

## Chapter 1

# Successful Gardening - It begins

What is the Information Thicket?

It is the huge and growing mass of information that surrounds us all the time. For those who played on the web in it's infancy, it was common to spend all night up looking around to see what could be seen. Finding a site that had cool and interesting things was a great event. In fact, a common element of most sites was a list of links to other cool sites.

Matthew Grey from MIT estimates in June, 1993, there were 130 web sites. The Online Computer Library Center estimates that in 2002, there were 8,712,000 unique sites. The Internet Systems Consortium estimates that in January, 2006, there were 394,991,609 hosts. This is 100,000,000 more hosts than there were people in the United States in July, 2005. This is a host for every 16 people in the world (population estimates based on the CIA factbook).

An interesting point is that writing the above paragraph took about 15 minutes of research online and only two searches using Google.

***AND the web is only one source of information.***

I live in Hartford, Connecticut which has been called (disparagingly) the filing cabinet of the world. I personally do not regard this as an insult.

**Filing cabinets made it possible to quickly access data when all the data we relied on was printed.**

In spite of hopes and dreams of paperless offices, **there is more paper floating through most organizations than ever before.** There is more information that is not on the web or on paper, but exists in some kind of digital form.

Finally, and most importantly, there is the **information that exists in the heads of people.** This includes both information that does not exist elsewhere AND **information about the existence AND LOCATION of information** (I think I saw an answer to that in an old magazine).

All this information.

And it is growing all the time. **Information is an organic entity.** It is growing from multiple sources all around you. There is no way to keep up with everything. **What you must have are strategies to make use of the disorder, to trim back some of the unwanted growth, to establish some pathways through the thicket.**

You and your company can succeed in this new information economy.

**However, to do so, your company must learn to garden in this ever-changing information thicket.** The world where you develop a plan for 5 years or even 1 year and stick to it is past. This changing world is more organic than engineered. It grows, sometimes in unforeseen ways. At the root of the challenge is information.

Just a few years ago, information was a rare commodity. Those companies with the most information stood the best chance for success.

This is no longer the case.

**Now we are awash in information. We have been thrown into the briar patch. We are in the midst of the Information Thicket. *Water Water Everywhere and What's a Fool to Think?***

**The challenge to effective work in this new economy is not gathering more information,** not warehousing data (that is being done, but proves to be as useful as the grain warehoused at the end of the Indiana Jones movie), **but *knowing* what you know and *using* what you know quickly, painlessly...exactly when you need it and where you need it.**

You have the raw materials. They are growing all around you.

**To succeed in the information age, you must learn to garden, so the thicket grows in a way that can help you.**

Within your company are most of the solutions you need. However, the critical test is to be able to use them and to share them **when it counts.** Do that, and you will succeed. Fail in that, and your company will go the way of most - **acquired, retired, or shut down.**

Old perceptions and old solutions are keeping you from succeeding in a fundamentally different world. **We keep throwing**

**industrial age solutions at information age problems and the result is waste waste of time, waste of money, waste of effort.**

The world has fundamentally changed. As societies moved from the agricultural age to the industrial age, the very fabric of society and family was altered and the ways of learning, living, doing business and... well, everything changed. That period of change didn't happen overnight. It took many years of upheaval as people and societies adjusted to new environments.

**Welcome to a new fundamental shift from the industrial age to the information age.**

How we live, where we live, how we communicate, how we work, how we learn, how we teach, how we view the world...and much more has changed and will continue to change. You can accept it or not. You can hurl curses to the sky or put your fingers in your ears. Or you can accept it, embrace it, grow with it. Much like water through rocks, your input is neither requested nor heeded. **But if you pay attention to what is going on, you CAN get a drink and water your crops.**

By the end of this period of restructuring, society will be very different. As part of that, business will be very different.

**This book is a direction, a map to success in the information age, a gardener's manual.** The first part of the book points to the mistakes in perception that are keeping you and your company stuck. The second section provides directions toward growing the tools necessary to succeed.

**The two areas where your gardening will reap the greatest rewards are: 1) building organizations that can change 2) growing**

**systems that allow the people in your company to grow and share their new knowledge.**

So...let's look at business. Business in America has fundamentally changed - knowledge society, information age... whatever you call it, you KNOW it is a different world.

Along with this, **the process of actually doing work is different.**

**Instead of taking one job in one role for one company for your entire working career, you work in teams that are constantly forming and reforming.** Each team has different people...different needs... different foundations of knowledge. Each team has a different directive, solves a different problem, then often dissolves. **The knowledge that was gathered and created during that process sometimes exists within some of the team members...for a while, but is rarely available for anyone else - especially after a short period of time.**

# This is a problem!

**Listen! That's the sound of knowledge that cost your company a**

## lot to grow evaporating.

In groups and individuals throughout your company comes the **“A HA!” of innovation - that moment when a new idea, solution or perception pops out.**

## Listen, you can hear them.

**Added to the chorus are the contented “Ahhhs!” of understanding, as a person or group finally “gets it”** ...finally can do, can see, can relate to their object of study. **These little lights flicker on all the time.** The question is, will these lights be like light bulbs...bright, but self contained and sealed, or will they be open flames that can light other lights in other places?

## This book is about spreading the A HA. It is about setting fires.

Hmmm... Fires and gardening?! What's the connection? I see two. Set a fire in a thicket and you don't have something good, you have a problem. Fires are good, but only if the thicket has been trimmed enough to have a safe place for a fire to burn. Second - the fuel for the fire comes from those trimmings you have cleared from the thicket. So, they work together- the thicket providing fuel for the fire and the trimming(and other gardening) allowing a lovely place inside the thicket to enjoy the blaze.

## Innovation is the power that drives economic growth.

## Information is the fuel that drives the engine of innovation.

**Gardening in the information thicket is the process of harnessing the engine - so the power drives a company forward, creating new Ahhhs and AHAs!!! along the way.**

In 1991, John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid made a compelling case for the **fundamental connectedness of learning, activity, and innovation.** 1991 is a long time ago in this information age. **However, these three inextricably interwoven activities are still viewed as separate processes, or worse, separate entities.**

**Take a minute and think.** How do YOU look at learning, working, and innovation? Do you think of learning and innovation as things that happen during work or away from the regular course of work?

In this new world of business and work- this information age, **the winners will be determined by those who can find and use the right information at the exact moment of need.**

In this new world of business, **knowledge is not a thing that can be held, captured, stuck in a database and “managed”.**

**Knowledge is an interaction between information and a person (or people) *in time.***

If the knowledge is being created **in a person (or persons) for the first time**, then the event is learning. First time it has been created **ever**? Then it is innovation.

**The key to implementing innovation throughout an organization is supporting the useful sharing of knowledge.**

**The key to gardening is providing paths through and to knowledge and places to sit and soak in the natural growth.**

A spark on its own is nothing. Let that spark be shared with other things, quickly and easily, and you have a fire.

So, in this new world, learning, knowledge, and innovation are all temporal interactions between information and people, rooted in activity or practice.

**People - information - understandings  
- time.**

You can see why so much innovation is lost, even with knowledge management systems in place. **It is because knowledge management systems are NOT managing knowledge -  
they can't.**

They are managing **knowledge leavings - the**

**remnants left over after knowledge has been created.** Much like the leavings after the circus parade - they aren't the same thing as the elephants that went by, but they do indicate that something big has passed.

This book points ways - both social and technical to support and encourage the people in our organizations to share information and to find the “right” information at the right time so that it can stimulate knowledge, learning and innovation.

It calls for new perceptions of how to grow learning, performance, knowledge management, and inspiration in our companies.

It is a set of gardening tips that can be applied in different situations as your company grows and evolves. **Gardening in the information thicket is not about building walls. It is about trimming, guiding, enjoying, encouraging. Information is growth.** You can **encourage growth** through weeding and soil preparation, through setting borders and trellises. However, we cannot make a thicket (or a tree).

**The hope for effective work in the information age lies in successful gardening.**

This book is short. My father often quoted Twain, saying, “Pardon the length of this note. I did not have time to write a shorter one.” **I have taken the time to write a short one.** Please read it often and chew thoroughly before swallowing.

