

# CHANGING the World of Work



*In an era when change is constant, chaotic and even random in nature, it's essential that executives and managers break out of traditional ways of thinking and use change to their advantage. It's a time of risk—and even greater opportunity!*

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**T**he globalization of our economy. The increase in use of technology. The impact of the “knowledge worker.” These three changes have dramatically impacted service businesses in the past 10–20 years and have helped to blur the distinction between market offerings as services or products.

Compare today's market with what existed 20 or even 40–50 years ago. In the 1950s and '60s, business was able to “warehouse” employees. Every time you needed someone or something new, you simply hired employee-staff and, when that job was done, you found something else for them to do. Managers added to their pay and benefits rolls without a thought.

The 1970s and '80s changed the world of work, especially in manufacturing, by enhancing automation with the widespread introduction of robotics. Massive computerization brought the same changes to service workers in the 1980s and '90s.

As an example of how far we've come in just the area of computerization, look back to the 1960s when the original Mercury astronauts went into space supported by the then astronomical computer memory of 64K that took up an entire room—or space capsule. Today's average desktop system runs with 64 MB or more that's embedded in a chip that fits comfortably in the palm of our hand!

Such monumental changes to the very nature of

work forced once complacent companies to become increasingly competitive. What have the savvy companies done to meet such challenges? Almost universally, they have been forced to reduce the number of people employed while accomplishing the same amount of work—if not more. Companies have downsized, right-sized and re-engineered their operations to stay in the game. Now we're hearing about what is called e-engineering, i.e., how to run a virtual company via the Internet.

In addition, companies have been motivated to enhance their technology and to bring computerization to the desk tops of the knowledge workers. As these workers have received more power via computers to “do” things, they have been expected to do more. Remember when everyone at a certain level within a company used to have a secretary? Now those same people have a computer. More and more executives today perform their own secretarial tasks on their own desktop and/or laptop computers.

## **The World According to Handy**

Ten years ago, in his ground breaking book *The Age of Unreason*, Charles Handy examined the future of the work world. He envisioned companies thriving as “shamrock organizations” (see sidebar on the next page) in which a core of essential executives and workers were supported by outside interim contract workers. He foresaw that these workers would perform administrative, clerical and light

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manufacturing tasks. But perhaps even more important, he also saw the need for an “outsource” to complete projects that were formerly performed by the people who had been downsized out of the organizations and were no longer available to do them.

### **THE WORLD ACCORDING TO PETERS**

In 1999, management guru Tom Peters introduced his new theory that all “white-collar” work is now project work<sup>†</sup>. He defines this as the kind of work one routinely must accomplish at professional-services companies. He further argues, in agreement with Handy, that work is being reinvented. The changes that impacted the blue-collar workers in the 1970s and '80s via factory automation and programmable machine tools have reached the corner offices and cubicles via computer technology, i.e., enterprise resource-planning systems, groupware, intranets, extranets, expert systems, the Web and e-commerce.

Companies are, according to Peters, “finally . . . realizing that they need to organize work in a fundamentally new way.” Workers themselves must be able to demonstrate clearly and convincingly how they can add value. According to Peters, “the only answer—is the project.” And not just any project, but what Peters calls the “WOW Project.” If it adds value, if it matters, if it makes a difference and leaves a legacy, if it can make you a star, then it’s a WOW Project. “Distinguished project work is the future of work,” says Peters.

Of course, you’re saying, not every project in and of itself is a WOW candidate. Right. It’s up to the worker to make it into an “event,” to make it special. The objective is not just to “do a good job,” but to “use every project opportunity . . . to create surprising new ways of looking at old problems.”

<sup>†</sup> “The WOW Project,” by Tom Peters, *Fast Company* magazine, May 1999.

If you are an executive or manager charged with executing a project and want to make it a WOW event, you need to recruit the brightest and the best, says Peters. You may want to bring in “new blood” for some fresh perspectives and ideas. Draft the hottest people you can, continues Peters. They may have to come from the outside. That means outsourcing and interim placement. And it may mean fabulous success—for the project, the company and you!

### **SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?**

The world in which you are managing and leading does not allow you to return to the 1950s and '60s to “warehouse” staff.

And, the world in which you are managing and leading has difficulty recruiting new and retaining existing people because of the impact of “free agency” on business. Today, your key employees can go anywhere (yes, just like in professional sports!) and probably negotiate a signing bonus, to boot.

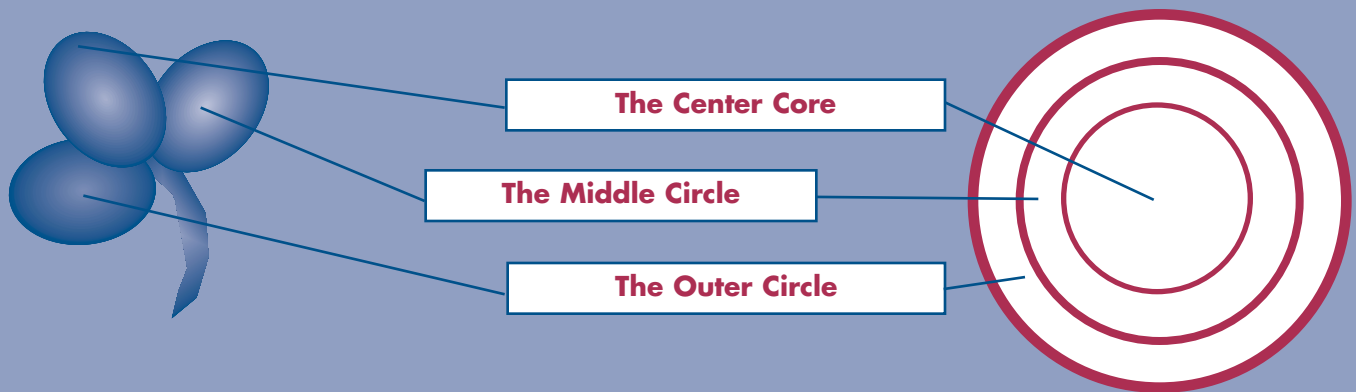
Finally, the world in which you are managing and leading has been impacted by the growth of entrepreneurial firms that are taking away much of the young, hot talent to build e-businesses.

But the world in which you are managing and leading still has tasks and projects that must be done to keep the core competencies within your company flowing smoothly, meeting government regulations and delivering service to all of your company’s stakeholders.

The solution—direct from Handy and Peters—is to think projects. Think about executives, managers, and professionals who can execute those projects. Think about outsourcing. Think about bringing outside teams—inside. Think about the completed project and how it feels to have it done!

We’d like you to think about **FLEX EXECS.** ■

# THE SHAMROCK ORGANIZATION



CHARLES HANDY ENVISIONED THE SHAMROCK ORGANIZATION MORE THAN TEN YEARS AGO. His vision was predicated on an observation by George Bernard Shaw that the reasonable person adapts himself to the world while the unreasonable person persists in trying to adapt the world to himself.

In an era when change is constant, random and, as Handy defines it, discontinuous, he argues that it is essential that we break out of our traditional ways of thinking in order to use change to our advantage. Such change demands what he calls upside-down thinking or a new approach to work and the nature of work in our organizations. We've used concentric circles to help illustrate his concept.

The organization is based on a core of essential, key executives who have skills and capabilities to move the company's core competencies forward. These people are supported in their efforts by outside, interim contractors.

*The Age of Unreason*, Charles Handy, 1989, Harvard Business School Press, Boston MA

The outer circle is made up of people brought in from the outside to do individual tasks. These workers are the lower-level, temporary people, or task workers, who may be brought in through temporary service agencies such as Kelly, Remedy, Olsten, and so forth.

The middle circle is comprised of project experts—people who come in to a company from outside agencies that specialize in skilled professionals who provide services that organizations must have to be competitive. Management chooses not to add these people to their permanent payroll and benefits plans, thus realizing a significant cost savings.

In the past, some companies hired large consulting firms to perform extra projects. However, individual or small-team interim professionals who can perform such specialized, complex jobs as benefit analyses, compensation surveys, and so on may usually be brought in at a more reasonable cost and have the added benefit of being selected precisely for the exact specialty desired.

# Where Does FLEX EXECS MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS Fit In?

Since 1990, **FLEX EXECS MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS** has been doing what Charles Handy and Tom Peters envisioned. We're ahead of the curve.

We've been placing interim executives, and high-level managers at the inner core of organizations.

In addition, **FLEX EXECS** also focuses on the middle circle—skilled professionals with knowledge and expertise gained through years of experience from work in functional areas, such as human resources, finance and operations.

**FLEX EXECS** is *the* source for interim management, executive search and human resource consulting.

If we may assist you in your next project. If you want to make your next project a WOW project. Please call us. We can help.

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