

Editor's letter

Corporations are fast-tracking strategic management programs to explore and adopt the concepts, processes and technologies of agility, Agile, digital strategy, machine learning, ecosystem innovation, hyper-competition and cognitive computing. In this issue each of these ingenuities is examined in articles that look at what they mean, how they are evolving, how they work and what strategies best create value from them.

- Stephen Denning's article on team-based, customer-focused innovation reports on "**How major corporations are making sense of Agile.**" His finding: "Now that many corporations are racing to become 'agile' it is easy to lose sight of the essential ideas and practices of Agile methodology." He cautions, "To be fully entrepreneurial, the whole organization needs to embrace the Agile mindset and function as an interactive network, not a top-down bureaucracy with just a few teams implementing Agile tools and processes."
- IBM strategists Saul Berman and Philip Dalzell-Payne see digital technology as an inextricable component of strategy in their article "**The interaction of strategy and technology in an era of business re-invention**" They maintain that, "Digital technology is both a means to tactical advantage and the key to transformational strategic opportunities." They warn managers that "The traditional strategy approach is increasingly ill equipped for a business environment that is being radically changed by technology."
- Accenture researchers Eduardo Plastino and Mark Purdy offer a step-by-step guide to creating "**Game changing value from Artificial Intelligence: eight strategies.**" They conclude that, "AI's unique characteristics as a capital-labor hybrid, which confers the ability to augment human labor at scale and speed, self-learn and continuously improve over time—will require organizations to adopt new approaches and models in a variety of functional areas."
- Arthur D. Little consultants Michael Kolk, Rick Eagar, Charles Boulton and Carlos Mira advise on "**How hyper-collaboration accelerates ecosystem innovation.**" Their caution for leaders: "Hyper-collaboration means seeing ecosystems not just as candy stores full of opportunities, but as fiercely competitive arenas in which companies fight for the best partners, technologies and networks to create, build and defend added value."
- Glenn Finch, Brian Goehring and Anthony Marshall, report on digital technology investment and implementation is a wide variety of industries in, "**Cognitive innovation: top performers share their best practices.**" They identify the extraordinary opportunities afforded by this new technology: "Cognitive computing systems are already helping make sense of the deluge of data spawned by ordinary commerce because they are able to adapt and learn."

Surprising insights about Chinese entrepreneurialism in Africa

- In the last article, readers have a chance to weigh conventional skepticism about China's increasing role in development in Africa against a radically hopeful view. Many cynical observers see China's involvement in Africa as an exchange of Chinese-funded infrastructure – like roads, airports, hospitals, schools and stadia – for favorable access to Africa's natural resources. Irene Yuan Sun, a McKinsey Africa expert and author, rejects this view. Her interview with S&L Contributing Editor Brian Leavy poses an alternate future: "**Will China's entrepreneurial migrant managers' successes awaken an African dream to be the next factory of the world?**" Sun says only about 10 percent of the Chinese firms in Africa are involved in infrastructure deals. "The other 90 percent are

private entrepreneurs in other sectors like manufacturing, trading and services. These private firms, particularly the ones in manufacturing, are employing locals at high rates, providing valuable skills training.” Sun notes, “Nowadays, a lot of the managers with the needed skills and resilience are Chinese people who worked their way up in factories in China in conditions that not so long ago were very similar to what’s in Africa today.”

The strategist’s bookshelf

Don’t miss Harvey Hornstein’s review of Robert Sutton’s timely new guide to managing abusive bosses. “Employees who determine that they are victims of unacceptable abuse can respond with one of four strategic options.”

Good reading!

Robert M. Randall

Editor

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