



The No Limits Workplace  
Aligning Work with the Human Spirit  
Yielding Enduring Prosperity and Individual Reward

The No Limits Workplace - Tenet 1

The Three C's - Three trends that are shaping our socio-economic environment

“Business failure is most often the inability to adapt to changes in the business environment”

“When the world around us is changing, nothing ensures failure more than past success”

The article below describes three trends that are continuing to change the world around us in such significant ways that it's accurate to say that they are re-establishing the terms for business success and failure. Regardless of industry, we're truly in the knowledge and idea economy and these trends are both a result of that and contributing to it. Understanding these trends and their implications is critical to development of an enterprise built to thrive in this new age.

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When trying to succeed in business, one thing's for sure. Fighting the reality around us is not the way to do it. Success requires that our “enterprise as an organism” be a fit for the environment around us. And when that environment changes, we'd better adapt. Otherwise, we go the way of the dinosaurs; dominant in one environment, extinct in another. So while we need to survive day-to-day by staying focused on current operations, we also need to continually assess the environment we live in. And if it's evolving, be certain that we are;

- a) aware of the changes
- b) defining them in terms of their effect on us
- c) identifying implications within our organization and
- d) developing and implementing strategies to deal with or better yet, take advantage of change.

That sounds pretty straightforward but for a list of reasons, most companies don't do it. Or if they do, it's often done by upper management who regardless of their knowledge and experience don't have the perspective to see all the data points and considerations that must go into an effective assessment and response. Among other things, the No Limits Workplace by it's nature ensures that this happens effectively, organically, and in real time.

The following is a brief description of these three trends that have been emerging for years and that will continue to have much to say about what today's and tomorrow's successful enterprise will look like and act like. It's fair to say that these trends are necessitating a next-generation of operational, people, organizational structures, practices, and assumptions about how work should work.

In an article as short as this, on a topic as big as this, we can only cover so much. A more in-depth article on these trends and their effects called “The Decentralization of the Workplace” is available. Our purpose here is, one, to identify the trends and briefly point out their significant implications. And two, to begin to identify strategic responses to these trends that will ensure both avoidance of problems and position any organization to turn these trends to strategic advantage.

THE THREE C's

The three trends (Three C's) are increasing complexity, increasing rate and scope of change, and increasing competition. Once mentioned, many find these trends to be obvious but their integrated nature, implications, and impacts have not been well defined and strategic responses to them even less so. Often the only one of the three that's drawn a significant response is increased competition.



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And unfortunately, as organizations have responded to that one trend with little consideration of the others, they've pursued strategies and initiatives that have left them even less effective at dealing with this evolving environment than before. Let's take a look.

### INCREASING COMPLEXITY

Increasing complexity comes in many forms that are often derivatives of each other. Examples are; more varieties of products and services, more specialized needs of customers, more complex tools, equipment, and technologies that people work with, more complicated instructions for using these things, more complex and varied tasks within jobs, a greater volume of work for most jobs, tasks that may require higher level skills, more complex and geographically disbursed supply chains and work processes, and others. A look down into almost any company with an eye towards this trend and it's implications will reveal countless significant impacts on jobs at all levels.

For the most part, employees at all levels are dealing with these things largely unaware of the trend but constantly battling the impacts. The output of this steady barrage of increased complexity on every nook and cranny of all types of organizations is a combination of increased chaos, less effective work performance, additional problems, waste, and inevitable employee stress, frustration, and often disillusionment and disenfranchisement.

There is much we could say and have said in other articles about this trend, it's impacts, and effects. And there are countless examples we could identify to illustrate them (see one below). The good news is that for those who see this in it's totality, and who formulate a strategic internal response to it, the trend of increasing complexity offers great opportunity for competitive advantage. Or if unrecognized and not responded to, a heightened chance of deterioration and collapse. It just depends on one's level of understanding of the issue and ability to respond effectively or not. In general the response to increased complexity is, not surprisingly, to become smarter. So how to make an organization "smarter"? For now we'll just say that it has much to do with continuous learning and knowledge management systems. Things that traditional organizations are not well structured to deal with. As we'll see, the NLW is much about a coordinated response to this and other trends that are pushing hard against traditional workplace models.

### INCREASING SCOPE AND PACE OF CHANGE

Increasing change is more commonly understood as a trend than increasing complexity. Even so, most organizations have done a poor job of fully identifying the wide-ranging implications of change and making the very significant internal responses necessary to become an enterprise able to thrive in an environment where change is coming faster and in greater scope than ever.

Change comes in the form of vastly shortened life cycles of everything from products and services to methods, knowledge, and technologies. Constant change in customer requirements, tools and technologies, knowledge and information requirements, people, processes, equipment, materials, suppliers, and pretty much any aspect of business one can think of. As is happening everywhere, when employees at all levels of the organization are left mostly to fend for themselves in dealing with constant change, as with increasing complexity, the output is a continuous slide towards chaos, increased fire-fighting, reactivity, and deteriorating efficiency and effectiveness that are the ingredients of a demoralized, burned-out, and disengaged workforce.

As with increasing complexity we could, and have in other articles, provide much analysis on this trend and it's massive impacts. Hopefully, this brief description has the reader recognizing that an effective organizational response to this trend offers great opportunity. Those entities that are "built for change" now and going forward will have tremendous advantages over those that merely react.



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### COMPLEXITY AND CHANGE COMBINED - A SIMPLE EXAMPLE

When these two trends are looked at in combination, the challenge more than doubles. It's one thing to deal with change if things are relatively simple. It's one thing to deal with complexity when things aren't changing all the time. But when everything around us is getting more complex and changing faster, we must conclude that if we want to turn this to our advantage, a truly significant response on our part is required.

By way of a brief example, let's picture a simple task with which we're all familiar, say packing a car trunk. It's one thing if the materials being packed are simple and always the same. If we're putting some clothes and a few boxes in the back of car, that's easily done well-enough by anyone and the contents will surely arrive at their destination without issue. But if we have to pack a car and now the contents barely fit, we have limited time to get them in, some can be crushed or spilled, and they have to be packed a certain way to match unloading requirements, we have a very different situation. Minus instructions and practice most will fail to get everything packed correctly, completely, and on time. Surely there will be lots of problems downstream with spilled, smashed, missing, and/or late contents, problems unloading and perhaps damage to the car because of spillage or other causes. Translate that to business and think about who has to deal with the missing and/or damaged product, the need to expedite an immediate replacement, the damaged vehicle, untimely service, or improperly packed materials. The downstream costs are spectacularly higher than if we had positioned the packer for success from the start.

So what happened? We introduced complexity. We're still "trunk-packers" but the implications of complexity make it a radically different task requiring a radically different approach. Let's picture ourselves packing that trunk and not having the time to get it right, or the information we need to know about the contents, or being able to get it to fit, etc. and then being expected to get it all perfect as we did when it was simpler. Whether one is seeing it or not, the steady drumbeat of increased complexity is happening everywhere all the time at all levels of organizations and rarely being responded to other than reactively or incrementally.

Now let's add change. If we're just packing some clothes and a few boxes and the clothes and boxes change somewhat each time we pack the car, it's no big deal. But when we have the more complex situation mentioned above and it's changing all the time. Now we really have problems. As soon as we learn to deal with one complex packing job, the contents and requirements change. Now it becomes far more of a challenge to get the task done right each time without significant downstream problems. And in fact, if a person is left to deal with this on his or her own, job failure is assured no matter how motivated and hard-working the person doing it.

When complexity and change are introduced and continue to increase we're looking at a vastly different workplace reality than when things were simpler and more static, as they were in business for years. Think how different our approach needs to be to "position" the trunk-packer for success in the simple scenario than in the complex and changing one. Clearly, in failing to do so, massive waste, fire-fighting, frustration, and many other negative things are inevitable.

This small and isolated example illustrates the very significant effects on a task, the person doing it, the bottom line, and implications to all those who are upstream, downstream, and otherwise associated with the task when complexity and change are introduced. What's the overarching implication? That we better figure out how to generate ideas from all the stakeholders on how to deal with this very different reality. Complexity and change can't be managed from even from one level above those doing the work. The only answer is to shape our enterprise into one that expands knowledge up and down work processes and supply chains and to become very good at generating ideas and implementing them quickly at the stakeholder level. Methods for doing these things



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exist but their effective application is still very much the exception. Even a task this tiny makes it clear that we're in the knowledge and idea economy and the implications are great.

### INCREASING COMPETITION

This third trend everybody gets because there's just no choice (except for organizations that don't face real competition). Yet few are dealing with competition in the most effective way. As we humans so often do when faced with an urgent problem, we react by reaching for the solution that appears most closely related to the problem. That may get one through the moment but it's rarely the path to an enduring solution. As companies find themselves struggling to compete due to financial pressures brought on by increased competition, they often grab for the easiest and fastest way to reduce costs. That's especially true when decision-makers are distant managers operating with traditional financial tools. Cuts in pay and benefits, people reductions, and reduced investments in learning and skill development appear to be the obvious or even the only solutions. Of course there's a time and place for all kinds of things but at the same time, these efforts are often not only ineffective but in more and more cases, because of the implications of trends 1 and 2, proving to be the opposite of what leads to success (see Tenet 3 on higher value work). Looking at the above trunk-packer example, it's pretty obvious that cutting the number of trunk-packers or reducing their pay isn't going to solve the cost problems brought on by inefficient and even error-filled operations that lead to volumes of downstream waste and unnecessary costs. The answers come in generating and implementing stakeholder ideas that will eliminate waste and in identifying superior ways of doing things that make the operation more efficient and effective and better able to deal with complexity and change. Cutting people and compensation may lower costs and get us through the moment but it's not an enduring answer and doesn't position the company for enduring success.

### SUMMARY AND BEGINNING TO ANSWERS

Simply put, the best way to deal with the increasing competition of today's environment is to develop an effective response to the first two trends. So how does one deal effectively with increased complexity and change? As we mentioned, if things get more complex we must become smarter. And if things are constantly changing then we must become more responsive and adaptable to deal with those external changes. Additionally, we must become more innovative to drive increased internal efficiency and effectiveness and to create product and service offerings that force others to respond. There is simply no choice but to become a bottom to top smarter, more responsive, adaptable, and innovative enterprise. Becoming this smarter, more responsive, adaptable, and innovative enterprise is no small undertaking. None of these attributes has been a priority for the traditional top-down org' model and therefore few companies are really good at any, let alone all of these things. Becoming a company that can continually evolve, let's say organically, to meet the demands of an increasingly complex, changing, and competitive knowledge and idea economy is a new game with new rules. It requires the off-loading of many traditional business structures, practices, and ingrained assumptions of how work is supposed to work. And simultaneously, the installation of the replacements to those things. This "replacement" is dramatically positive in it's effect and though it may sound like a huge undertaking, isn't really that difficult to implement.

And why do we say it's not that difficult? Because all of what comprises this transformation is A) so well-attuned with what is a fit for today's business environment, B) what people intuitively know needs to be done, and C) what naturally aligns with people's higher nature, that it clicks into place much more readily than might initially be assumed. In fact, it doesn't require management work in the traditional sense (figuring out the answers, developing a plan, implementing, and communicating to or involving others as fits their role). It's more about opening doors, expanding the community of participants, and positioning people to contribute. It's much about learning to leverage resources (see Tenet 6 on leadership). The potential is already there, it's just a matter of doing what's necessary to realize that potential. Sure that's different but it's not necessarily difficult.



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### CONCLUSION

The explanation above is a very short analysis of the numerous issues associated with the three expanding trends of complexity, change, and competition and their massive impacts on organizations. The takeaway is that the world has changed and is continuing to change rapidly. Workplace models born of traditional structures, roles and responsibilities, assumptions, and perceptions of “how work works”, that were built for control and predictability, are simply no match for this environment. Today’s knowledge and idea economy very much presents a need for responsiveness, adaptability, innovation, and increasing organizational intelligence. And it must be understood that traditional people / org’ / operational models, by their nature have not and cannot promote these attributes. The NLW, like nothing before it, encompasses the key components of a next generation response that can enable any organization to align itself with this changing reality as opposed to fighting against it. It may be thought of as the organizational model for the knowledge and idea economy.

The NLW is always implemented in an enterprise-specific way that works best for the employees, management team, business situation, and current state of that particular organization. If you have an interest in benefiting from the power and potential maximization that comes in aligning work with the human spirit, please contact us at [www.nolimitsworkplace.com](http://www.nolimitsworkplace.com) or [russnlw@gmail.com](mailto:russnlw@gmail.com) or call Russ Lawrence at 814 574 2271.