forcing employees to do their jobs in a specific way instead of trusting them to find their own approach, literally costs a lot of brainpower.

What about the impact of interruptions. When someone is in deep concentration, focussing on a matter and is interrupted, it causes immediate concentration problems. It will take at least eight minutes to regain the same amount of focus and concentration.

Insights like these are really being taken into consideration when it comes to managing organisations. As a knowledge worker, we actually can't work for eight straight hours a day. We can pretend we do and we're all doing it, but we are fooling ourselves.

If you want your organisation to be ready for the upcoming disruptive ages, I think the best thing you can do is take knowledge work and its circumstances very serious.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[[<https://www.martijnaslander.international/> Martijn Aslander]] is a thought leader, public speaker and executive sparring partner. His unique ability to challenge business leaders and help them to think outside of the box has landed him in boardrooms all over the world. As an explorer of the information age, his insights into networking and new technology help leaders of global brands future-proof their operations. By teaching them to think differently about sales and influence, Martijn helps prepare businesses for the new economy. He is an international expert in value creation, complementary economics, networking and life-hacking, with disruptive views on social and information capital. He is also an internationally sought-after public speaker with a reputation for captivating, confusing, entertaining, informing and inspiring audiences in The Netherlands, his home country, and abroad. For him, it's not just about affecting a paradigm shift; it's about a better world.

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