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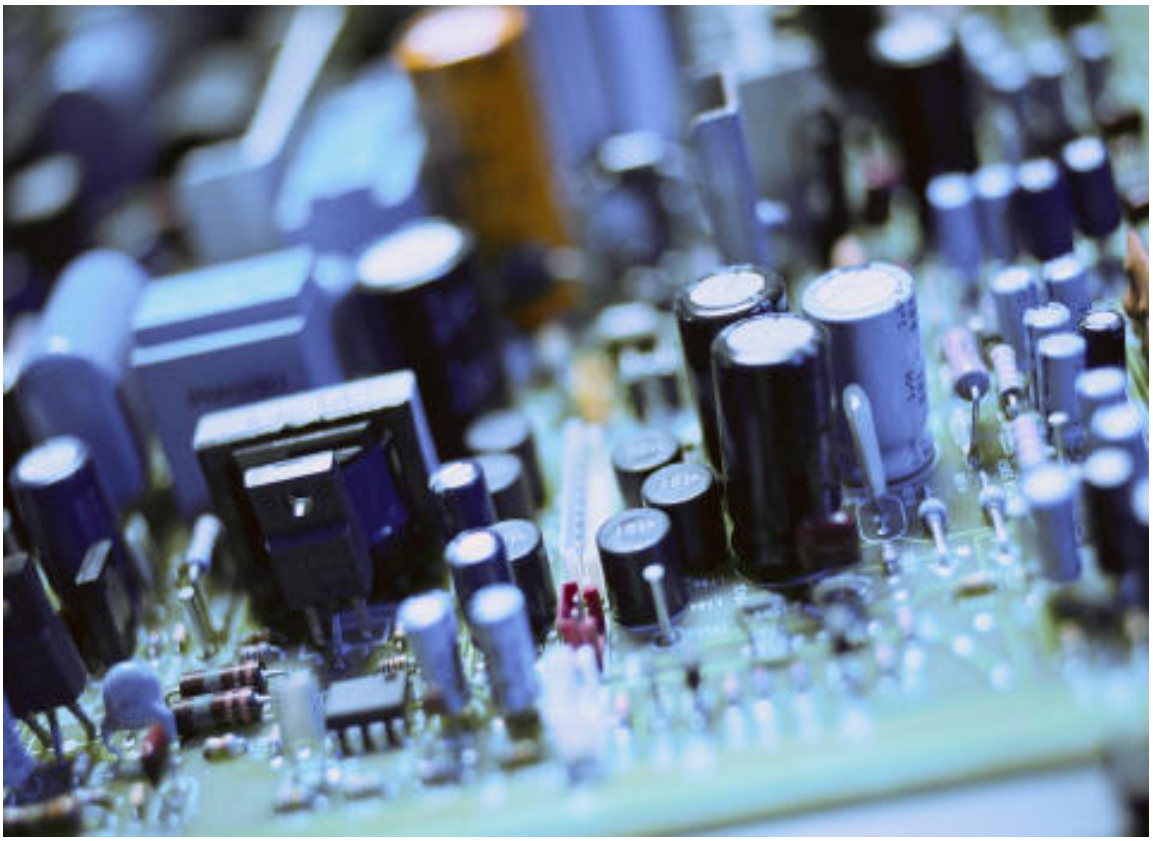

Insights From the ECLF Silicon Valley Learning Expedition

August 29 – September 2, 2011

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From August 29 to September 2, 20 senior L&D executives from major global corporations joined an ECLF Learning Expedition to the Silicon Valley which was organized and curated by Roland Deiser. A program overview and the list of participants is attached at the end of this document.

The following report is a summary of insights from this expedition. It represents the synthesis of thoughts and feedbacks that were generated by the group.

Introduction

Silicon Valley is a uniquely vibrant, thriving, self-sustaining ecosystem of leading-edge companies supported by academia, venture capitalists, and entrepreneurial game changers. It exists in a specific space/time continuum that cannot be transported and installed *per se* in another place—neither the East coast of the U.S., nor Europe, nor Asia.

It is "Mecca" for the world's smartest engineers and entrepreneurs, drawing them from around the globe to the most interesting, cutting edge and super-cool work. It offers an exciting lifestyle, challenging work, the opportunity to win prestige, and a fast track to wealth. It is especially a magnet for a burgeoning network of young Gen Y engineers and professionals seeking to be in the place that is building a new (better) world.

Recreating the aura and energy of SV anywhere else is nearly as unimaginable as supplanting the movie industry from Hollywood or the finance field from Wall Street. However, there is absolutely no doubt that key elements of the SV mindset can be adapted elsewhere in companies that are willing to open themselves up to new organizational structures, leadership styles, collaborative methods of working, rewards, and innovative thinking about the future. Some geographic areas are coming close to replicating on a small scale what happens in SV, such as a few areas of China and Boston's beltway of high technology companies.

The following are some of the key insights and conclusions that the ECLF-SV group gleaned from four days of speakers, round tables, site visits, and intra-group discussions. Not all these insights will be applicable to every company; many reflect the rather unique circumstances in SV where most companies are relatively young, often with less than 15 or 20 years of existence. Nevertheless, a majority of companies will derive value from these thoughts. Note that these comments are not intended as recommendations to be followed; they are, as stated, just insights and takeaways.

Insights About Innovation

Given that understanding innovation was a major component of the expedition, this group of comments focuses on a few critical takeaways about the nature of innovation and how companies in SV make it happen.

1. **Silicon Valley is a meta-culture aggressively focused on redefining the future.** Collectively, SV companies have a strong consciousness of their mission and intentionality to innovate the world. The spirit SV is extensively based around making profits while fulfilling a "moral" mission -- improving and advancing the human condition through technology. The corporate world of SV is admired and respected. As professor and cultural anthropologist *Chuck Darrah* told us, "Very few people here believe they have sold out and are working for Satan." People trust that technology can solve any problem in our work and personal lives—and profits will flow from those solutions. Cisco's John Chambers stated, "Leaders who have the courage to think outside of the box and try new things have the power to change the world." The Museum of Technology is a testimonial to the region's faith in the power of silicon chips to revision every aspect of human experience; the wall of plaques inside is effectively an altar where the public can honor the newest digital gods.

2. **There is an overarching belief that innovation can be intentionally cultivated, nurtured, and bred into an organization's culture.** Innovation is the lifeblood of SV companies; without it they cannot survive given that competitors abound who will out-innovate the slackers. SV companies are thus laser-focused on hiring the most passionate, creative, smartest entrepreneurial people and building the infrastructures (leadership, teams, project assignments, and rewards) to draw the most creative thinking out of people on a regular basis. Given this, HR and L&D play key roles linked directly to the strategic core of their organizations.

3. **Innovation has no boundaries. The elements of innovation are identifiable—and readily available to all. --** By virtue of our site visits and the talks in which they shared their methods, our SV hosts were tacitly agreeing that innovation is a universal principle, not restricted to SV alone. Any company can foster innovation by adopting and implementing its key components, which might be synthesized as follows:

    - ***Embrace, nurture, and celebrate FAILURE.***
      Repeated over and over again was the counterintuitive premise that failure is a necessary component in innovation. Numerous speakers genuinely reiterated the same mantra: *If you are not failing, you are not trying. If you are not failing, you are not innovating.* The winners of SV fail, get up, and then fail again. People are not shunned or demoted for

failing; rather they are celebrated, promoted and even recruited to a new startup for having the courage to take risks and learn from them. Leaders who fail on a huge project can actually build reputations as innovators—and often parlay their failure into obtaining investors for their next idea.

- ***Say Yes… And.***
  Whenever a new idea is proposed, do not automatically react by saying *No*, or even *Yes, but*. These reactions kill innovation and make people afraid to innovate again. Google teaches its people to say *Yes…And*—reflecting its philosophy that any idea can be improved upon with the right nurturing. *Yes…And* is the foundation for many creative techniques – such as post-it noting, mind-mapping, brainstorming, synthesizing, what if games, storytelling–that can be applied to work at turning a bad concept into the next billion dollar business.

- ***Foster disruptive thinking, not consensus.***
  Disrupting routine thinking is a hard and fast rule of innovation. IDEO explained this best in saying that "people have a tendency to express the solutions in terms of their problem;" they cannot see outside of their own mindset. Several speakers cited the famous quote from Henry Ford: "If I had asked my customers what they wanted, they would have told me a faster horse." Another speaker put it this way: "Consensus is the enemy of innovation," because project teams so often settle on the lowest common denominator solution. *Google* calls the disruption process "pretotyping" –by which they suggest that we intentionally launch an innovation process by starting from the very worst ideas and then seek to improve them. *Gabriel Broner*, head of Ericsson's Innova unit in Silicon Valley, says he chooses which innovation proposal to fund based on which team has the most disagreement. Cisco's *Ron Ricci*, VP of Corporate Positioning, says, "People must be able to think east and west, not just north and south."

- ***Follow a paradigm or structure for innovation.***
  Innovation cannot arise out of unstructured group thinking**.** Nearly every SV company follows a specific paradigm to foster and refine new ideas and ready them for market.
  - The *Institute for the Future* invented its 3 stage model of Foresight – Insight – Action to "predict" the future for their clients based on using many ethnographic tools (surveys, interviews, scenario development, study of human artifacts, etc).
  - *Google* uses a six-stage process: 1) empathize with users to understand their needs; 2) create a point of view; 3) take that POV to the ideation stage; 4) prototype; 5) test; and 6) go to market.
  - *IDEO* adheres to a longer and richer process, but a structure nonetheless: 1) discuss and clarify the real underlying issue behind the problem (people oriented, emotions, human factors); 2) develop insights (divergent thinking); 3) draw up guiding principles to the solution (convergent thinking); 4) prototype and test; 5) finalize a solution aligned with guiding principles.

  Whichever method used, creativity needs constraints to prevent it from getting out of hand.

- ***Don't ask for permission; just do it.***
  As a management philosophy, this is not anti-authoritarian, but rather pro-innovation. SV companies highly respect a creator's need for personal freedom and that we trust in their creative process. At places like Google, Yahoo, EA, IDEO, anyone with an idea that arises out of their passion is empowered to act on it without prior approval. Bold action is a key element in risk taking and failing, and so must be allowed. The concept of "hack days" – a day in which employees can do anything they want to explore their interests and possibly "stumble upon" a new idea – is a formalized version of this philosophy because employees have permission to not seek permission at any time that day.

- ***Prototype often and test new ideas.***
  Several companies, especially IDEO, zero in on understanding a market need and then developing a prototype that can be used to test with the intended audience. IDEO's use of a 3-D printer was an impressive example of its recognition of the value of prototyping a new product idea quickly and cheaply, even if imperfect.

- ***Aim for quantity of ideas and don't strive for perfection.***
  These rules of innovation are connected to the first. Innovation is a statistical game. For every 1000 ideas, only 1 or 5 may actually work, but you need all 1000 to create the universe. Secondly, perfection kills newly born ideas that are, by their very nature, imperfect. The search for perfection creates fear of risk-taking and fear of failure. Innovation arises instead out of imperfect solutions that are given attention, nurturing, and time to grow and improve in the market.

- ***Be first to market and optimize upon implementation.***
  Related to the above, another sacred tenet of SV is to be the first one out in the market, ahead of your competitors. The goal is to own the territory in the consumer's eyes. Let the market assist you in fixing mistakes and enhancing and optimizing your product.

- ***Celebrate and reward both failure and innovation.***
  Honour employees who fail and those who create something. The reward doesn't have to be money; it can also take the form of "badges" that are publically displayed on their person's company profile page. Ericsson's *Innova* program rewards not only the employees who create the best innovative idea but also the managers who best support innovation.

4. **Using a 1% strategy, innovation can be slowly introduced into a traditionally managed and controlled company.** This last insight is based on the presentation from *Gabriel Broner*, Head of Ericsson's *Innova* Unit, which is replicating a scaled-down version of SV within a dedicated "space" in the company. Headquartered in Silicon Valley, *Innova* extends out to only 5,000 of Ericsson's 90,000 employees located globally in nine of the company's locations. Rather than imitating Google's 20% time off for hacking and exploring ideas, *Innova's* strategy is to introduce

innovation in small increments – starting with only 1% of Ericsson's people budget at this time. The program invites employees to propose any innovation they want – be it a product, a service, or an internal process improvement -- on an internal web site. If their proposal is approved, they are given time away from normal job duties and a credit card loaded with an exploratory budget of $500 to develop the concept. (Funding 200 ideas costs only $100,000!) A second round of funding follows if the prototype shows promise. The strategy has already had an impact on employee awareness about innovation and motivating risk taking behaviors among them. It has generated over 900 proposals, 90 of which have reached 2nd Stage funding. *Innova* may also license new innovations that are outside of Ericsson's market, such as a soccer ball with internal video cameras.

Chuck Darrah
San Jose State University

Marina Gorbis
Institute for the Future

Gabriel Broner
Ericsson

Insights into the Development of Organizational Culture

This group of insights focuses on two key observations about organizational cultures.

5. **The culture belongs to the CEO.** It goes without saying that a CEO creates the vision for any company, but this SV insight is an assertion that the CEO's responsibility extends deeper and wider to ownership of the organizational culture. Cisco's CEO, *John Chambers*, is regarded as the pace setter in launching the company's new brand image as the provider of solutions rather than just a supplier of hardware. Google's *Eric Schmidt* routinely appears at the Friday afternoon beer bashes to answer questions from employees and inspire them to discover more innovative ideas. Numerous CEOs in SV blog, walk the halls, attend dinners to honor innovators, and get involved in L&D programs. Given that the most distinctive aspect of SV is its powerful cultural mythology, it is not surprising that SV CEOs are held responsible as much for their company's profitability as for their company's brand aura. (Note: An interesting exception to this philosophy was *Peter Coughlan* at IDEO who believes that culture is continually emerging and that it is therefore everyone's responsibility.)

6. **Most SV companies are built on structures that emphasize collaboration in place of traditional command and control hierarchies.** The focus on collaboration during the expedition was as ubiquitous as the focus on innovation—and the two are integrally linked. *Howard Rheingold* talked about the growing need for "collaboration literacies" and how social media now facilitates collaborating and co-learning in powerful ways. Numerous CLOs noted how collaboration within and among project teams in SV is critical to innovative thinking and winning results. *Google* and *Cisco* assess and reward managers based on their ability to collaborate. *IDEO* assembles 3-person project teams based on their expertise but also on their ability to collaborate (they effectively live with each other for 3 months).

   As one of the most "mature" SV companies, *Cisco* reorganized itself from a hierarchical structure with functional silos to a product-based structure to foster greater collaboration across departments, functions, and silos. One motivation for their transformation was the recognition that they were wasting time and resources on internal competition between functions that collaboration would allow them to direct externally towards satisfying customers. *Cisco* is now moving rapidly towards a structure to implement and foster shared goals but with a clear definition of four key components of collaboration: 1) decision rights, 2) funding of decisions, codified measurements, and a transparent rewards model.

   Meanwhile, Ericsson's *Innova* program was explicitly organized to take advantage of collaboration across its teams of engineers. As its director, *Gabriel Broner*, stated, "We want to encourage collaboration – many ideas and all types of them → to trigger our thinking about radical ideas that show out of the box thinking; to address unarticulated needs; identify emerging trends, aligned with areas of focus; leverage Ericsson's strengths, and address customer needs in a new improved way." If there is one memorable statement that summarizes the emphasis on collaboration in SV, it is IDEO's tacit employee rule about how to work with others, "*Above all, don't be an asshole*."

7. **Diversity sparks innovation and collaboration.** One of the greatest strengths of SV culture is its diversity of people. There is a lot of homogeneity in the form of engineering expertise, but there is a depth of cultural diversity among the people. Silicon Valley attracts people from many cultures from all over the world which fuels different and disruptive thinking. It also creates a culture of respect and collaboration, because no one can afford to have a reputation of "not being able to get along with *those* people" when one of them may one day be your next boss or the founder of a new startup.

Insights into L&D, Recruiting, Talent Management, and Leadership Development

The following group of insights deal with L&D's role in SV companies, which seems distinctly different than the European approach.

8. **L&D often plays a role that brings it in direct contact with the organizational strategy.** Many SV companies are so young they do not have CLO positions. Despite its relative maturity, *Intel's* new CLO is its first in the company's 25 years. However, while not stated directly, there was a tacit implication that in those SV companies with CLOs, L&D is perceived as strong strategic partner in developing the organizational culture to support the CEO's agenda and the constant need for innovation. Its role focuses less on training functions than on cultural caretaking and transformation. We saw this in our site visits and among our speakers, where CLOs spoke to us about their involvement in fostering innovation in critical arenas, such as empowering employees with tools to explore their interests, channel their talents, and advance their careers.

9. **Leadership development in SV is mostly low key, experientially-based initiatives that create experienced managers who can inspire and coach for innovation.** Silicon Valley companies do not worship formal leadership development to the extent many European companies do. Companies such as Apple, Google, Chevron & others offer little to nothing formally structured leadership development. Few companies do succession planning, because, as *Theresa Roche* from *Agilent* put it, "This is simply not how we select people in reality."

   In SV, leadership is developed experientially through assignments to manage teams on increasingly challenging projects. The most valuable and promotable leadership skills include authenticity, risk-taking, being a visionary and a persuasive community organizer, and having an attractive personal style and great coaching skills to inspire a team to collaborate and produce something tangibly new and profitable. A great manager is especially someone known for being a talent developer of other people.

   However, this approach may be more indicative of younger SV companies. In contrast, as a more "mature" company, *Cisco* was clearly invested in formal leadership development. They have a detailed leadership competency model (C-LEAD: collaborate, learn, execute, accelerate, disrupt) that every Cisco top leader must develop. The program includes rigorous assessments with psychological profiling and a detailed development plan. High potentials ascribing to VP level must go through its E-ALF (Executive Action Learning Forum) program where they receive rigorous

assessments in how disruptive and collaborative they are, including sitting before a 15-member panel as part of their 360 and a stern review of their credentials by the Executive Committee. This program seemed to be atypical in Silicon Valley, where most companies develop leaders project by project. [1]

10. **Recruiting inherently bright, creative, passionate people is more important than developing talent**. HR and L&D operates differently from many European companies. Enthusiasm, engagement, and collaborative teamwork skills are viewed as highly indicative of a worker's potential. As a result, HR emphasis in SV is placed on the hiring decision. *Google* spends 3 months and up to 15 interviews before it hires a new person. *IDEO* looks for people who have what they call a "T" profile – i.e., deep mastery of one area with a breadth of knowledge across many other domains. One reason for this is that SV companies emphasize how business is more driven by technology and innovation than by people development. One IDEO leader stretched the concept in this way: "If you hire people who are on fire, it doesn't matter how you organize." Another reason pointed out by *Brad Margolis*, Head of Executive Development and OE at *Electronic Arts*, is that it is very hard to grab the attention of people who are doing exciting work. They get bored quickly at training sessions and literally weigh the value of the training against what they could be accomplishing on their own. Often, L&D loses.

11. **Communities, networks, and connections are a critical component of HR and L&D structures today.** SV companies are rapidly adopting and supporting online and offline communities and networks as major components of their HR and L&D structure and design. *Cisco* and *Google* offer exciting Facebook-style social networks on their intranets that serve for recruiting, retention, learning, talent development, and career planning. Every employee is invited to put up a profile page listing his or her background, education, skills, interests, community memberships, self-declared expertise, and availability to teach or mentor others. Employees can determine their own privacy level. They can tap into the publically-available content of the company network to find new job opportunities, to meet people with similar educational backgrounds (alumni) and shared interests, or to identify who is available to help them learn something new. These are indicative of the trend that one's reputation and social stature as a community member and networker are the new currency of people management.

[1] See detailed Cisco case study by Bersin and Associates in the document repository of the Learning Expedition

12. **Talent development in many SV companies is self-motivated, self-driven, and self-empowered using social media.** While most European companies operate extensive formal training programs, SV companies increasingly look to technology and social media to empower employees to drive their own skill building, job movement, and career self-management. The strategy is more pull than push, because highly motivated employees obviously recognize the value of self-learning to build their competences.

    Cisco's Certified Management Professional (CCMP), for example, is a new program aimed at empowering people to ascribe to becoming a professional manager in what will be a nationally recognized program similar to a Cisco Certified Engineer. Its soon to be released *Quad* interface provides employees with a dashboard-like page where they privately monitor their own performance assessments, their pulse scores, and their progress towards certification. Employees win points and badges for passing certain milestones towards certification. They can also list their own areas of interest, expertise, and memberships.

    Google's *Magnet* intranet offers similar features plus more: "Googlers" can research all job openings – single jobs or families of jobs – plus learn about the job's manager and even the manager's manager and entire the career path each job leads to in order to decide if they like that career trajectory. They can locate experts and teachers who are giving courses open to anyone, and people willing to mentor them. Once their career goals and interests are input, *Magnet* will push out new jobs to them.

    Throughout SV, career advancement is extensively pushed into the employee's own hands. In the democratic spirit, performance reviews warp into "career conversations" based on satisfying the employee's interests and personal goals.

13. **The new model for L&D is to facilitate experiential learning among co-learners and co-teachers.** The traditional hierarchy of teacher-student less prevalent in the SV. Instead, people are co-learners in their daily tasks, supporting each other to learn and build skills. The primary focus is on-the-job learning to develop one's capabilities for the future. Employees at *Google* offer themselves up as mentors or teachers for anyone who wants to learn a new software application or how to play piano, with thousands of courses offered. *IDEO* puts together "craft" days when all professionals in a related field are invited to share their recent lessons-learned and update their knowledge pool. *Cisco*, *Google* and others encourage employees to list their areas of expertise so that others in the company can call on them to advise customers or help with sales problems. Above all, there is an openness to sharing knowledge and helping others that has its roots in a democratic bottom-up approach to innovation.

14. **Reward / Take care of your employees. This is not just a philosophy; it is a strategy.** *Google* is by far the champion of taking care of its employees, by concretizing the belief that every employee deserves to live at his or her "existential best." To enlighten their soul, *Google* employs Meng, whose official title is "Jolly Good Fellow (that nobody can deny)" and who was formerly an engineer and employee #108 but who now acts as a Zen master to guide employees to the spirit of mindfulness (which Meng says also leads them to a stress-free work life and greater wealth and success). To reward employees in the here and now, Google provides its 'Googlers' nearly every imaginable benefit seemingly for free – food, mentoring, educational and job advancement courses, rock concerts, Friday beer sessions, financial counselling, onsite day care, maternity and paternity leave, lap pools and volleyball courts on campus, bicycles, rides to work if your car breaks down, and on and on.

    But the spirit of taking care of employees was ubiquitous among other SV companies, too. *IDEO* employs the "experience manager" whose job is take care of its work teams and ensure they are happy and productive. The experience manager is empowered to take action to help a team stuck in the process or needing a motivating treat (dinner, an excursion, etc).

CLO panel – from left to right: Barry Leskin (Bay Area Executive Development Network) | Teresa Roche (Agilent) | Susan Burnett (Yahoo) | Brad Margolis (Electronic Arts) | Roland Deiser (ECLF) | Ron Dickson (Intel) | Don Mac Laughlin (Cisco) | Sundar Nagarathnam (NetApp)

Meeting with Cisco Executive Board members

Meeting at IDEO (Peter Coughlan)

Insights into the Future of Work and Organizations

Several insights might be thought of as indicative of how future organizations might operate and how people will envision their work.

15. **The Millennial generation is redefining a new approach to work.** One of the most distinguishing characteristics of SV is how employees, especially Millennials, view their work. They tend to blend work and life into a seamless time/space continuum, such that it is hard to tell where one starts and the other ends. They seek challenging work, are not risk averse, and are willing to self-manage their careers.

    As *Chuck Darrah* put it, "They don't live life, they manage it." They are optimistic, entrepreneurial, self-starters. They also know they must keep learning as their skills will be outdated quickly. Again, *Chuck Darrah*: "There is nothing worse than a 40-year old engineer who relies on his old skills."

    They are not anti-authoritarian – hierarchies do exist - but their values lean towards democratic structures and respect for everyone. Even leaders cannot be known as dictators or authoritarian as company intranets increasingly display employee ratings of managers. In this sense, SV may be the model to study to understand how the Millennials will change companies.

16. **Companies come and go, but networks survive.** This is already a truism in Silicon Valley today where people who lose their jobs in corporate failures rely on their networks to find their next careers. But the statement may also be pointing to the future of all jobs. In the coming world, innovative companies will be born and die in a space of years, not decades or centuries, replaced by newer technologies or acquired and merged for the value of their patents or their cash. Few employees will feel loyalty to a company today that is about to disappear when they can tap into their networks for a better job tomorrow.

    Even if a company lives on, the Millennial generation constantly craves new "experiences," to be working on the most advanced, cutting edge technologies or on projects that will change the world. In the future, their job loyalty and methods of job hunting will increasingly rely on social media, their personal and professional networks, and their membership in online and offline communities, rather than today's traditional methods of recruitment and retention.

17. **Self-learning through technology and social media will replace much of formal education.** In his recently founded "Rheingold U", Social Media Guru *Howard Rheingold* has created the "Social Media Classroom" to showcase the future of education in a globally networked world. He is heavily using online tools such as online forums, webinars, Wikis, blogs, videos, social bookmarking sites (delicious), screen-sharing, and more to encourage self-motivated peer-to-peer learning. At Rheingold-U, co-learners get together and decide what they want to learn and then research it and teach it to each other (he calls this paragogy). Rheingold admits that self-learning is not automatic and is a learning process in itself, but the rewards in terms of motivation, engagement, and cultural impact are significant.

18. **Crowdsourcing and "social production" open innovation up beyond a company's boundaries … and may one day compete with the corporate world**. *Marina Gorbis*, Director of *The Institute for the Future*, related several examples of young entrepreneurs founding their own garage-style start-ups by tapping into the energy, ideas, and willingness of other people to share in the work at no cost. In the universe of "social production," any problem can be thrown out to the world and people will produce "micro-contributions" of their time and expertise to help solve it. Often the results are an innovation that is cheaper to produce or faster to market than current market offerings from the corporate world. IFTF even sponsors social production days where they open their doors to literally anyone interested in working on that day's challenge. IFTF has also started using crowdsourcing for some of its clients. These may be the first waves of the future of work in many organizations.

19. **Leverage your own cutting-edge technologies to solve your own problems and/or create value.** This insight became clear when we saw how *Cisco* has used its TelePresence technology to transform itself into the leader in providing technologies for changing how people work and communicate. The company makes heavy use of TelePresence to conduct its own global meetings and has developed deep experience in making virtual meetings more satisfying. Similarly, *Google* engineers built the company's *Magnet* system on the Google platform, utilizing their superiority in search to create perhaps the most interesting self-powered HR and talent management interface so far designed. *IDEO* used its own expertise in design, psychology, and human factors engineering to create one of the most exciting, collaborative places to work. The *Institute for the Future* opens its doors on certain days to anyone with an interest in working on a problem, thus facilitating social production and crowdsourcing – the two methodologies cited above. The implication is that every company may already own one or more technologies with which they can change their own work processes, strategic thinking, customer approach, or branding.

20. **There are children born today who will work in jobs that do not yet exist.** This insight is a reminder that change never stops and that innovation is the key ingredient in being able to meet the future and survive. This is why Silicon Valley is a unique environment and why its focus on innovation will sustain it for decades to come. The Institute for the Future ironically states that it is impossible to predict the future, but they continue to make a good living at predicting many of the transformative shifts that will impact their clients. *Cisco* has already transformed itself once, and with the vision of John Chambers, is already thinking far ahead to the next cycle of solutions it can offer. *IDEO* showed us a white board in which it examined its past and present in an effort to understand and design its own future. By hiring 1000 people a month, and recently buying Motorola, *Google* took control of its future as perhaps the world's leading technology company with the capability to play in just about any sandbox it wants to, from search to advertising to wind power to mobile communications.