



BUILDING CREATIVE BRIDGES

paulsignorelli & associates

ps

Staff Training

Mentoring

Volunteering  
& Docents

Writing

**Community and Collaboration in an Onsite-Online World:  
An Annotated Bibliography  
Latest Update: December 17, 2010**

The following annotated bibliography provides resources for anyone who is currently involved in or wants to be involved in building communities and fostering successful collaborations: communities of learning, communities of practice, online communities, and a variety of others.

It is meant to be a starting place, not an end point, and will continue to grow as other resources are added.

--Paul Signorelli

***Building Communities***

Bingham, T. & Conner, M. (2010). *The New Social Learning: A Guide to Transforming Organizations Through Social Media*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

When American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) President and CEO Tony Bingham teams up with *Fast Company* magazine columnist Marcia Conner for a book on social learning and all that the term implies about building collaborative communities of learning, we might expect tremendous results. We're not disappointed. They dive right in by telling us that the book "is for people who are specifically interested in how social media helps people in organizations learn quickly; innovate fast; share knowledge; and engage with peers, business partners, and the customers they serve" (p. xviii). They provide us with "playground rules" for the new social learning (p. 1), and they give us little opportunity to put the book down before we have finished it. Social learning "leverages online communities," they assure us (p. 11), and is centered on "information sharing, collaboration, and co-creation..." (p. 21). They repeatedly bolster their arguments by citing studies, including one showing that people who study in small groups do better than those "who worked on their own" (p. 39), and offering creative examples of how social media tools such as Twitter are being used effectively in online learning by educators who "post tips of the day, answers to questions from students, writing assignments, and other prompts and reminders about key points to keep learning going" (p. 95). "Collaboration is something we've known how to do our entire lives. Working together to produce something more significant than one person can do alone is timeless," they write halfway through their book (p. 107), and the remainder of their work is a contemporary paean to and example of the power of that belief.

Phone:  
415.681.5224

E-mail:  
paul@paulsignorelli.com

Website:  
www.paulsignorelli.com

Block, P. (2008). *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Peter Block shows, in his work and his presentations, that it doesn't take much effort to initiate the process of building and strengthening communities—just a few people willing to gather and cross barriers they don't normally cross so that ideas flow freely and exchanges strengthen relationships. It's all about engagement—that moment when people are drawn together by a common interest or goal and, in the process, begin to build the sort of communities which result in long-lasting and productive collaborations. Chapters include “Insights Into Transformation,” “The Transforming Community,” and “Designing Physical Space That Supports Community”—one of the many areas in which Block excels and inspires. *Community* is a concise, well organized, and compelling primer for anyone interested in exploring and understanding how to create, nurture, and facilitate productive communities, and is creatively designed to be reread in part or in its entirety anytime a refresher on the basics of building communities is needed.

DeLuca, D., & Valacich, J. (2006). Virtual Teams in and out of Synchronicity. *Information Technology & People*. 19(4), pp. 323-344. Accessed August 13, 2007.

Addressing how teams are created and nurtured online through synchronous and asynchronous methods, this detailed study can also serve as a first-rate primer for anyone interested in nurturing successful online communities. Examining various methods for online communication between members of a team, the writers show how a combination of listservs, e-mails, bulletin boards, and synchronous and asynchronous online sessions meets the varying needs of the online teams. Particularly noteworthy is the description of an asynchronous offering which began with a face-to-face meeting of all participants (DeLuca & Valacich, p. 329)—an idea which appears to lead to much better online learning experiences for those initially unfamiliar with how it works. An extensive list of references at the end of the article provides plenty of resources for those interested in pursuing this topic.

Florida, R. (2010). *The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-crash Prosperity*. New York: HarperCollins.

Richard Florida, whose books including *The Rise of the Creative Class* consistently document what he believes to be the growing influence of that class, returns in his latest work with a recession-era manifesto suggesting ways we can work together to foster that class and engage in a major reset of how we work and prosper. “We are living through an even more powerful and fundamental economic shift, from an industrial system to an economy that is increasingly powered by knowledge, creativity, and ideas,” he suggests (p. 111), so we need to respond to people's desire “to learn, to develop new competencies, and to grow their capacity and confidence, through training and development and through promotion from within” (p. 121).

Drawing from and acknowledging the work of writers including Jane Jacobs (*The Economy of Cities*) and Lewis Mumford (*The City in History*) to talk about the importance of communities and subcommunities, he looks at the role technology and infrastructure play in developing and nurturing communities (p. 21) and envisions a resurgence “driven by community groups and citizen-led initiatives” rather than “from top-down policies imposed by local governments” (p. 82).

The great news for those of us involved in workplace learning and performance is that education and training, according to Florida, are key elements in this process: “when the mills closed in the 1970s and 1980s, people in Pittsburgh went out and got training and college degrees”—a collective action that he and others cite as part of the reason for Pittsburgh’s Reset successes (p. 78). As he concludes his survey of how we have dealt with past economic crises and suggests ways to nurture the creativity he believes is essential to our success, he ties his various themes together: “Education and infrastructure, creativity, and connectivity—these are things we can address, things we must improve and ensure to see this Reset through and build a new prosperity” (p. 186).

Fried, J. & Heinemeier Hansson, D. (2010). *Rework*. New York: Crown Business

*Rework* is a book very much of its moment as those preferring Web 2.0-style collaborations and those who feel territorial about everything they produce attempt to find common ground. The writers suggest that we avoid the complexities and turf wars which so often hold many of us back from achievements we might otherwise produce if we were not trying to do too much, trying to recreate what others are doing rather than pursuing our own vision on behalf of those we serve, and allowing ourselves to “obsess over tools instead of what [we]’re going to do with those tools” (p. 87). They take a light and playful approach: the simple graphics which are interspersed with the text throughout the book keep readers moving from page to page. The use of the graphics and the stylistic device of providing short sections on dozens of interrelated themes—most pieces are no longer than a tightly written blog posting and have the same sense of informality—make the book a pleasure to peruse and easy to absorb.

It is not the content that is revolutionary here. Reminders to improvise (pp. 18-20), produce something tangible rather than engaging in endless discussions about producing something tangible (pp. 33-45), undertake a few achievable projects rather than trying to do pursue every possibility and ending up completing none (p. 83), ask what problems we are solving through our undertakings (p. 100), and learn by doing rather than always trying to duplicate what others have accomplished (pp. 134-136) simply take us back to basics we should already know but all too often set aside in a frenzy of trying to respond to all constituents without serving any of them effectively. Which, of course, makes the time spent with *Rework* tremendously worthwhile.

Godin, S. (2008). *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us*. New York: The Penguin Group.

Best-selling author and popular blogger Seth Godin (<http://sethgodin.com>) wants us to lead. We know he does: he tells us that in the title to this book. His wonderful manifesto about how leaders and their contemporary tribes find each other is an enticing starting point for those who don’t have the time or inclination to read denser theses on change management such as Everett Rogers’ classic *Diffusion of Innovations* (now in its fifth edition). His language is sparse and direct. Declarative sentences are the order of the day.

He works in the same style as Dan and Chip Heath (*Made to Stick* and *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*); he influences us through stories rather than burying us in theory. He speaks of the importance of passion and faith and belief in ourselves and the causes we champion. He assures us that we have the tools to form and nurture tribes capable of producing results. And when he asks us at the end of this brief introduction to the power of collaboration to share this book with others, we know we will because we believe and are inspired by his closing words: “Give this copy to someone else. Ask them to read it. Beg them to make a choice about leadership. We need them. We need you. Spread the word.”

Johansson, F. (2006). *The Medici Effect: Breakthrough Insights at the Intersection of Ideas, Concepts, & Cultures*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing.

Frans Johansson’s justifiably popular book on how even the most fleeting of collaborations can have wide-ranging effects focuses on what he calls “The Intersection,” that wonderful place where people from different fields of study or walks of life meet, share ideas, and walk away with far more than they could ever create alone. It’s where a Swedish chef who was born in Ethiopia combines ingredients in ways none have ever done before and puts a New York restaurant (Aquavit)—and himself—on the map. It’s where a young Ph.D. math student creates a revolutionary card game (Magic), which earns \$40 million for the company that buys and produces it. “When you step into an intersection of fields, disciplines, or cultures, you can combine existing concepts into a large number of extraordinary ideas,” Johansson writes (p. 2). “The name I have given the phenomenon, the Medici Effect, comes from a remarkable burst of creativity in fifteenth-century Italy.” For those of us who work in the field of staff training, it is where we learn just as much from students as we can offer them, with the result that all of us are teacher-trainers as well as student-learners and what we find is spread to others we will soon encounter. The beauty of the Intersection is that it really does not require very much effort—just a commitment to remain inquisitive. We need to be able to question what we learn and know and teach. Break down the barriers. And be open to a constant stimulating change of our perspective. Most of all, we need to listen: to ourselves, to those around us, and to those we meet in books and magazines, online, in classrooms, and even in our dreams. The rest falls into place.

Kilmann, R. (2001). *Quantum Organizations: A New Paradigm for Achieving Organizational Success and Personal Meaning*. Palo Alto: Davies-Black Publishing.

The title of Ralph Kilman’s book suggests both the benefits and the challenges of attempting to read his work: he has produced an important and innovative look at the power of collaborative rather than hierarchical organizations while, at the same time, producing a work that is at times so complex that it’s far from easy to read and digest. At the heart of the book is an interesting comparison between a Newtonian, or mechanical, approach to our world and a quantum (relativistic) approach. Staying with this stimulating work that draws parallels between the thinking behind quantum physics and organizations which develop what he calls “quantum infrastructures” provides a convincing road map for developing collaborative, flexible, nonhierarchical structures—quantum organizations—that can produce positive results not easily achieved within more rigid and highly structured enterprises. A brief section on “enabling organizational success” near the end of the book (pp. 299-312) provides a nice starting point for anyone feeling overwhelmed by the overall complexity of Kilman’s work, and an extensive bibliography offers plenty of guidance for anyone wanting to further explore this level of collaboration.

Oldenburg, R. (1989). *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. New York: Marlowe & Company.

Few books have had greater influence on the way we perceive communities, community-building, and collaboration than Ray Oldenburg's *The Great Good Place*. The terms he introduces have become part of our lexicon: the first place (home), the second place (work), and the third place—the great good place, which is where we meet, socialize, share ideas with, and learn from friends and acquaintances who become part of our personal and extended community. In the first part of his book, Oldenburg describes the history of the third place in America, explores the character of third places, and outlines the “personal benefits” and “greater good” resulting from nurturing and sustaining third places—a tremendous antidote to cynics who claim there no longer is a commitment to the idea of public goods. “My interest in those happy gathering places that a community may contain, those ‘homes away from home’ where unrelated people relate, is almost as old as I am,” Oldenburg writes at the beginning of his book (p. ix), and his obvious love and admiration for and commitment to those places serves as inspiration for anyone trying to justify a commitment to community and collaboration.

Paloff, R. and Pratt, K. (1999). *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace: Effective Strategies for the Online Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Rena Palloff and Keith Pratt, building from work which began while they were Ph.D. students in 1993, offer an educators' view of how to create and sustain effective online learning opportunities which lead to communities of learning. Their focus is on "teaching and learning" rather than on technology (p. xvii); the result is rewarding and inspirational. The first of the two sections of the book concentrates on the philosophy and mechanics of developing communities of learning online; the second section explores hands-on methods for producing those communities and includes explicit guidance on how to inspire collaboration by providing learners with clear guidelines as well as effective facilitation and feedback (pp. 111-125). A chapter on transformative learning (pp. 129-143) makes a strong case for how effective online learning can be by providing learners with time for engagement and reflection, and also reminds readers that effective online learning is a learner-centered process (p. 135). Sample course outlines, syllabi, lists of learning objectives, and online course guidelines make this an indispensable tool for anyone involved in online presentations and online learning. (Note: updated edition was published in 2007.)

Shirky, C. (2008). *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. New York: The Penguin Press.

Clay Shirky, whose writing and presentations on Internet technology and social change are consistently sharp and engaging, provides a from-the-field report on our continuing evolution from hierarchical, highly organized entities to the far less formal collaborations fostered by social networking resources. “Social tools provide...action by loosely structured groups, operating without managerial direction and outside the profit motive,” he reminds us (p. 47), and the result is explosive in terms of loosely organized groups' ability to produce results previously unimagined. “Ridiculously easy group-forming matters because the desire to be part of a group that shares, cooperates, or acts in concert is a basic human instinct that has always been

constrained by transaction costs. Now that group-forming has gone from hard to ridiculously easy, we are seeing an explosion of experiments with new groups and new kinds of groups,” he explains (p. 54). His explorations take us down a variety of paths, including what happens to the concept of “a professional” when social media tools open up a profession such as journalism to everyone through blogging; we’re also treated to an exploration of how collaboration succeeds in producing magnificent resources including Wikipedia. He is far from serving as an unquestioning cheerleader for what he observes in the use of social networking tools: “...a good social tool is like a good woodworking tool—it must be designed to fit the job being done, and it must help people do something they actually want to do,” he notes (p. 265). By the end of *Here Comes Everybody*, Shirky helps us establish a bit of perspective on the changes through which we are living and in which we are participating: “The invention of tools that facilitate group formation is less like ordinary technological change and more like an event, something that has already happened. As a result, the important questions aren’t about whether these tools will spread or reshape society but rather how they do so,” he concludes (p. 300). For those who are still wondering why so many people are diving into collaboration through online social networking tools, Shirky serves as a sympathetic and attractive guide.

Surowiecki, J. (2004). *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies, and Nations*. New York: Doubleday.

It’s difficult to read anything written on the topic of collaboration and community in the past few years without coming across references to James Surowiecki’s *The Wisdom of Crowds*—and for good reason. The book, as he writes in his acknowledgments, “is partly about the difference between a society and just a bunch of people living next to each other” (p. 274)—a concept at the heart of all successful collaboration. His observations in his introduction lead us through a brief survey of those who have disparaged the ability of groups (crowds) to produce any signs of intelligent decision-making—Charles Mackay (*Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*), Gustave le Bon (*The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*), and others—then guide us to his well documented premise: “...under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent, and are often smarter than the smartest people in them” (p. xiii). The result is an entertaining, engaging, and convincing argument for collaboration involving people from exactly the same kind of widely diverse backgrounds that Frans Johansson promotes in *The Medici Effect*, and leaves us little room to doubt the power, efficacy, and attractiveness of what collaboration can produce.

Tapscott, D., and Williams, A. (2006). *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*. New York: The Penguin Group.

Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams’ *Wikinomics* combines three topics—social media tools (wikis), economics, and collaboration—to produce a stimulating exploration of how the changes we are facing can be used to our advantage to foster success through collaboration and sharing rather than hoarding. Their economic model is one of exchanging goods and services without charge—a theme also creatively explored by Chris Anderson in *Free: The Future of a Radical Price*—in ways that benefit all involved while not ignoring the need for participants to reap financial as well as social benefits. The chapters on “The Wiki Workplace” and “Collaborative Minds” are particularly useful to anyone seeking new ways to foster collaboration and the building of communities, and they draw from their other work to suggest that social forces and changes are providing attractive opportunities: “...the Net Generation, and the rise of the new Web,” combined with the fact that “[m]ost large organizations today are geographically

dispersed” and that “the nature of work itself is changing” is making the sort of collaboration fostered by people working on a wiki a tremendous model for collaboration (p. 246). What remains to be seen is whether we are willing to run with this model or let a magnificent opportunity pass by unused.

***For more information, please contact Paul Signorelli & Associates***

***[paul@paulsignorelli.com](mailto:paul@paulsignorelli.com)***

***(latest update completed December 17, 2010)***

