

Future Perfect

Steven Johnson—2012

Introduction

- Post-9/11., Chances of dying on a commercial flight was 19 in 1 billion, and almost 100% improvement over the already excellent odds of flying in the 1990s.
- An American child was more likely to be elected president of United States in their lifetime than to die in a commercial jet flight.
- It was an individual triumph, corporate innovation, state-funded research and government regulation all came together to allow flight 1549 to land safely in the Hudson began with the chicken gun.
- As a news hook, steady, incremental progress pales beside the sexier stories of dramatic breakthrough and spectacular failure.
- Instead, the changes came from decades of small decisions, made by thousands of individuals and organizations.
- Over the course of 1997, in the middle of the greatest peacetime economic boom in US history, and before the Monica Lewinsky scandal broke, 71% of all editorials published in the Post that expressed an opinion on some aspect of the country's current state focused on the negative trend. Less than 5% of the total number of editorials concentrated on a positive development.

Chapter 1: the peer progressives.

- While millions of smaller sites and hundreds of millions of users do the heavy work of creating content that is used and linked. These will be paid entirely in the gift economy. Wikipedia, to use only the most obvious example, is powered entirely by the gift economy, mostly in the form of the free labor contributed by its authors and editors.
- Kickstarter or is no pipe dream. 2 ½ years after Chen, Adler and Strickler launch the site, they announced that Kickstarter it was on track to raise roughly 200,000,000 for the artists in a single fiscal year. The entire annual budget for the national endowment for the arts is 154 million.

Chapter 2: Peer networks at work.

- There was something fitting in this unlikely connection, since 311 is designed to re-create some of the human touch of small-town culture in the context of a vast metropolis. Callers are guaranteed to reach a live person within 30 seconds, after brief prerecorded message.
- Some of the discoveries have been subtle but brilliant. For example, officials now know that the first warm day of spring will bring a surge in the use of the city's recycling programs. The connection is logical what you think about it: the hot weather inspires people to upgrade their air-conditioners, and they don't want to just leave the old friend field units out on the street.
- When New York's taxi and limousine commission installed television screens and credit card machines and all taxis, they also installed GPS devices that communicate vast amounts of information back to the TLC. Every second of every day, 13,000 tabs send real-time data on location, travel speeds and whether they have customers or not.

- Yet despite its urgency, the news had arrived on their doorstep via the word-of-mouth network of two neighbors gossiping together. “Vanishing point theory of news”
- Say, the sake of argument, that there is an empty lot in the city neighborhood that’s overrun with weeds and beer bottles. Locals complain about the lot in some form of the 311: it’s an eyesore, kids are breaking into it and smoking cigarettes, the barbed wire fence is a potential hazard. Those complaints accumulate and eventually become a meaningful cluster on the map of the neighborhood, a red flag that says, “There’s a problem at this address.” At this point, the Brick Starter network invites proposals from the neighbors and other relevant parties: one group of green thumbs suggests a community garden, a local contractor offers to build a playground, and others suggest paving it over and turning it into a parking lot. The projects set their funding goals and rewards, and the wider neighborhood community selects a winner by pledging money to support it. It would be pure networks all the way up the chain.

The Pothole Paradox.

- It also increases the larger group’s ability to solve problems. The pioneer in this line of research is the University of Michigan professor Scott Page. He has spent the past 20 years building a convincing case for what he calls the “diversity trumps ability” theory, demonstrating the phenomenon in sociological studies and mathematical models. Take two groups of individuals and assign to each one of some kind of problem to solve. One group has a higher average IQ than the other, and is more homogeneous in its composition. One group, say, is all doctors with IQ above 130; second group doesn’t perform as well on the IQ tests, but includes a wide range of professions. What Page found, paradoxically, was that the diverse group was ultimately smarter than the smart group. The individuals in the high IQ group might have scored better individually on the intelligence tests, but when it came to solving problems as a group, diversity matters more than individual brainpower.
- In the old days, the limited options meant that people were dependent on mass media institutions – newspapers, the nightly live news that featured an array of topics and perspectives thus serving up a more diverse information diet. To continue the: Mary metaphor, contemporary pure produce journalism is like one of those dinner menus that go on for 10 pages, which means that everyone can find their favorite dish and never experiment. Old media, on the other hand, is like a chef’s tasting menu: far less choice, but because an expert chef is making the decision for you, you end up expanding your power by eating food that you would’ve never ordered on your own.

Incentives: we have a winner!

- The RSA’s position on intellectual property was part of a larger intellectual use those that characterized most enlightened science: **ideas** improved the more they were allowed to flow through the community, building proprietary walls around those ideas with only retard the March of progress.
- A website called www.challenge.gov.
- Schnur’s organization – New Leaders for New Schools – had recognized that the secret to education success to not lie in just a single characteristic principal or superintendent but rather in a remarkably consistent series of reforms, including consistent teacher assessments and training

programs, clear pathways for the promotion of aspiring teachers and aspiring principals; or the district wide introduction of more experimental charter schools.

- The beauty of a prize backed challenge like Race to the Top.
- With Race to the Top, the federal government's role was merely to amplify and promote the innovative strategies that had already emerged on the local level.
- Diverse network working outside the marketplace establishes a worthy goal, and an even more diverse network sets out to find a way to reach it – even if the goal in question turns out to be more than 200,000 miles away on the surface of the moon.

Governance: liquid democracies.

- To a certain extent, the Kickstarter model is already alive and well in the world of campaign finance: 90% of the donations to Pres. Obama's 2008 campaign came from individuals giving \$200 or less.
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