



Sentiers at Work

No.β ~ September 2018



Cover image: [Folch Studio](#) (Barcelona)

Sentiers at Work

No.β ~ September 2018

Welcome to this first edition of *Sentiers at Work*. Like in the weekly newsletter, you'll find a varied array of topics but, as the title implies, this monthly version will inform your work lives, and how your organizations (companies, coops, non-profits, foundations, etc.) function.

The two broad foci will be technological transformation and a framing I used in a previous publication; learning constantly to become future proof.

Whether it's on a personal or organizational level, we need to constantly be learning and adapting to changing, evolving, and ever more complex landscapes. These briefings will try to answer those challenges and better equip you and your team.

This is not a strategic list of action items. Rather, like *Sentiers*, it's a broad spectrum radar to feed your curiosity. It gathers the most interesting ideas to bring context, sense and understanding. It's a fifteen to twenty minute read that saves time, keeps you on top of things, and your curiosity sated.

— Patrick Tanguay

On The Great Benefits of Curiosity at Work

The Business Case for Curiosity

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW (19 MIN READ)

I'm a big fan of fostering and feeding curiosity, this is an excellent long read at HBR, part of a theme in a recent issue. It recaps some of the author's research. In short, Francesca Gino (behavioral scientist and the Tandon Family Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School) shows how important curiosity is, being a kind of accelerant for creativity and innovation. She runs us through the benefits, two barriers (leaders have the wrong mindset about exploration, and seek efficiency to the detriment of exploration), and five ways to bolster curiosity.

A body of research demonstrates that framing work around learning goals (developing competence, acquiring skills, mastering new situations, and so on) rather than performance goals (hitting targets, proving our competence, impressing others) boosts motivation. And when motivated by learning goals, we acquire more-diverse skills, do better at work, get higher grades in college, do better on problem-solving tasks, and receive higher ratings after training. Unfortunately, organizations often prioritize performance goals. [...]

[Curious people are] more comfortable than others asking questions, such people more easily create and nurture ties at work—and those ties are critical to their career development and success. The organization benefits when employees are connected to people who can help them with challenges and motivate them to go the extra mile.

Notes

Some of the benefits

- More innovation and positive changes.
- Reduced group conflict.
- More-open communication and better team performance.

How to bolster curiosity

- Hire for it.
- Model inquisitiveness.
- Emphasize learning goals. (This is an important one, reach out if you'd like some reading material on the topic.)
- Let employees explore and broaden their interests.
- Have “Why?” “What if...?” and “How might we...?” days.
- Learn how to ask good questions.

Connections

- In the same HBR issue, checkout [The Five Dimensions of Curiosity](#), which identifies five ways (or reasons) in which people display curiosity.
- [From Curious To Competent](#) is the last piece of that package.
- An old favorite of mine on the topic: [The Art of Curiosity](#) by Ian Sanders.

Not Disruption: Structure & Product Fit

Why big companies squander good ideas

THE FINANCIAL TIMES (17 MIN READ)

Another explanation for why large organizations get disrupted; it's not that they don't respond fast enough or ignore "low-end" competition but rather that their organizational structure doesn't fit the needs of the disruptive / product. The author reviews Rebecca M. Henderson's (Professor at Harvard Business School) thinking on this structural handicap and contrasts it to Clayton Christensen, including multiple examples and a tying thread about... British and German tanks in the 1920s and 30s.

Instead of simply posing the issue as adapting to digital, this brings an interesting perspective from a product vs structure standpoint.

Dominant organisations are prone to stumble when the new technology requires a new organizational structure. An innovation might be radical but, if it fits the structure that already existed, an incumbent firm has a good chance of carrying its lead from the old world to the new. [...]

An architectural innovation is an innovation that changes the relationship between the pieces of the problem, it can be hard to perceive, because many of the pieces remain the same. But they fit together differently. [...]

There are multiple points of failure, there's the problem of reorganization. There's the question of whether the new idea will be profitable. There are cognitive filters. There is more than one kind of denial. An incumbent organisation has to overcome every one of these obstacles.

Notes

- Companies like Sony, Kodak, Xerox, or the oil industry right now, didn't miss the disrupting innovations, they knew before everyone else but the new technology and resulting products had no place to fit in each company.
- Innovators are often difficult people, making these transitions even harder because there needs to not only be innovation but also political acumen to push for changes in structures.

Connections

- Ben Thompson (Stratechery) has a good piece from a few years ago on [What Clayton Christensen Got Wrong](#).
- Dan Hill (Associate Director at Arup and leading their digital studio) wrote about the dark matter of organizations (including governments) in his book [Dark Matter and Trojan Horses: A Strategic Design Vocabulary](#) which I recommend. The silos and structures in the FT article are, in part, dark matter.
- The article can feel a bit like reading their portfolio but Hill [recently wrote about the Arup Digital Studio](#) which gives a good idea of how that type of strategic design can work.

Three Horizons Framework

Three Horizons Framework - a quick introduction

DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS (7 MIN VIDEO)

This model “allows a more nuanced conversation, bringing new insights, allowing people to disagree for far more interesting reasons.” It maps three patterns across time and according to prevalence. H1 being “business as usual,” and expected to gradually be less fit for purpose. H3 is an emerging future, perhaps a technology expected to replace the one prevalent in H1. H2 is “people trying things out in response to the ways in which the landscape is changing.” It might be to capture the new tech to prop up the old H1, or to harness it to accelerate the arrival of H3.

It might sound a bit obscure but watch the video, the last half is a super quick list of questions to pursue in a workshop to run down possible outcomes. Her example is a very broad societal one but the model can be used at various scales to think through important transitions.

[I]n order to appropriately respond to the changes around us, organizations, communities, businesses and governments must not only pay attention to possible short-term responses to symptoms of these crises, but must also address the underlying structural and systemic causes that drive these symptoms.

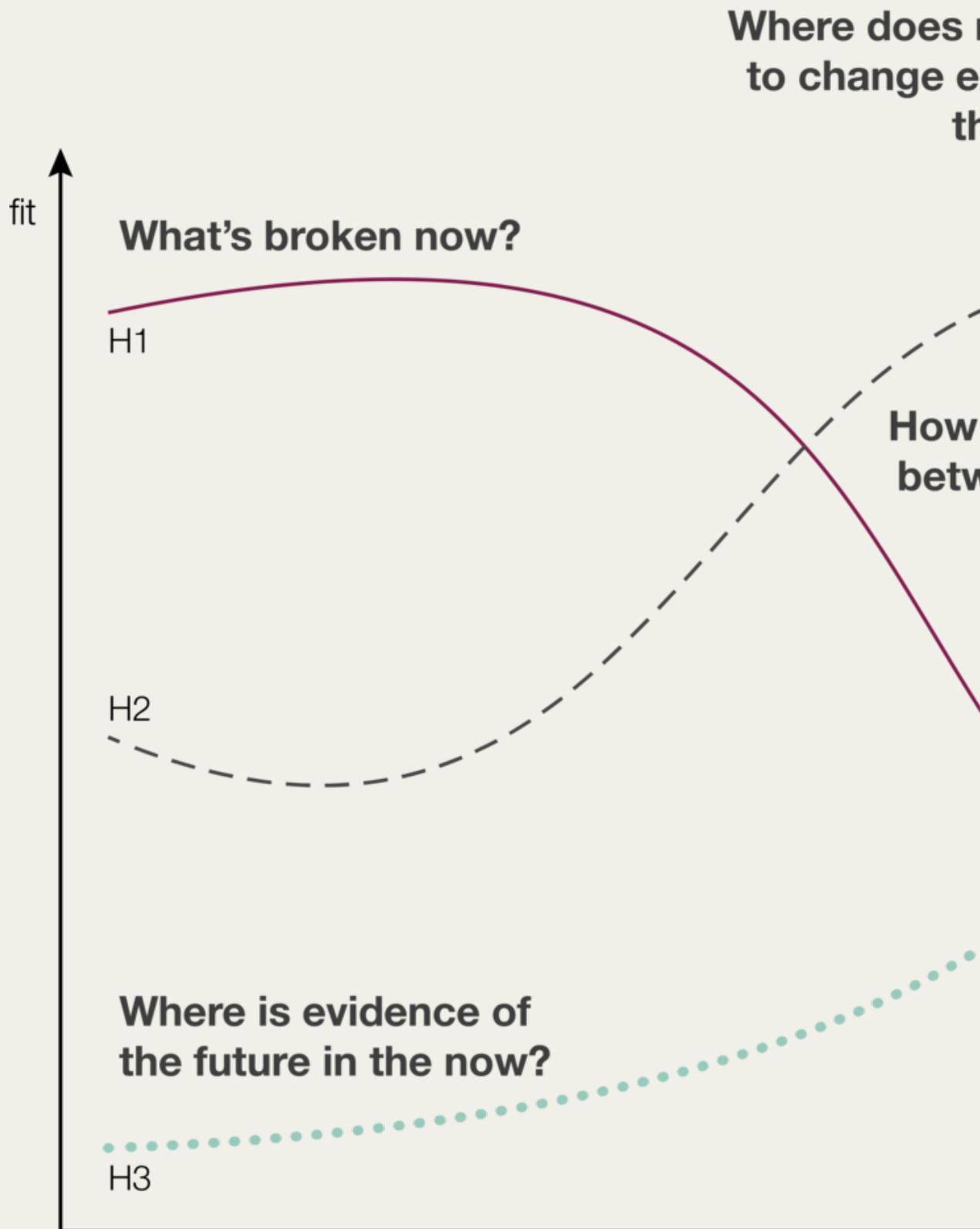
Notes

- [Three Horizons and future transformation](#) is another good overview.
- This one: [The Three Horizons of innovation and culture change](#) concentrates on culture and “not knowing.” (The quote above is taken from that piece.)
- [Three Horizons](#). Resource site by the International Futures Forum.

Connections

- [The Design of Future Visions for Large Organizations](#) by [Fabien Girardin](#) only mentions the framework in passing but is worth a read for his thinking on the use of **design fiction** in organizations, which is another interesting process to use for thinking of possible futures.
- The video is narrated by [Kate Raworth](#) who has written a book about Doughnut Economics, on social and planetary boundaries. The example presented is taken from that perspective.

Three Horizons Framework



resistance
exist within
the system?



What's the hopeful future?

might we bridge
between paradigms?

What's worth keeping
from the present?

time

Source: [Fashion for a finite planet](#)

Understanding The Intangible Economy

Not enough people are paying attention to this economic trend

GATES NOTES (6 MIN READ)

This one is “compressing” the ideas from one book into an article. In this case, Bill Gates’ review of *Capitalism Without Capital* by Jonathan Haskel (Imperial College Business School) and Stian Westlake (senior fellow at Nesta) about the rise of the intangible economy. The quickest take is that this represents an economist’s view of Marc Andreessen’s idea that software is eating the world (“More and more major businesses and industries are being run on software and delivered as online services—from movies to agriculture to national defence.”). Andreessen was focused on the companies leveraging software, the book explains in economic terms how intangibles differ from physical products’ relationship between supply and demand.

Unlike the goods that powered our economy in the past, software is an intangible asset. And software isn’t the only example: data, insurance, e-books, even movies work in similar ways. [...] The portion of the world’s economy that doesn’t fit the old model just keeps getting larger. That has major implications for everything from tax law to economic policy to which cities thrive and which cities fall behind, but in general, the rules that govern the economy haven’t kept up. This is one of the biggest trends in the global economy that isn’t getting enough attention.

Notes

- Generalizing broadly; up to recently software was simply a tool helping people be more productive. Today, software, in its more advanced “Artificial Intelligence” framing, is being productive on its own.
- AI (whatever its actual intelligence) becomes more valuable as it’s used more, because it leverages more and more data.
- 50 of something physical / manufactured is more expensive than 10.
- 50 copies of something digital is barely more expensive than 10 (if at all).
- 50 times more “installations” / data for an AI makes each “smarter.” (Assuming data is shared.)

Connections

- Andreessen later updated his maxim to proclaim that Software programs the world.
- An Economy of Desire. Since there is, for all intents and purposes, no scarcity with digital goods the “information market” (internet) offers an unending buffet of desires, never reaching the equilibrium that scarce markets reach.

Developing Teams & a Deep Bench

Microsoft CHRO: A Conversation About Succession Management

GALLUP (7 MIN READ)

Definitely not something I expected to be writing a few years ago but nowadays Microsoft is doing lots of interesting things under Satya Nadella (CEO since 2014), notably in his approach to lifelong-learning, like here in this interview with their Chief Human Resources Officer, Kathleen Hogan. They have completely reconstructed the yearly review process, which are now called Talent Talks.

As we looked at our culture, we recognized a key part of embodying a growth mindset is learning from your past to reinvent a better future. With that concept in mind, our leadership team decided to revive the concept of People Review, but with a new process and a new name. We decided to call it Talent Talks, because we wanted to make it less abrasive and judgmental — and more about placing an emphasis on developing our talent and planning for the future.

Notes

- The emphasis is now on the development of each team member, how to foster their progress, and on the depth of the “bench,” who can play which role in the future and who’s coming in.
- Managers are always thinking about how to “drive succession planning and building organizational capability.”
- They also put a lot of emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and notice the mention of “delighting our customers through diversity” which is a perspective I hadn’t seen before.

Connections

- Satya Nadella Rewrites Microsoft’s Code. Interview with the CEO on everything he’s changed. As above, of interest for his constant learning focus.
- Very much related to reviews, at Deloitte Insights: Behavioral principles for delivering effective feedback.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

How to Retain More of Every Book You Read

JAMES CLEAR (8 MIN READ)

There are a lot of articles about reading books and a lot of overlap between them. This one by James Clear is worth a read because he does bring a couple of more original ideas like combining knowledge trees, and “surrounding the topic.” His first item is not as original but certainly important and something I try to do more and more; quitting books. There’s just so much around and we are already struggling to read as much as we’d like, calling it quits on bad reads is a good habit to work on.

Start more books.

Quit most of them.

Read the great ones twice.

Notes

- He mentions writing summaries and the Feynman technique, which I love. Shane Parrish has a good short explainer on it. Not about summaries but I also love this writing class idea from Jason Fried (going from three pages to one, to three paragraphs, to one, to one phrase).
- On quitting books, this advice on [How to Read a Book a Week](#) includes a [five step process to read books quickly](#). I don't really recommend it for the purpose of actually reading a book but it can be a good way to decide whether to read it "for real."

Connections

- [Skim reading is the new normal. The effect on society is profound](#)
- [Your Brain on Reading \(Why Your Brain Needs You to Read Every Day\)](#)

*“Start more books
Quit most of them
Read the great ones”*

books.

them.

“Read ones twice.”

— *James Clear*

No More “Data Free-for-all”

What if people were paid for their data?

THE ECONOMIST (6 MIN READ)

An article considering the ideas in Glen Weyl (Yale University and Microsoft Research) and Eric Posner’s (University of Chicago) book *Radical Markets*. They argue—as virtual-reality pioneer Jaron Lanier and others do—that the data we freely provide to the big tech companies like the GAFAM actually has great value since it powers much of what they do, including their forays into Artificial Intelligence. Remember that AI is basically algorithms finding patterns in large volumes of data, and that data is usually, in some way, coming from us users. What if that data was properly valued and users were able to control their data and sell it according to their preferences and privacy requirements?

Notes

- Data ownership is not one or the other, it's a spectrum. Pay attention to the data you hold, if you really need it, and how you can give more control to the user.
- Consider the cost of data leaks and their potential cost.
- Thinking of AI as “Collective Intelligence” is a useful shift in perspective. We go from a “ghostly electronic intelligence emerging from code” to intelligence emerging from a pool of data produced by a collection of people. Consider which of your data you could gain insights from.

“He argues that in the age of artificial intelligence, it makes sense to treat data as a form of labour.”

To understand why, it helps to keep in mind that “artificial intelligence” is something of a misnomer. Messrs Weyl and Posner call it “collective intelligence”: most AI algorithms need to be trained using reams of human-generated examples, in a process called machine learning.”

Connections

- Cambridge Analytica Scandal.
- GDPR European legislation.
- Make private data into a public good (economist Mariana Mazzucato).

Organizational Liberation

Give Your Team the Freedom to Do the Work They Think Matters

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW (5 MIN READ)

There are many, many different ideas and methods for re-inventing, re-designing organizations, flat orgs, no-managers, Holacracy, etc. Amongst all of these, and the books and services associated with the transitions, I appreciate one that “has never had a name because it hasn’t really had a guru.” The authors of the piece, Brian Carney (SVP for Corporate Communications of Rivada Networks) and Isaac Getz (professor at ESCP Europe Business School in Paris), have taken to calling this one “corporate liberation.” It basically means turning managers into coaches and letting the teams come up with solutions.

Make sure to read the “steps” section with things like “lose your ego,” “create the respect tide,” and becoming the guardian of the team.

According to a 2017 Gallup Employee Engagement survey, 33% of U.S. employees are engaged, 51% are disengaged, and 16% are actively disengaged. Freedom-based companies, by contrast, can typically boast that more than 70% of their employees are “engaged,” according to Gallup’s data. [...]

[At Decathlon] Managers transitioned to the role of coaches in service of their teams, giving away their formal authority. As a result, today all warehouse teams manage the order fulfillment by themselves, and many teams set their own work schedules.

Notes

- Some of these companies have been using this thinking for decades.
- Changing the role of managers instead of trying to remove them.
- Give more responsibilities to team members, making them more engaged.
- Uses more of the brainpower of the organisations.
- Examples are not just taken from tech but from retailers like Decathlon and manufacturing like Michelin.

Connections

- From Patriarchy To Partnership – The Paradigm Shift Our Organisations Need, regroups all these trendy methods under the idea of making hierarchical relationships adult-to-adult instead of parent-child. Includes two super quick takes on two Google research projects.
- “Sense and Respond”, a good short interview with Frédéric Laloux, explaining his people-centric approach.
- No bosses, no managers: the truth behind the ‘flat hierarchy’ facade. Debunking some of the bossless ideas, including the no-hierarchy poster child of recent years, Valve.

*“As we looked at our culture
part of embodying a group
from your past to reinvent*

*ure, we recognized a key
wth mindset is learning
at a better future.”*

— Kathleen Hogan, Microsoft

Online Retail Infusing The Offline in China

China's corner stores are the future and its retail is winning it

AXIOS (2 AND 3 MIN READS)

Two short articles at Axios, presenting a few details about how JD, Tencent, and Alibaba are taking a completely different approach to Amazon's. Where the latter is largely trying to dominate from its online position and making some vertically integrated inroads in "brick and mortar" with their recent bookstores and last year's purchase of Whole Foods, its Chinese competitors are instead becoming "software stacks" for millions of stores across the country. They offer complete solutions to convert stores, digitize their processes, become their main product provider, and the payment platform.

Among the central ideas is that in the future, shoppers will not view e-commerce and brick-and-mortar as distinct things, but as a single merged organism — as simply "commerce." [...]

Alibaba says that over the last year, it has redone about 1 million mom and pop shops like the Huangs' across China. [...]

Almost no Chinese use cash or credit cards. Instead, every transaction — from a fruit-vendor on the street, to the super-market, to movie tickets, to paying your baby-sitter — is done from your smart phone.

Notes

- Notice the Hema stores in the second article, the author sees it as fabulous, I see it as unsustainable.
- It's interesting to pay attention to mobile, which is not only pervasive in cities but much more so in the Chinese countryside than in Western countries'.
- JD has a warehouse that “can ship 200,000 packages a day with just four human workers, all of them robot mechanics.”

Connections

- The Letter from Shenzhen is an excellent read to better understand the megacity and tech transformation and adoption in the county.
- How Alibaba's 'new retail' is changing the future of retail in China and the world.

Some Lessons On Data & Ethics

Data's day of reckoning

O'REILLY (14 MIN READ)

Articles on the topic of ethics are often more theory and aspiration than application. There are a lot of actual applicable concepts and methods around but the more accessible coverage often doesn't offer much in terms of usable tactics.

This one by Mike Loukides, Hilary Mason, and DJ Patil is more “from the inside” of developer circles and does a good job of making a parallel with security and how both are insufficiently present in education. They also include a good checklist companies can use, and various cultural and policy changes that could bolster the inclusion of ethical reflexions and enforcement measures in industry.

Notes

- The piece is focused on software development but, since every company is digital to some (ever increasing) degree, struggles and lessons from their work are useful for different types of organizations.
- Ethics, privacy, bias, and all related issues are discussed more and more in public because of the failings of some big technology platforms but, again, they apply to everyone

Connections

- By Genevieve Bell (Autonomy, Agency & Assurance (3A) Innovation Institute at the Australian National University, formerly at Intel): In our focus on the digital, have we lost our sense of what being human means?
- Welcome to the metadata society — and beware.

*Sentiers gathers the most interesting ideas
to bring context, sense, and understanding.*

