tech toolbox

A Farewell

There is no finish line. There isn't even a pause button. Technology continues to evolve at an exponential pace. Yet, while there is no finish line, this column is goodbye, for me, for now.

I am no longer an ACC member. I left a great in-house position at an exceptional company to venture out on my own. I had to choose between my day job and my evangelism. Each demanded undivided attention. I am compelled to pursue the evangelism because I prefer failure to not trying. I've automated my Legal Technology Assessment as a testing, training and benchmarking platform for basic technology competence (Word, Excel, PDF). I also consult with law departments and law firms on how to integrate technology into their workflow, and how to then collaborate with each other to deepen the integration.

My parting thoughts do not differ much from my opening thoughts. Technology is fascinating. Technology is important. Technology is evolving at an ever more rapid pace. But technology is not magic. It is not imbued with agency. It does not act of its own volition. Nor can it recognize the tacit desires of its user. Well, not yet. For the time being, our enterprise technology, like our cars, still needs to be driven by us.

Very little enterprise technology is plug and play. The best studies find that every dollar invested in enterprise technology demands a 10 dollar investment in training and process redesign.[1] Because of the need for this complementary investment, realizing the full gains from new technology takes an enterprise five to seven years, if it ever happens at all.[2] The slow pace of integration and adoption contrasts unfavorably with the rapid pace at which the world is moving. The average tenure of an S&P 500 company has declined from 65 years in the 1920s to 15 years today.[3] In an even shorter span, the half-life of a learned skill has fallen from 30 years to five years.[4]

Getting serious about process redesign and training not only means letting go of our faith in the magical properties of technology, but also coming to grips with the fact that younger generations do not possess super powers. The digital native is a pernicious myth. Getting a Twitter account in utero engenders neither comfort not competence. Study after study has shown that absent training, younger generations struggle to use technology to solve basic problems.[5] Tech competence is a bundle of learned skills, not a matter of innate talent. Age-based essentialism causes us to eschew training because of the erroneous beliefs that older generations lack the capacity and younger generations lack the need.

I love technology, but I do not care about it. I care about the people who use it. Technology should be about leverage. A support system, not an obstacle to overcome. Technology brings the promise of unburdening us from the yoke of drudgery — to let lawyers be lawyers. But those gains are not automatic. Better has a cost that we are too often unwilling to bear. And so technology becomes either a distraction or a burden; one more step in an extant process rather than five fewer steps. There is no finish line. But while perfection is illusory, progress is possible. I hope my columns these last two years have made some small contribution to progress. Thank you for your time and attention. **ACC**

NOTES

1   E . Brynjolfsson and L. M. Hitt, "Computing Productivity: Firm-level Evidence" Review of Economics and Statistics 8, no. 4 (2003): 793– 808.

2   E. Brynjolfsson, and L. M. Hitt, "Information Technology, Workplace Organization, and the Demand for Skilled Labor: Firm-Level Evidence" *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117, no. 1 (2002): 339– 76.

3   Richard N. Foster and Sarah Kaplan, "Creative Destruction," McKinsey Quarterly, McKinsey & Company, August 2001; Foster, Richard, and Penelope Muse Abernathy. "The News Landscape in 2014: Transformed or Diminished? (Formulating a Game Plan for Survival in The Digital Era)." Geopolitics, History, and International Relations 2 (2010): 9-30.

4   Thomas, Douglas, and John Seely. Brown. "A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change." Lexington, KY: CreateSpace (2011).

5   Helsper, Ellen Johanna, and Rebecca Eynon. "Digital natives: where is the evidence?" *British Educational Research Journal* 36.3 (2010): 503-520; Selwyn, Neil. "The digital native-myth and reality." Aslib Proceedings. Vol. 61. No. 4. Emerald Group Publishing Limited (2009).

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