

# The Fourth Revolution

**What's behind the move  
from a brute force  
to a brain force economy?**

By Jonathon Levy

TWENTY-THREE YEARS AGO, IBM's then senior vice president for human resources, Walton Burdick, suggested that in the future the world's best companies would be differentiated by the degree to which they relate to their employees as whole human beings. It seems that Burdick's prediction is coming true: A unique convergence of human and digital technologies is happening in the workplace, and it's creating additional leverage for the workplace learning and performance industry. In the process, that convergence is providing better health, less stress, and greater well-being for the knowledge worker.

The convergence is the latest iteration of a long historical trend toward increased human leverage, toward doing less but accomplishing more. For thousands of years, human evolution has been marked by the growth of mind over matter—increasingly greater use of mental power to leverage the requirement for physical power. Historians describe those steps of evolution in terms of three paradigm-changing “revolutions”:

- the Agricultural Revolution
- the Industrial Revolution
- the Information Revolution.

In his book *The Third Wave*, Alvin Toffler notes that “America and other countries are already feeling the impact of a gigantic Third Wave based on the substitution of mental power for muscle power in the economy.” It is more than just technology and economics, Toffler says, more than just being “digital” and “networked.” This revolutionary wave marks our transition from a brute force to a brain force economy.

## Brain force economy

A reliance on brain force is obvious in the increased dependence on knowledge workers for competitive advantage. The amount of information knowledge workers must deal with grows daily and is beyond anyone's ability to sort and parse usefully. That situation sets the stage for an even more powerful event—a fourth wave or revolution that creates increased leverage for both the knowledge worker and the enterprise, extending the evolutionary thrust of doing less but accomplishing more.

This “Fourth Revolution” is in its infancy, far from widespread use in corporate America. Yet, you can clearly differentiate it from previous waves by its reliance on consciousness as the pivotal driver of change. Two elements are apparent in this new focus on consciousness:

- expanding the consciousness of the individual knowledge worker
- tapping the collective consciousness of the knowledge workforce.

It comes as a response to a need of the time, when information overload is creating even higher demands on the knowledge worker.

The Fourth Revolution is about developing the full potential of knowledge workers; about identifying and linking knowledge resources within an enterprise and, therefore, gaining maximum return from human capital. What's required now is not increased informa-

tion but an increased ability to deal with that information. The combination of mental techniques such as transcendental meditation—or TM—with next-generation networks to instantly share collective knowledge holds the promise of a super-charged, high-performance workforce that is both happier and more productive.

## Expanding the knowledge container

Until now, corporate spending for increased human capital productivity focused mainly on more content and more technologies for training and learning. But recently, a number of company leaders began to realize that they were

addressing only half of the equation: content and dissemination. Those leaders did not address the human side—increasing awareness of those receivers of content, the knowledge workers.

As digital knowledge technologies reach their limit, attention has turned to the beneficiary of knowledge, the container of knowledge: the knower. Previously, the linear model of learning (which is most commonly used in a classroom situation) separated the learner and the knower from the known (content). Now it's possible to achieve unity between knower, knowing, and known through the blending of both human and digital technologies.

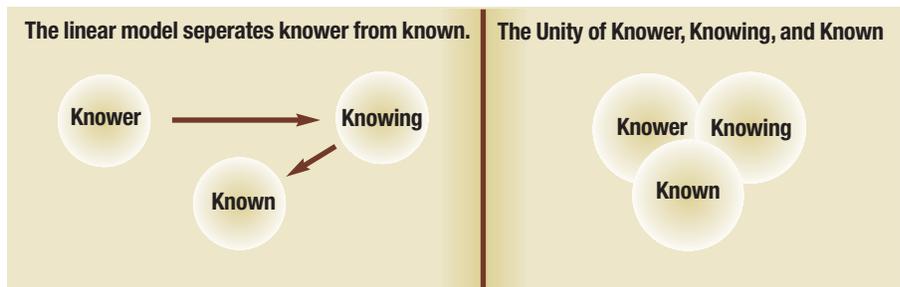
More and more, online and mobile learning environments in which the learner is in full control and the knowledge is selected—not by a teacher—but by the learner herself on the basis of the need at the moment are the norm. In such environments, the subject matter expert can be said to be the learner. A further step toward the unity of knower, knowing, and known takes place subjectively as the awareness of the knower expands and, through regular practice of meditation, begins to comprehend more of the interconnectedness between the self and the environment. That self-awareness, or what Daniel Goleman refers to as “emotional intelligence,” is a much sought-after quality of leadership and develops naturally through practices such as TM.

## Techniques of expanded capability

Employers large and small are taking notice of the benefits of TM, and the media is reporting on the results. For example, ABC News reports that TM has been proven to lower blood pressure and reduce the need for medication. They quote Robert Ginsberg, chief of thoracic surgery at the University of Toronto's Department of Surgery: "The people I see least in my practice . . . are people who meditate regularly . . . because they just stay healthier . . . and we don't see them as much." According to *The Washington Post*, the Capital's largest commercial developer, The Towers Companies, offers TM instruction to its employees as a way to help them be more productive while at the same time helping them to reduce the risk of stress-related mental or physical health problems. One of the company's owners, Jeffrey Abramson, offers meditation classes to the company's employees at no cost because he thought it was a good way to contain stress-related ailments and health-care costs. According to Abramson, "The missing key to any health-care system is prevention."

*Inc.* magazine recently reported that TM is reaching high into the corporate stratosphere: "Maxed-out professionals are turning to daily meditation to lower blood pressure, prolong concentration, and crank up creative juices." *Inc.* reports a swell of participation in workplace programs that offers on-site "mindfulness" courses, workshops, and retreats. *Business Week* reports that "[t]here are no hard numbers on how many companies have added meditation benefits, but the anecdotal evidence is mounting . . . [At] AOL Time Warner Inc., where the sales and marketing group was reduced from 850 to 500 people three years ago, meditation classes were incorporated to help employees deal with the new 12-hour days."

Lawyers in a Buffalo, New York, law firm begin their weekly meeting by meditating. "It's our universal experience here that much more can be accomplished in the practice of law if we are doing it in a thoughtful and quiet manner rather than in a frantic manner," says David Pfalzgraf, a partner at the firm. And a Dallas-based corporate meditation



coaching service reports that meditation is now taught at such companies as Nortel, Raytheon, and Texas Instruments. One of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies, AstraZeneca, has instituted the practice of meditation to open or close important executive meetings, the theory being that decision makers whose minds are clear and free from stress will make better decisions.

*Business Week* adds that "Bluebloods like McKinsey, Deutsche Bank, Hughes Aircraft, are joining new age companies such as Apple Computer, Yahoo!, and Google in offering meditation to their employees."

## Collective consciousness

Just as meditation provides a technology for developing individual consciousness, robust interconnected networks that identify, capture, and redistribute inherent knowledge provide a technology for tapping into an organization's collective consciousness.

In ancient times, villages grew up at crossroads and where roads met rivers, and those villages became the hubs of knowledge exchange. People passing through would inform the villagers about what they knew and had seen, and, in turn, the villagers redistributed what

they had already learned from others.

We have come some distance. Today, we can achieve instant communication with anyone anywhere, at any time. Increasingly, we are developing the ability to have any bit of knowledge available instantly, to share and refine our understanding with others, and to capture the inherent knowledge of colleagues. Now we have the ability to capture and categorize the knowledge our colleagues are carrying around inside their heads—and make that available to others.

An early example of that kind of technology was developed several years ago at Petroleos de Venezuela in Caracas, one of the world's largest oil companies. Their corporate learning unit, CIED, created a program that crawls around the organization and taps into inherent knowledge held by their knowledge workers. The proprietary software, called *Orion*—after the astrological hunter—not only captures what people know, it also publishes the knowledge as learning objects into their corporate knowledge system.

Put that all together, and what we're witnessing is a workplace first: a convergence of mental technologies along with network technologies designed to leverage the bench strength of a company's human capital. When synchronized and aligned around corporate strategy, the technologies of the Fourth Revolution create more than just a more productive workplace and higher levels of coherence within the enterprise. The benefits gained by knowledge workers extend into their private lives as well: better health, less stress, more creativity and energy, and greater inner happiness.

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## More

- "Perspective: Doing Well By Doing Nothing," Jess McCaun. *Inc. magazine*: [www.inc.com/magazine/20040701/perspective.html](http://www.inc.com/magazine/20040701/perspective.html)
- "Zen and the Art of Corporate Productivity," Mara Der Hovanesian. *Business Week*: [www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/03\\_30/b3843076.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/03_30/b3843076.htm)