



The Spirit of Paulo Freire in Blogland: Struggling for a Knowledge-Log Revolution

Comments

Chris, you chart into virgin territory with this paper, making you one of the early explorers of a new genre. And you have provided us a wonderful foundation for we who follow.

This article is a cogent blend of journalism, politics, rhetoric, and cultural studies: not an easy feat. Thank you and congratulations.

Posted by: [Carolyn Bremer](#) at July 5, 2004 10:24 AM

I found your discussion about klogging very illuminating and learned a lot from it. Your piece falls very well into place and "dialogs" with an emerging and dynamic academic field or community: Action-Research. You have another Brazilian there writing very interesting thoughts: Julio Emilio Diniz-Pereira.

Here is a url, in case you want to look at it.

http://www.triangle.co.uk/ear/content/pdfs/10/issue10_3.asp

Posted by: [Alvaro Ramirez](#) at July 5, 2004 01:13 PM

The author notes that her own involvement in the blogs she is studying means the information she presents isn't unbiased, though she argues that being involved is the only way she could have come by this information. The brief digression on the invisibility of the cyborg gives us convenient point to latch on to her narrative.

I think I would rather read a good piece of investigative journalism, or a long blog entry, that presents insider information in this manner. Reading academic prose online can be very slow-going, but the academic essay is a genre with its own conventions (though those conventions developed over centuries, for the convenience of print readers). I think I would have appreciated, in the abstract, a few brief nuggets that show the kind of thing that is going to be investigated -- linking patterns? Fact checking? Harassment of bloggers at the hands of government authorities? The quote from the first day of Kucera's blog isn't enough to satisfy my curiosity, though the fact that Kucera mentions Boese does cement Boese's credentials as an insider. The excerpts from "The Other Side" seem to function more as chapter headings than integrated parts of the article -- I'm thinking particularly of the transition from Boese's brief comment on the Google toolbar's pop-up blocking ability to a blog entry discussing war panic in Erbil.

Regarding Boese's credentials, I was personally more interested to learn that Boese "was working for CNN Headline News, writing the afternoon on-screen headline ticker Mondays through Fridays") -- a detail that suggests Boese has a firm grasp on audience and rhetoric. Still, from the obligatory "what is a blog" paragraph, we find: "blog is defined as a regularly updated webpage using blogging software."

I respect Boese's desire not to get too bogged down, but it should be possible to signal "I don't want to go there" without resorting to tautology. (I "blogged" for years just by writing ordinary HTML, and doing a lot of cutting and pasting. I then created some PERL and DOS batch files to automate some of that cutting and pasting, and that gradually developed into my own home-grown PERL/XML blogging software, though I mothballed that when a student who needed an extra credit project designed for me the blogging software that I now use. But that quibble shouldn't detract from Boese's excellent examination of the tension between blogging and journalism.)

While it's true that there hasn't been much scholarship on blogs, there has been some that Boese misses in her overview. We are all still applying the tools we learned in our own separate subfields to the "new" subject of blogging. The rapid development of the Internet in general and blogging in particular means that we'll always be playing catch-up -- though Boese's description of what she calls "techophobia" at CNN makes me wonder whether the business world is any different. More collections like *Into the Blogosphere* and *BlogTalk* (I hope they publish a *BlogTalks 2.0* anthology) will help us coalesce and synthesize (and that's, in fact, why I'm going to try to blog something on so many *Into the Blogosphere* articles.)

To continue the general scholarship tangent... much of what has been said about Usenet, MUDs, and other forms of Internet communication can be applied to blogs -- though it's very true that journalism seems to have noticed the wider effect of blogs before, say, the rhetcomp community or the bloggers themselves. Journalists pride themselves with getting "out there" on the street, ear to the ground, while academics spend more time mastering a more narrowly defined subfield in their chosen area. (That's supposed to be a nice way of admitting that academics have to fuss about in libraries a lot.)

Just as the committee-authored "official" blogs of politicians are group-thinked into a thin gruel, due to the pressures traditionally placed on the creation of "official" statements, a newsroom blog brings with it pressures that the average social blogger (or student forced to blog for course credit) doesn't face. Broadcast writers were not only used to thinking the audience as passive recipients of their product, "they also constructed THEMSELVES as passive recipients of media products, despite the fact that they were actively writing and shaping those media products every day at work. The anonymity of the "voice" with which they were conditioned to write seemed to preclude finding a voice with which to speak up on a klog."

I like "first person idiosyncratic" -- Boese's characterization of a blogger's point of view.

At Seton Hill, many of the same students who are active in the student paper are also committed bloggers. Some have posted strong personal opinions about topics that they might later have to write about (objectively). One reporter was trolled anonymously on her personal blog for an article she wrote. Since we're a small school, our paper only comes out about once a month, but we're planning to ramp up the online version of the paper. Since the online paper is published within the same subdomain as the student blogs, Without getting sucked too far into the "are blogs a new form of journalism" debate, I'm continuing to watch this subject closely, so that they as individuals will understand their obligation to keeping their credibility in the eyes of the public.

Since it's been years since I've spent much time in a newsroom (what with all the fussing about in libraries) I welcome Boese's insights. She applies to newsrooms Michel de Certeau's concept of the "wig" -- a diversionary tactic, in which workers pursue their own agendas on company time (without actually pilfering, or being unavailable for "real" work should they need to reprioritize).

Google actually has an official policy, in which employees are expected to spend 20% of their time developing their own personal projects. Of course, Google will own the intellectual rights to whatever the employees come up with, and I doubt the 20% free time extends to

groundskeepers and cafeteria workers... given Google's proven ability to mutate with the times, I think that particular practice is worth investigating in the context of the questions Boese raises.

Posted by: [Dennis G. Jerz](#) at July 7, 2004 01:05 AM

I am always happy to see Paulo Freire receiving his due, or at receiving a passing allusion, as a profound analyst of the politics and economics of knowledge.

I have done a lot of work recently on knowledge sharing for the enterprise and have begun to come to the conclusion that business organizations built on the commodification of information as intellectual property simply can't sustain an internal culture of openness. This is because this approach applies the same producer-consumer model to the internal consumption of information as it does to the external market. And the underlying structure of economic incentives is a deck stacked against it, as a friend of mine has often written.

Take the commission system for the sales force as a classic, if crude, example. Am I likely to share my leads with colleagues who are also my competitors when my compensation is tied to my individual performance?

Equally significant, however, is the question of how to motivate members of the organization to contribute information on negative results. Success has a thousand fathers, but failure is an orphan, as the saying goes. Yet analysis of negative results is essential to organizational learning. Even so, most business organizations continue to use the anonymous suggestion box system to elicit such information -- an implicit admission that witnesses to failure require protection from reprisals.

These are two sides of the same coin: Businesses and government agencies are still organized on the basis of a politics and economics of individual accountability -- credit and blame -- which involve rational actors in complex calculations about the risks and rewards of exchanging information openly. Much energy is diverted from the problem at hand into the game of "hot potato" -- the futures market in credit and blame which underlies the process of quantifying one's own value to the organization and negotiating one's compensation in the competitive internal labor market. And in this market of credit and blame, the most successful risk management strategy is patronage, in which internal cohesion and security of organization members is substituted for results as the unspoken first principle and reason for being of the enterprise

This system of internal incentives run parallel to the organization's perception of how its external markets work: It must aggressively defend its intellectual property against competitors, and any collective action undertaken with those competitors (lobbying to renegotiate the regulatory environment for the industry on more favorable terms, for example) must be evaluated in light of that competitive relationship.

This has a everything to do with the sputtering of klog initiatives in the enterprise, in my view. A "learning culture" cannot be imposed by fiat on the advice of consultants who view the issue in purely technical terms, as though such cultural change were inherent in the technical properties of the network. This is demonstrably false: case after case shows that existing organizational "stovepipe" structures simply replicate themselves in the new IT-enabled environment.

The irony should be obvious: a rigorously planned business reengineering initiative, imposed from above and from outside the organization, with the express aim of capturing, and harnessing the power of ad-hoc, bottom-up, internal institutional memory?

Really effective learning organizations, such as the open source movement, operate with a radically different view of their organizational mission. To put it in Freirian terms, internal solidarity is driven by a radical reformulation of the relationship with end users, an approach that contrasts starkly with the essentially adversarial relationship that business organizations maintain with their customers and their competition.

In the open source world, the idea is to eradicate the distinction between the producer and the consumer; between the market and the organization whose aim to exploit that market; and most of all between stakeholders, who stand to gain or lose from their equity position, and the implementing workforce, whose contributions are accounted for as an overhead cost to be kept to a minimum ... and whose creative labor is expropriated as the intellectual property of the stakeholders, not shared in common.

In short, business organizations will not transform themselves into "learning organizations" until they achieve some pretty fundamental changes in the way they structure incentives to drive the internal marketplace of ideas. Closely linked to this is the way they understand the external marketplace of intellectual property. The great contribution of the open source movement, I predict, will be to educate consumers to demand the kind of relationship with producers that empowers them.

Posted by: [Colin](#) at July 9, 2004 05:50 PM

What a brilliant article!
I have posted a link to it at my own blog: <http://thinkingnurse.blogspot.com/>

Posted by: [Max](#) at January 19, 2005 09:56 AM

While finishing up the first of several Action Research classes toward a Master's in Education/Cirriculum and Design, I came across your article. It is so very well written. This is GREAT STUFF!! You've opened a whole new world of interest for many. Keep up the excellent work

Posted by: [Miz Fowler](#) at February 2, 2005 03:14 PM

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