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Cover page designed by Concha Arias-Pérez

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Layout Design: François Louis Nicolet

Composition: Jorge Liácer-Gil de Ramales

Editorial correspondence: Llorenç Pagés-Casas <pages@ati.es>

Advertising correspondence: <novatica@ati.es>

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Monograph: Innovation Driven by ICT Users (published jointly with Novática*)

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In the Knowledge Society, Knowledge is Losing its Value

Interview to *Hiroshi Tasaka*

In the knowledge society, knowledge will cease to have any value. Ten years ago a highly knowledgeable person was greatly valued, but nowadays we can access all the knowledge in the world with a simple mouse-click. What will be valued is collective wisdom. We will need to learn how to manage collective intelligence and arrive at a new definition of the concept of innovation. It all boils down to a problem of ego management. The answer is to turn enterprises into flat and open ecosystems in which knowledge can flow freely.

Keywords: Collective Intelligence, Enterprise-Ecosystem, Knowledge Society, Innovation, Post-Knowledge Society, Web 2.0.

Q: What is SophiaBank?

A: We are a practically not-for-profit company dedicated to providing enterprises with intellectual capital and the connections they need to develop in an environment of constant innovation. Sophia means tacit intangible knowledge, sentiment, imagination, creativity ... Values that cannot be expressed in a text. We are entering a new age, the age of the knowledge society. But there is a paradox here: in the knowledge society, knowledge will lose its value. Ten years ago a highly knowledgeable person was greatly valued, but nowadays we can access all the knowledge in the world with a simple mouse-click. This is a reality.

Q: So where are we heading?

A: What is important is not knowledge, but wisdom, something that cannot be set down on paper.

Q: Is the concept of what we define as innovation changing?

A: The Web 2.0 revolution has created a new world: a world of collective wisdom. If you ask a community a question, the answers you get may be more valuable than the answer from one expert. This is happening today. In the past, innovation only came from geniuses, from talented people who were able to see beyond a problem. Today such people still exist, but we need to stimulate wisdom in communities of people; in other words, collective intelligence. The Internet is a perfect tool for collecting and sharing such wisdom. We need to learn how to manage collective intelligence and arrive at a new definition of the concept of innovation.

Q: Are companies ready for this change of mindset?

A: I don't think companies are ready to share their employees' knowledge and wisdom with other companies. We need to move towards consortiums to share knowledge and create new products and services. We have to let consumers, customers and providers get involved in the innovation

Interviewee

Hiroshi Tasaka is philosopher, engineer, professor at Tama University (Tokyo) and author of more than 40 books on the management of work, business strategies, the Internet revolution, and models of social change. He is the founder of SophiaBank, a think tank created in Japan dedicated to advising enterprises on innovation processes.

Author of the interview: Teresa Turiera-Puigbò, Infonomia.

process. Albin Tofler predicted this as long as 20 years ago: we are moving towards the prosumer (producer + consumer). Companies should be able to create their own ecosystems to foster this relationship. Generally speaking, our companies are still anchored to the old system.

Q: What will happen to new generations entering the job market, with a culture based on instant satisfaction and participation in decision making?

A: We cannot manage culture. What we have to manage are people's egos: we need to get beyond the mentality of "don't try to teach me anything new because I have a lot of years' experience in my job"; we need to listen to young people, even though they may not yet have accumulated much in the way of experience or wisdom. It all boils down to an ego management problem. The answer is to turn companies into flat and open ecosystems in which knowledge flows in many directions and where it is hard to see the border between the employee and the customer. In a hierarchical system, the ego ends up killing other people's ideas.

Q: But most companies have a well defined hierarchical structure. How do we go about creating this ecosystem?

A: The Internet is a very useful tool for starting to create spaces where ideas can be exchanged. Blogs and social networking services are very practical communication systems. They will replace intranets and will become the new keyword for companies. I would recommend that they start here: with attractive blogs that encourage people to put forward ideas and contribute their comments.

Q: Under this new scenario, will the concept of capitalism as we now know it change?

A: Capitalism will become knowledge capitalism. Up until now the term capitalism only referred to the management of money. But now knowledge management is much more important, because knowledge is a self-increasing capital. If I am an expert in something and I share my knowledge with others, I increase the value of my knowledge, but I don't lose anything. Also my reputation grows; there is an increase in what we might call my brand capital or trust capital. Thus if we manage our knowledge capital properly it will increase exponentially, but it will never be anything tangible, quantifiable, like money. We will need to be wise enough to value these intangible assets. The Web 2.0 revolution will regain values that pure capitalism had left behind, such as personality, humanity, kindness and compassion.

Q: Are you being serious?

A: I'm not telling a fairy story here! It's a reality. The Web 2.0 has brought us a collective economy. In a virtual community someone asks for advice and hundreds of people are willing to give it, asking nothing in return. It is a voluntary act of goodwill. What kind of person will lead such a community? Think about Linus Torvalds, the man who created Linux. It's the success story of a large community of people from all over the world who ended up putting the giant Microsoft in the shade. I believe that during the Web 2.0 revolution we will see a great many success stories such as this. And this is something that companies and professionals would do well to take on board.

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