Book Review

Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything (2008). Don Tapscott and Anthony D Williams. Portfolio: New York

This is a book written in a racy, glitzy style, designed to excite the imagination with its heady evangelism and its promise of a new dawn, as, according to Tapscott and Williams, the "perfect storm" that is Web 2.0 permits a revolutionary new business paradigm to emerge generated by the potential for mass collaboration that this technology brings forward. Typically, books of this type portray those who are more considered in their appraisal as lacking the insight and the leadership to embrace opportunity and change. This book is no exception. Yet, despite the considerable accolades the book has received, those who read it are well advised to do so reflectively and questioningly. Suggestive of easy answers to highly complex and difficult issues, this prescriptive book is too easily promising of a brave new world ahead. While there is merit in considering the extent to which Web 2.0 and other information and communication technologies may enhance business effectiveness this book is not conducive to deep, considered reflection and debate.

The book was deeply frustrating as while they acknowledged that there were hard questions to be answered by businesses considering exploiting Web 2.0., at best the authors provided superficial responses to these. Adding to the reader's frustration, having set the scene for Web 2.0 as the catalyst of radical change the authors then 'hedged their bets', acknowledging the difficulty of delivering change within organisations. Then, having argued that Web 2.0 is the way to competitive advantage, the authors had also to acknowledge that as other businesses embrace the technology, competitive advantage is lost. So, the best that businesses will achieve through this technological 'investment' is short-term competitive advantage. Ironically, in the chapter entitled "The Wiki Workplace" reference to the technology is noticeable by its absence, with the focus turning to the such fundamentals as culture, management style, and the informal relationships and forms of communication that exist within all organisations. Towards the close of the book, the authors shift position again, and having acknowledged the difficulty of delivering change, they announce that "it is just a matter of shifting organizational paradigms" (p. 263). These inconsistencies of position serve to weaken the credibility of the book. The offering up of the "Principles of Wikinomics" does nothing to retrieve the book's credibility. These are a set of ideas that were in existence before Web 2.0 and that cannot be considered revelatory.

For those unfamiliar with Web 2.0 and for anyone considering how it might contribute to their business performance, the book does provide ideas. It is also good to see the concept of "x-ray vision" [1] (p. 22) revisited some ten years after it was first employed by public administrationist John Taylor, as he reflected upon how understanding an organisation's information and communication arrangements can enable new and deeper insights into the organisation than are otherwise possible.

Is Web 2.0 relevant for every business? Will the costs involved in harnessing the technology outweigh the gains? How should it be adapted for particular business contexts? What unanticipated problems will

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[1] Taylor, J.A. (1998) "Informatization as x-ray: What is public administration for the information age?", in Snellen, I. Tl. M. and van de Donk, W.B.H.J.(eds), *Public Administration in an Information Age*, IOS Press, Oxford.

it generate as it is harnessed within businesses? These are questions that readers of the book will have to answer for themselves.

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