

Global Trends, and Why Communication And Critical Thinking Are More Important Than Ever

If you know what lol, rofl, imho, idk (or tl:dr) mean, chances are you have experienced text language, instant messaging, and/or social media... and have felt that uncomfortable coexistence of brevity, sheer quantity of "e-words," and constant content. When you add to that the hundreds of TV channels available through cable, satellite, and YouTube, not to mention the millions of websites, and presumably also the interactions with family and friends, the constant tidal wave of news and entertainment can become a bit overwhelming. On the flip side, it's exciting to see that so many more people have access to comparatively inexpensive communication channels.

Technologies to communicate have proliferated; costs of hardware, software & internet access have fallen; and 4.15 Billion people in the world have access to the internet, as of 2019. These facts mean that many more ideas can be expressed shared, and built on, which implies possibilities for big change. Eric Schmidt, Executive Chairman of Google, said "product innovations will come from the developed world, innovations in use will come from the developing world." There are ideas everywhere and often unexpected places; given the costs to communicate, collaborate and create have plummeted, the cost of innovation is also now lower than ever. All of these trends have huge implications for quick prototyping (3D printing - did you hear about the 3D printed, functioning hand gun? should owning a gun be as easy and untraceable as downloading a pattern?) and other technological innovation, but even more for communication, community development and unlocking huge swathes of human potential.

It's a fascinating, exciting, and sometimes overwhelming time we live in. There's a lot of information, collaboration, foment and resulting action. How did this happen and how do we manage?

In his keynote at the May 2013 Ideas-City Conference, Joi Ito, the Director of MIT's Media Lab, spoke about life BI (before internet) and AI (after internet). He posited that the AI era represents the triumph of a philosophy - many, small decentralized pieces and innovation "centers" operating in a working anarchy, rather than a few large pieces of heavily controlled experimentation. It represents the triumph of guiding principles and complexity, over laws and creating simplicity. In a working anarchy, you can't just expect that everyone follows the same 5 or 10 clear rules. Yet, don't you want to have an idea of what's going on in your region, industry, world? With all that communication and information, how are you going to decide what is more and less important for you?

Building from that idea of the BI/AI culture shift, Web 1.0 was all about easy access to information, Web 2.0 became about communication and collaboration, and Web 3.0 became social and incorporating multiple technologies and platforms. Companies can interact with customers and gather market research and create more community around their brands. We can crowd-source ideas, funds and even encyclopedia entries. Wikipedia is a non-profit organization whose encyclopedia entries are crowd-sourced and corrected for free (!) and a 2005 study published in the Journal Nature showed it to be 99.5% accurate, compared to Encyclopedia Britannica's 99.7% accuracy.¹ We have lived in a fragmented world for so long, and now technology is on the cusp of enabling us all to participate, and share ideas more easily². People around the world can participate in a live twitter chat about the best adventure travel destinations, things to bring along, and banter with each other, all using specific #hashtags. A 13 year old Maasai boy can share his invention with his village, and the world (via a TED conference)³, thereby protecting his family's cattle, and Kenya's lions.

There are many more organizations now, that leverage these technologies to match needs and resources - Kiva.org and similar organizations support micro-entrepreneurs; Global Giving supports giving to non-profits of all stripes;

¹ As of 5/2020 Wikipedia had more than 6.1 million articles in English, and more than 52 million articles across 309 languages.

² although audiences fragment, which speaks to increased need to get out of our echo-chambers and to question our assumptions.

³ As a result of the exposure, someone stepped up to pay for his formal education -- Richard Turere is a name to look for in social entrepreneurship, low-tech high-impact technology products. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/02/26/tech/richard-turere-lion-lights>

Change.org makes it easy to create an online petition to lobby for your issue; Taproot Foundation and Arts & Business Council match business volunteers to non-profit management projects; Syria Deeply integrates the latest digital tools to add context to news and facilitate experts dialogues in conflict areas; and crowd-sourced funding platforms like kickstarter, indiegogo, GoFundMe, and so many more have enabled bands to record and/or tour, animals to have operations, children to go to school or study music, and small businesses to start.

Technology and globalization are speeding up change in the way we live, and with it, the education system, the workplace, and even how we interact and organize. With Moore's Law⁴, increasing platforms for communication and collaboration⁵, and increasing ability to detect trends in "big data" - we are going to be able to come up with more and more understanding, possibilities and solutions. Social media platforms have already enabled movements such as Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, as well as flash mob pillow fights in city centers. In the not too distant future (and in some pockets of the present), we will be wired, multi-lingual, 24/7 and flexible. The world will be changing rapidly and there won't be one news source to turn to, but a plethora to choose from.⁶ This may sound breathless and exhausting, and change always is, until we get used to the new normal. We will become constant-learners and, because we can't do it all, do need to rest, and there is so much noise... collaboration and critical thinking has never been more important.

So, what does that mean for us now?

Although the complexity can be overwhelming⁷, more of the good ideas are going to be heard and developed than without these platforms. We *will* develop ways of thinking about and filtering through information - both cognitively or with software packages (artificial intelligence?). High performance cultures, whether in businesses, social change movements or nations, are and will be those that collaborate, where people are engaged, where the organization and processes can tolerate messiness, and the leaders and employees can be comfortable with uncertainty.⁸

On a final note, with so much information and so much change, we need to make sure that it brings everyone into the fold⁹, captures the wisdom of experts and the crowds, and unlocks human potential through exchange of and access to information. Necessity is the mother of invention, and we see that when people are armed with information, they can develop ideas and solutions adapted to their particular challenges. When all stakeholders are at the table, we design much better programs and products, that take into account multiple aspects of the real world, are actually adopted and more sustainable. With inclusive conversations, we become aware of (and sometimes overwhelmed by) what is happening in other corners of the world- the different technologies, diverse issues and innovative solutions- and there are many more minds, and with more diverse insights thinking about how to make it better. We can learn from each other; it's a fascinating time to be alive.

To discuss these issues, or if you would like help creating a high-performance culture, or in planning your collaboration and corporate citizenship initiatives, please get in touch at info@glocalconsultantsgroup.com or +1-773-218-8270 / +1-347-480-8679. Glocal Briefs™ are pragmatic, five minute intros to diverse management and leadership topics. Check out the others [here](#).

⁴ Named after Gerald Moore, co-founder of Intel, who quipped that computer processing capability doubled every two years.

⁵ How many of you have been on a video chat, a webinar, or used a collaborative document creator such as Google docs or similar? have you tweeted from your smartphone? during a conference? In 2020, that percentage will have significantly increased, I suspect.

⁶ You may have heard the estimate that one week of the New York Times contains more information than a person was likely to come across in their lifetime in the 18th century. An incredible amount of unique new information will be created worldwide - 2.7 zettabytes (2.7 x 10²¹) this year - how many times would that fill up your hard drive? What will we do with that information?

⁷ Stress management and unplugging from 24/7 technology are key to taking time to think, to develop responses rather than becoming reactive. After all, we want to use technology to improve project outcomes, not let it control us.

⁸ Check out "Shift Happens" on YouTube - educator Karl Fisch first put together this presentation to his peers on the challenges within education, given global trends and preparing students for a world of jobs and issues we can't yet foresee.

⁹ Ask for a copy of our Corporate Social Responsibility 101 Glocal Brief™.