

white paper

Blog and its role as an Innovation Tool In the Innovation Society

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1. AIM

To analyze Blogs as a possible innovation tool to support acceleration of ideas to innovations in the innovation society.

2. BACKGROUND

In this paper the wish is to outline and analyze the use of the Blog and it's role as an innovation tool. In the innovation society (post-industrial society), ICT- (Information Communication Technologies) tools play a central roll in innovation processes. The exploration of the Blog in this process is chosen due to it's simple and user-friendly character in combination with being a strong broadcasting (communication) medium with a feedback loop. The Blog as a potential innovation tool is a new and unexplored area, where analysis like this can contribute to a greater understanding and support further development.

The initiative to this paper, and to explore Blog as an innovation tool, has risen through an emerging need. This is something that the innovation bureau Hybrid State has acknowledged in their work to support innovation. The emerging need is a simple communication tool that takes an innovation team through the first part of the innovation process. Blog is an example of a common collaborative communication tool that can handle an unstructured dialogue between collaborators in an innovation project's seed phase. This tool fills the space between brainstorming tool and a CMS- content management system, as a daily collaboration and communication tool that keeps an innovation team moving forward. The blog also fills the need of an easy tool to communicate through for a team of collaborators from different organizations practicing open innovation¹ without a common CMS-tool.

The principle behind this is to be found in current entrepreneurship- and innovation research, where it's stated that speed, flexibility an innovation are the most important advantages a company can give itself. It's only logical that one tries to increase the speed of an experiment/test even though one doesn't know the end result. One needs to "fail forward", and also fail faster than the competition and be better to interpret one's failures to create knowledge from them.

¹ **Open Innovation** = by "open" is meant collaborative innovation based upon an information commons as is practiced (but not limited to) in open source communities.

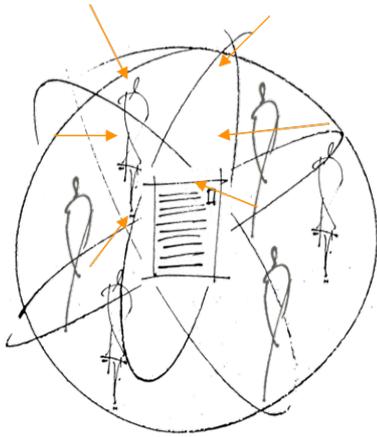


Illustration of the importance of a common communication tool that supports collaboration.

Experiences from the Swedish public innovation support structure shows that failure in the collaboration model is the most common reason why a development- or an innovation project fails. Experience also shows that the communication model, access to right information and knowledge at the right time, is a keystone to why a development- or innovations project succeeds. These insights also points at the importance of new and emerging methods, models, and tools to support the work in an innovation process in the innovation society.

The hypothesis is that the appropriate use of a Blog constitutes a great example of a communication ICT-tool that supports the collection and the filtration (with it's direct feedback loop) of information to generate valuable knowledge for the team working on the innovation project. Along with supporting the team to make more informed decisions in their project the Blog also supports a faster, flexible and, therefore, a more successful innovation process.

2.1. To innovate in the innovation society vs. to innovate in the industrial society?

Being in the middle of a paradigm shift from an industrial society to a post-industrial society; a creative-, knowledge-, or an information- and communication society (referred to collectively as the innovation society), has radically changed the circumstances of how to take an idea to market, i.e. how to innovate. The rapid development and constant launching of new information technologies and communication tools create and push this envelope. It's due to these changing circumstances that the need for new emerging forms and patterns of organizational structures and collaborations are called for. That is why co-worker-, customer-, user-, and open- innovation process are suggested. The process of taking an idea to market/innovation is changing from closed innovation, top-down communication and passive collaboration to open innovation, bottom-up communication and active collaboration.

A characteristic for the innovation society is that there is no shortage of the primary resources knowledge and information (human capital), and the more they are being shared and used the more of them is accumulated. In the industrial society the characteristic has been to economize with

scarce resources, where the primary resources have been real capital that has been reduced when shared.

The main part of innovation tools, -methods and –strategies that still are being used in innovation processes today are developed and based on the assumptions and truths from the Industrial society. Consequently, the big picture encapsulate the shift from the Industrial society's emphasis on existing market positions and competition advantages distilled with the management of resources, to the post-industrial society's emphasis on the creation of new resources (via entrepreneurship) to generate new markets. A key component for this to succeed is innovation, through which one makes one's competition irrelevant rather than trying to compete on the same basis.

3. AUDIT

Weblogs (Blogs for short) foreshadow a revolution in communication that has an impact on the same level as the printing press. For the first time in history an individual, nearly any individual, has the ability to 'publish' his or her information for the entire world to read, listen to, or see, and to receive nearly instantaneous feedback on that information.

The impact of blogging is still being assessed, but suffice it to say that Blogs will revolution the way information is produced, filtered, published and used. At the very least Blogs will be the catalyst for a re-examination of intellectual property and the rights governing that property.

As Blogs continue to grow in popularity and as their role within organizations evolve, perhaps Blogs will help us reconsider the very nature of how to innovate?

3.1. Description of the technology Blog and its differences from other communication tools.

a. What Is a Blog?

A Blog is a web page that is usually created and maintained by a single person although some of the most visited Blogs are created and maintained by groups of individuals. The primary function of a Blog is to facilitate the sharing of information through a highly interactive format.

b. A Brief History of blogging

The first Blog is generally attributable to Peter Merholz although Jorn Barger first coined the term weblog in December 1997. Cameron Barrett is credited for publishing the first list of Blog sites. In July 1999, Pitas launches a free 'build your own Blog' tool. One month later Pyra makes Blogger available which goes on to become the most popular blogging tool to date (Google bought Pyra in 2002). Blogger is credited to making blogging a mainstream activity.

c. What Does a Blog Look Like?

Below is a simple example of what a Blog created with Blogger looks like. The key components are:

1. The title of the Blog
2. The author(s) of the Blog
3. The postings (usually in reverse chronological order); also known as an entry
4. The permalink
5. Comments, i.e., responses to the postings
6. The identification of the poster
7. Trackbacks
8. Blogrolls, i.e., relevant links to other websites or Blogs
9. Categories
10. An archive of postings
11. RSS/XML feed, Additional information, e.g., profiles, URLs

SPATIALITY CENTRAL

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2008

Greetings from a snowy New Hampshire. This is the first in a (hopefully) long list of entries for Spatiality Central.

POSTED BY SPATIALITY CENTRAL AT 7:28 AM 0 COMMENTS
LABELS: [WELCOME](#)

Subscribe to: [Posts \(Atom\)](#)

FOLLOWERS (0)

[FOLLOW THIS BLOG](#)

BE THE FIRST TO [FOLLOW THIS BLOG](#)

0 FOLLOWERS [MANAGE](#)

BLOG ARCHIVE

▼ [2008 \(1\)](#)

▼ [November \(1\)](#)

Greetings from a snowy New Hampshire. This is the...

ABOUT ME

SPATIALITY CENTRAL

[VIEW MY COMPLETE PROFILE](#)

The Title

The title of the Blog is equivalent to the cover of the book. The title provides the first opportunity to 'hook' the reader.

The Author

Unless you are a celebrity, people generally will not recognize you in the blogosphere, but Blog etiquette requires you to identify yourself and to take responsibility for the content of your Blog.

The Posting

The posting or entry is the starting point for all Blogs.

The Permalink

The concept of a permalink (permanent hyperlink) came about around 2000 as a response to the advent of database driven dynamic content management systems that often produced unwieldy URLs that were ever changing. The permalink facilitated external linking to a specific Blog entry and simultaneously reduce the number of broken link errors. An example of a permalink (used by Blogspot) is below:

`http://<username>.blogspot.com/<4 digit year>/<2 digit month>/<article name>.html`

Comments

While the original content of a Blog is important it is often the comments that transform a Blog into a vibrant source of information and opinion. Being able to track comments is one of the key components of good Blog design.

The Identity of the Poster

On the surface this appears to be straightforward, but in oftentimes in political Blogs, the identity of the poster is obfuscated leading to misinformation and controversy.

Trackbacks

A trackback is a means of adding a comment without having the reader navigate away from your Blog. If a Blog is not advertising supported using a trackback has little value, but if the number of

visitors and stickiness is important trackbacks can be a good way of making sure that readers stay on-site. A trackback is essentially a hyperlink that usually refers to the original posting.

Blogrolls

Blogrolls are lists of sites that may be of interest to the readers of the Blog. For example, a Blog about space exploration would probably have www.nasa.gov as an entry into its blogroll.

Categories

Categories may or may not be used. When a Blog has been in existence for a long time and the author is prolific, categories are often used to help the reader navigate the back Blog postings. Using the space exploration example again, categories may include such entries as Apollo Mission, SETI Project, and European Space Agency.

RSS/XML feed

As an added service to your readers you may want to enable them to read your postings without having to log onto your Blog. A RSS/XML feed is the way to do this. With an RSS/XML feed anytime you post a new entry, readers who have selected this option will receive your entry immediately.

d. Key Success Factors

Having a successful Blog depends on your objectives. If you are an individual, having a few close friends read your writings is all you probably want. On the other hand, if you have a mission, e.g., getting a certain candidate elected, then it is imperative that you get as many people as possible to read your entries. Finally, within a large organization you may have multiple missions: improved intra-group communication, support for public relations initiatives, intimate communication with customers (sometimes selected group of customers), and bridging 'silos' within an organization.

Regardless of your mission here are some things to keep in mind:

- Blog entries need to be refreshed at least two or three times a week.
- Encourage interaction with readers
- "Timeliness is next to godliness"

3.2. Blog and Blog tools - The Current State of Play

According to Technorati, a search engine provider for blogged content, there were 112.8 million Blogs as of June 2008. While some of these Blogs are dormant, the sheer number attests to the popularity of blogging.

One element contributing to the popularity of blogging is the low cost to start a Blog and the low cost to maintain the Blog. To start a Blog can cost nothing and the learning curve is short and shallow.

The Blog example above (Spatiality Central) was established in less than three minutes at no cost through Blogspot (part of Blogger), a popular Blog hosting service.

As blogging has evolved from a single person event to a group activity, system demands have increased. Today, there are numerous hosting sites exclusively dedicated to hosting Blogs. These sites provide storage space or archives, infrastructure support for advertising, scalable communication capabilities, access control and security. Blogging has become a big business and the market for blogging services has responded accordingly.

3.3. Companies and organizations using Blogs as a lead in their innovation process

The convergence of, the Internet, the World Wide Web, graphical user interfaces, open source development environments and broadband, has resulted in the emergence of Blogs - the most powerful information tool ever to impact an organization and it's innovation process.

Blogs can either be the best thing that has ever happen to an organization or its worst nightmare. There are numerous examples of both scenarios. It is management's responsibility to make sure that Blogs are a positive force and being put to use in the organizations innovation process.

a. Upside opportunities

Blogs can have many positive impacts on an organization and it's innovation process. For example, a Blog can:

- Increase trusted communication with customers
- Transcend reporting hierarchies
- Breakdown silos of information and knowledge
- Build and re-enforce informal knowledge-based groups
- Provide informal forums for idea testing
- Act as an early warning system for dissension
- Counteract rumors
- Put a 'human face' on a faceless corporation
- Provide unique filtering and emphasis (directly attacks the information overload problem)

Increase trusted communications

In this era of multi-billion euro bailouts, the distrust of senior management has never been higher. Blogs can go a long ways in overcoming this distrust. For example, Microsoft 'looked the other way' when one of their technical evangelists, Robert Scoble, published an unrestrictive Blog as a way of getting trusted information directly to Microsoft's customers. Numerous companies have since followed this idea, and in some cases even the CEO Blogs.

Transcend reporting hierarchies and breakdown silos of information

Given an unrestrictive readership, Blogs oftentimes transcend traditional reporting hierarchies. This benefit is nearly without consequence. Information flow is increased, ideas are more freely discussed, feedback is increased, and managerial laziness or incompetency is revealed. Traditional reporting hierarchies serve little purpose in today's information rich enterprise except encourage the development of information silos. Blogs are to today's information ramparts as Joshua was to the Walls of Jericho.

Build and re-enforce both formal and informal knowledge-based groups

Blogs can be the rallying point for knowledge-based groups. By providing an open communication system for information interchange, Blogs can catalyze the formation and re-enforce the continuation of knowledge-based groups.

Provide informal forums for idea testing

One of the good things about Blogs is the lack of restriction regarding the type of information that is published. More often than not, Blogs contain information about a real event; however, there is nothing preventing a blogger from writing about something that is not as yet real. In this way, a Blog can become an information agora for the discussion of new ideas, new products and new services before they become reality. This is one of the most power uses for Blogs within an organization.

Act as an early warning system for dissension, counteract rumors and 'humanize' the organization

Blogs have often been cast in the role as anti-management tools. If management is open, honest and information savvy, then it has nothing to worry about from Blogs. In fact, Blogs can be one of management's more insightful tools. By carefully reading employee Blogs, management can quickly gauge the morale and frustration levels among their employees. Furthermore, management by writing their own blogs can squelch rumors before they gain footholds and provide a direct communication link between management and employees.

Put a 'human face' on a faceless corporation

Also, a well-written blog can 'put a human face' onto a faceless organization. It does this by personalizing the information. Through the use of stories, personal anecdotes and unpublished inside information, a blogger can transform a monolithic looking organization into a collection of individuals trying hard to do the best for their customers and/or constituents.

Provide unique filtering and emphasis (directly attacks the information overload problem)

What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention, and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it. (Herbert Simon in

Computers, Communications and the Public Interest, pages 40-41, Martin Greenberger, ed., The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971.

Large organization spend considerable amount of time and effort working with outside consultancies in hopes of efficiently keeping abreast of information relevant to their markets, customers and competitors. These efforts have only been partially successful, particularly in technology-based organizations.

By encouraging and then 'mining' the content of Blogs, organizations not only can get most of the information they currently pay outside agencies for, but this information will be uniquely filtered and emphasized in a manner most relevant to the organization. This contextualization will cut down on information overload while simultaneously improving the information utilization within the organization.

b. Downsides of Blogs

Any information tool as powerful as blogs can also have its dark sides. Here are a few things an organization must watch for when employees are encouraged to blog:

Leaking of confidential or proprietary information (The IPR Challenge)

Leaking of sensitive material via a Blog poses a serious problem, but nearly all organizations have policies and procedures in place to prevent the unauthorized use and dissemination of confidential information. Bloggers should use utmost care when incorporating proprietary and/or confidential information into their Blog. Furthermore, a blogger must be aware of their organization's enforcement policies regarding intellectual property.

The use of the blog to spread malicious or false information

Malicious or misinformation can be a serious problem regardless of the size of the audience or the composition of the readership. Any infraction must be dealt with immediately.

Undercutting carefully timed information campaigns, e.g., the launch of a new product

Care must be taken to keep all bloggers informed of what material is time sensitive and what is not. This is especially important in hyper-competitive markets. Also, the blogger must use good common sense so as not to 'tip' the hand prior to a formal announcement.

Self-aggrandizement on the part of the blogger

Oftentimes, the bloggers only reward is a bit of recognition, but if this becomes the driving force behind the Blog then the Blogs worthiness is compromised and its value to the organization must be questioned. Sometimes a simple conversation with the blogger is all that is needed to re-orient the direction of the blog.

An increase in intra and/or inter-group tensions

While a Blog can and often does break down information silos, it can have the opposite effect. If one group is getting an abnormal amount of attention due to the popularity of its Blog, then jealousy and in fighting can result. Also, an innocuous misinterpretation on the part of a blogger can sow dissension and mistrust in other groups. More often than not, this friction erupts between the engineering and marketing departments. It is imperative that management looks for early signs of disruption and addresses the source of the disruption as soon as possible.

A cacophony of corporate voices

The low start-up costs (both financial and temporal) means that almost anyone can become a blogger. This can, but rarely does, result in an organizational 'Tower of Babel'. Usually, this problem is self-correcting with the best Blog garnering the largest most responsive audience that allows it to dominate over time. If the organizations external communication programme is being compromised by too many internal Blogs, then management must step up to rectify the problem.

Blog Burnout

Blog burnout occurs both on the part of the blogger and on the part of the audience. A good Blog is labor intensive and after a few months the blogger starts 'running out of things to say' unless they work in an ever changing environment with plenty of new things to discuss. Even with new information, a blogger just might say "enough is enough", and the Blog will either be taken down or slowly left to expire. In either case, the impact on the organization must be weighed and appropriate management actions take.

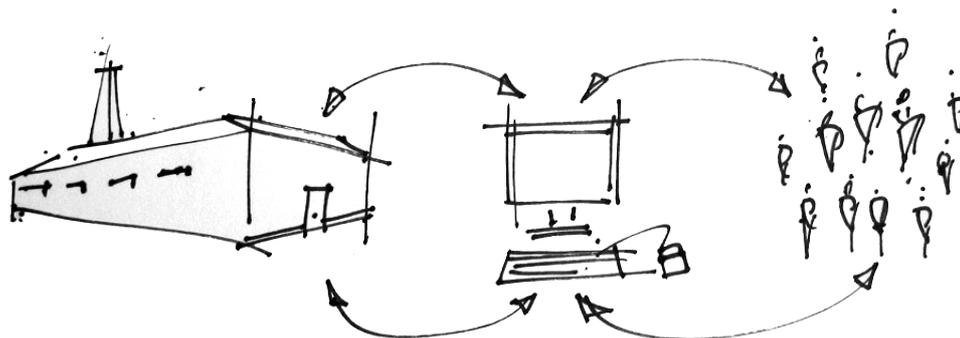
Another type of burnout is audience burnout. A good Blog generates a loyal audience and this audience will stay with the blogger through thick and thin, but audiences do have attention spans and evolving interests. If the blogger fails to provide fresh information and insights then the Blog will lose viewers. This can also have an impact on the organization as this valuable vehicle for information dissemination is underperforming.

4. CASE – The on going project “User Driven Innovation in the healthcare sector”

– is a unique project where three Nordic healthcare regions collaborate to develop new ways to encourage and support innovation work in their organizations. Region Skåne (Sweden), Region Midtjylland (Denmark) and Helse Bergen (Norway) all work with innovation on a strategic level and recognize the need for innovation in order to improve quality of care for patients. Within this project the healthcare regions will share their experiences from working with innovation and the overall

ambitious aim is to introduce an innovative culture in healthcare that engages all levels from patient, to nurses and doctors, to management.

As part of the project a web-based interactive tool has been developed that enables the regions to communicate and interact with their personnel in order to make use of valuable knowledge and innovative ideas. The tool is developed by the innovation bureau Hybrid State and is based on ideas of Crowdsourcing² for User Driven Innovation³. The tool is tailor-made and used in various innovation projects to accelerate the process with input from co-workers.



One component of the web based tool, that is found at www.innovation4care.com, is the innovation project's Blogs, a collaboration and communication space where the Innovation teams prepare for the Crowdsourcing events.

Blog instructions when using the Crowdsourcing site:

The Blog is the place where the Innovation team, running an innovation project, prepares for their Crowdsourcing event. The Blog is the tool they can use to communicate and collaborate in the process of finding and formulating the competition, article and reward model for the Crowdsourcing event, where the co-workers participate to give directions to the innovation project in question.

Representatives

A Representative is responsible for the Innovation project. She can invite a smaller group of co-workers to form an Innovation team that will work together to formulate the Crowdsourcing event using a blog.

² **Crowdsourcing** = the act of taking a task traditionally performed by an employee or contractor, and outsourcing it to a(n undefined, generally) large group of people, in the form of an open call.

³ **User-driven-innovation** = innovation created with the user as a active part in the innovation process

Innovation project

An innovation project can for instance be development of new patient surveillance technology or development of hospital facilities. Each innovation project can run several Crowdsourcing events with different themes, following the projects specific innovation process.

Innovation team

To optimize the results of the Innovation team's work the recommendation is to put together a diverse team with different roles in the innovation development task. A recommendation is also to create a team of no more than 8 people that will work together in the blog. The blog tool easily accessed through the web site enables team members with relevant and vital knowledge for the task to come from different organizations.

Publish an article

In order for the Crowd (for instance a group of co-workers) to comment or vote in a competition it is important to support them with relevant information so that they can make an as qualified participation as possible. In a so-called article the Innovation team describes the background to the innovation project, the innovation process used, the aim with the Crowdsourcing event, and the reward model for the Crowd. The Blog tool makes it possible for the team members to collaborate on a distance at the member's convenient time, ensuring that every one is updated on the progress of the work.

Crowdsourcing Event

It is in the competition in the Crowdsourcing event the Crowd votes to support different development issues. The results generate information in to the projects innovation process for the innovation team to handle when continuing the innovation work. The result will be discussed and analyzed in the Blog, and it will be part of the basis that the team uses to make decisions in the innovation project regarding development directions.

5. ANALYS - Possibilities of using Blog as an innovation tool

Why is blogging so important for innovation? It is all about information flow.

Information and the ideas encapsulated within the information flows are the lifeblood of innovation, particularly when an organization practices the principles of open innovation.

In an open innovation model, it is imperative that candidate ideas are widely disseminated, discussed and understood. A Blog is an ideal vehicle for achieving this. By providing means of 'publishing' the status and proposed action associated with various ideas, a Blog is the most cost-effective and efficient way of encouraging innovation.

A Blog can also be used to publicize the results of a successful open innovation programme. Open innovation works by continually re-enforcing its methodology. This is best done with unfettered access to information, in other words, the very essence of a Blog.

Starting with a brief look at communication, information and the message.

a. What is Message Entropy?

Before examining message entropy, a quick look at information entropy is needed. In 1948, Claude Shannon published A Mathematical Theory of Communication, which introduced the concept of information entropy. Information entropy can best be described by Shannon's equation for the estimate the average number of bits to encode a string of symbols.

Shannon's entropy equation:

$$H(X) = - \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} p_i \log_2 p_i$$

Where pi is the probability of a given symbol.

Shannon's work had a profound impact on communication theory.

We are extending (loosely) the concept of information entropy to encompass messages. For the purposes of this paper message entropy is a function of the number of messages of like content, the elapsed time from the event to the availability of information about the event, the expertise of the messenger, the truthfulness of the messenger, and the contextualization of the information (see next page).

$M_x = (n_x + t_x + e_x + v_x + c_x)$; where

M = message entropy

n = number of reports on message (M)

t = elapse time between event occurrence and first report

e = expertise of the reporter

v = the veracity of the reporter

c = the contextualization of the report

The role Blogs play in reducing message entropy will be discussed shortly.

b. Blogging and Message Entropy

Blogs are a good way of disseminating information, but can it improve the quality of the information or provide the 'reader' a more worthwhile knowledge experience?

The answer to both questions is YES. The quality of the information arising from Blogs is better because it is filtered. The absolute quality is dependent upon the filter, i.e., the person who is blogging. For example, a Blog written by a member of the technical staff of Ericsson can be an excellent source of high added value information regarding the technical aspects of mobile phones. In this case, a Blog fulfills five functions related to message entropy, four explicit and one implicit:

1. Quantity of Information - Blogging has substantially reduced the bottlenecks (usually organizational and financial) associated with publishing information thus increasing the amount of information available to describe an event or occurrence. (explicit benefit)
2. Timeliness - Again by reducing bottlenecks blogging has accelerated information flow (explicit benefit).
3. Filtering - Once more information is produced and increased information efficiencies are achieved, it is essential that some form of filtering mechanism be in place. In the example above, technical accuracy is expected given the expertise of the blogger. In other words, a content filter is functioning (explicit benefit).
4. Truthfulness - Inaccurate and incomplete information can increase message entropy, and blogging can fall victim to this. What keeps blogging 'honest' is the audience feedback mechanism that demands rapid updating, correcting and extending of information. Truthfulness on the part of the blogger (enforced by the audience) is a critical attribute of blogging (explicit benefit).
5. Putting information in context; as in the example above, the background of the blogger narrows the audience for the information and that information is thus presented with higher contextual attractiveness (implicit benefit).

By its very nature, blogging implies the sharing of information, and more importantly, the feedback mechanism in almost all Blogs, encourages the iterative search for information accuracy and knowledge acquisition. Blogging without a way for the readers to contribute to the information flow is of little value, but opening up the information to reader scrutiny and interpretation thus brings in an incredibly powerful force - the wisdom of crowds. The primary example of this is Wikipedia. While technically a wiki, Wikipedia can easily be seen as an incredibly large multi-author Blog with cutting edge feedback systems. Information is published knowledge is gained and message entropy is reduced, not bad for a technology less than ten years old.

6. FUTURE CHALLENGES

Blogging continues to be one of the best means for an organization to communicate both internally and externally. Yet we are far from fully exploiting this technology. Blogging can help us to identify pockets of tacit knowledge and expertise, but we need automatic detection and extraction tools to quickly and easily identify change agents and new knowledge centers. Secondly, dynamically generated taxonomies must become a reality. This will make it possible to facilitate the management of knowledge contained in free form Blogs.

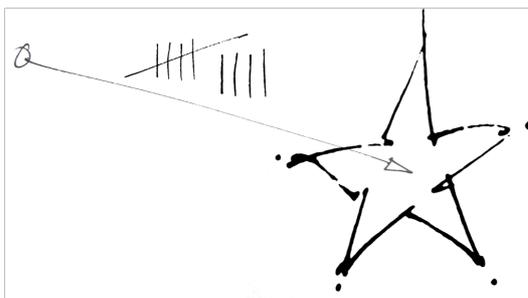
7. IN CONCLUSION

Blogs are one of the most powerful tools an organization has to gather, organize and disseminate information. Blogs can reduce message entropy dramatically. By presenting timely and high quality information, blogging can prepare the organization to fully exploit the precepts of open innovation becoming or remaining a leader in their chosen market(s). Without the free flow of information an innovative organization is not possible.

The Blog offers a fast, simple and flexible way:

- to publish to a large-scale group.
- to receive almost instantaneous feedback and filtration on the quality of the published message which helps define the right information at the right time, to the right user.
- of keeping all team members well-informed, as well as giving them an effective platform for making decisions about the direction in the innovation project.

These points when combined facilitate as pointed out previously “Fail Forward Faster” (illustrated beneath), which is essential for a successful innovation process today.



8. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

In the future, innovation companies like Hybrid State see the development of more specific Blog tools that supports the innovation process both for individuals and organizations. These Blog tools must aim, in a continuous simple, fast and flexible way, to support the collection and the filtration of information to create knowledge and direction for the broad base of innovation actors using them, who's shared goal, is to accelerate ideas to markets.

An organization can be innovative without employing Blogs, but it would be like trying to win the Vasaloppet without skis.

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