



FUTURE OF WORK AGENDA

A Free Monthly Newsletter
March, 2007
www.thefutureofwork.net/

THIS MONTH'S HEADLINES

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1. **[FROM JIM AND CHARLIE](#)**

This is our personal note welcoming you to the March 2007 issue of *Future of Work Agenda* and setting our theme for the month. This month we revisit some “old” questions – What is a knowledge worker? and “What’s new urbanism all about? Our research these days is increasingly focused on the attributes of healthy communities, and one of the most important components of a healthy community is happy knowledge workers.

2. **[ANNOUNCEMENTS](#)**

Future of Work member Paula Bartholome will be presenting a webinar to the International Association of Medical Science Educators. The WDC calendar of public events and *Future of Work* program activities continues to be full for the next several months. And we’re always seeking new members for our consortium.

3. **[FEATURE ARTICLE: WHAT IS A KNOWLEDGE WORKER, ANYWAY?](#)**

In our consulting and research work we spend a lot of time exploring how the emergence of knowledge work as the primary driver of economic activity is changing the nature of the workplace and even basic organizational and management practice. Recently one of our clients asked us a very basic question: Just what *is* a knowledge worker?” As he said, “Everyone uses that term but it certainly doesn’t seem very well defined. And if we’re going to be doing market research and making investments aimed at attracting knowledge workers to our community and local businesses, we sure ought to have some kind of agreement about just who it is we’re talking about.” We agree, and that question stimulated the development of a working paper on “Knowledge Work and Knowledge Workers.” We’re pleased to offer an excerpt from that paper here.

4. **[BEST OF THE BLOG](#)**

This section provides you with brief summaries of several recent notes we’ve already posted on the *Future of Work* weblog. In each case we also include a live link to the original post on the blog. And we encourage you to become a regular reader of the blog, where we are posting notes, case studies, and links to other important websites on a regular basis.

5. **[THE WDC BOOKSHELF: WHAT WE’RE READING RIGHT NOW](#)**

This is a new section that we plan to include every couple of months from now on. We’re book junkies, constantly on the lookout for good ideas and magical insights that will solve all the world’s problems. We haven’t achieved that nirvana yet, but our failure hasn’t stopped us from trying. Here’s a set of mini-reviews of books that we’re currently enjoying and learning from, and we think you will too.

6. IN OUR HUMBLE OPINION: WE NEED A NEW NEW URBANISM

We end each issue of *Future of Work Agenda* with a personal perspective – our chance to comment on issues and developments in the world of work that we find important and interesting. This is our “editorial” page, where we enjoy offering our opinions and predictions about what’s happening (or should be happening) in the world of work and beyond.

THE FULL STORIES

1) FROM JIM AND CHARLIE

March Madness! And we’re not referring to NCAA basketball. Now that the Oscars, Britney’s baldness, and Anna Nicole’s burial (all February events, come to think of it) are behind us we can start paying attention to important future of work challenges once again.

This month actually marks a slight (very slight) turn on our path towards the future. We’ve been focused on the future of work for many, many years – and we intend to stay on that journey for a long time to come. But our recent work in West Michigan, along with many recent conversations with our *Future of Work* members, has convinced us that there isn’t going to be a healthy (or even a viable) future of work without a healthy future of communities at the same time.

In most respects that’s not new news – even for us. We’ve been involved with economic developers for many years as we’ve searched to understand (and create) work environments that meet the needs of the workforce and employers while also contributing to responsible economic, social, and environmental practice. One reason we promote distributed work so enthusiastically is that we believe strongly that it’s more natural, consumes less energy, reduces commuting time and congestion, and helps individuals balance their work and personal lives much more effectively – while at the same time helping employers reduce costs, increase productivity, and become far more agile in the global economy.

So you’re going to be hearing and seeing more thoughts and opinions about communities and economic development from us from now on.

That’s a long set-up to our feature article and rant this month. The feature article, “[What Is a Knowledge Worker, Anyway?](#)” is an excerpt from a working paper we’re preparing for the West Michigan WIRED innovation project. It was a response to a deceptively simple question that was raised during a recent meeting of the Advisory Council for our project. The project, described in some detail elsewhere, is focusing on developing the market for workplaces that will help West Michigan attract, retain, and leverage knowledge workers as part of its transformation from a manufacturing-driven economy to an innovation-driven one.

The question came up during a conversation about the size of the market for remote work centers, and it was, simply, how we defined the term “knowledge worker” (that’s an important thing to know before we start collecting and interpreting market research data). Of course, simple but profound questions rarely have simple answers. So after we scurried back to our bookshelves and did some online digging, we produced a working paper that we’ve extracted here. Our goal is a bit devious: we’re hoping that you, our readers, will critique our thinking and enhance it. We don’t exactly have a Wikipedia in place, but we’d be

more than happy to revise the working paper (it's still in process) with your thoughts, additions, and corrections.

The second part of that same Advisory Council conversation shifted to the very practical question of what kinds of programs, institutions, and other infrastructure elements a community (or, more properly, a region) should develop if its goal is to attract and retain those elusive knowledge workers as residents and citizens. In other words, what is it about a community that attracts knowledge workers? Our response to that question, also still underway, stimulated our rant this month, in which we "take on" the whole field of New Urbanism ("[We Need a New New Urbanism](#)" – and no, that isn't a typo in the title). As you'll see, our position is – again – relatively simple: walkable neighborhoods and mixed housing do not a community make. And we trust that here, too, you'll share your responses and insights with us in the spirit of generating better, more useful knowledge.

And as always, of course, we're also pleased to bring you our regular [Announcements](#) and the [Best of the Blog](#) section summarizing our most recent posts on the [Future of Work blog](#). We continue to believe that you'll find ideas and information here that you just can't get anywhere else.

So, on to the rest of the newsletter. Enjoy! And please [let us know](#) what you think.

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2) ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Paula Bartholome to present to the Int'l Association of Medical Science Educators

Future of Work member **Paula Bartholome** (Parallax) will be presenting a web-based teleconference for the International Association of Medical Science Educators on "Leading People within Organizations: Communicating for Performance." The April 3 presentation will be part of the organization's leadership series that regularly draws 300+ participants from around the world.

WDC and *Future of Work* Activities

Our corporate *Future of Work* members will gather in San Francisco in early March for our semi-annual Members Roundtable. We're very pleased that the Roundtable will feature a presentation on Workplace Performance by **Michael O'Neill** of Herman Miller, as well as a panel on managing distributed workers led by Professors Sara Beckman of UC Berkeley and **Terri Griffith** of Santa Clara University. **Dan Johnson** of Accenture will be hosting the Roundtable, while **Renee Leach** of Hewlett-Packard will sponsor our group dinner. Many thanks to both of you!

As previously announced, Jim will once again be a keynote speaker at the [Human Resources Leadership Program](#), conducted by Santa Clara University. He'll be speaking on "The Future of Work" on March 28, 2007.

Jim and Charlie will be describing the highlights of the WIRED West Michigan project at a panel discussion at the [CoreNet Global Summit in Denver](#), April 29-May 2.

We'll also be featured speakers at the [IFMA Industries Forum 2007](#) being held in Atlanta, Georgia, May 2-4. Our topic there will be "Corporate Agility," which of course is the title of our new book, due to be published in May 2007 by the American Management Association.

Future of Work Continues to Seek New Members

Future of Work offers several levels of membership that depend on your status and needs: *Individual and Small Business*, *Corporate*, and *Implementation Partners*. We also offer special discounts to nonprofit, educational, and public sector organizations.

These membership programs are described in more detail on the [Future of Work website](#), or feel free to [contact us](#) directly for more information about fees and benefits.

All *Future of Work* members are now listed on the *Future of Work* website, in the [About Us/Members](#) section. We encourage all our readers to consider joining the community.

Please [visit our website](#) and apply for membership today.

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3) FEATURE ARTICLE: WHAT IS A KNOWLEDGE WORKER, ANYWAY?

by Jim Ware and Charlie Grantham

In our consulting and research work we spend a lot of time exploring how the emergence of knowledge work as the primary driver of economic activity is changing the nature of the workplace and even basic organizational and management practice.

Recently one of our clients asked us a very basic question: "Just what is a knowledge worker?" As he said, "Everyone uses that term but it certainly doesn't seem very well defined. And if we're going to be doing market research and making investments aimed at attracting knowledge workers to our community and local businesses, we sure ought to have some kind of agreement about just who it is we're talking about."

We agree, and that question stimulated the development of a working paper on "Knowledge Work and Knowledge Workers." We're pleased to offer an excerpt from that paper here.

Peter Drucker is generally credited with coining the term "knowledge worker" in 1959. In 1991 he wrote an article on knowledge worker productivity for the *Harvard Business Review* ("The New Productivity Challenge," Nov-Dec 1991, pp69-79) in which he more or less put knowledge work (ill-defined at best) and service work in one large, rather amorphous, bucket. The closest he came to defining "knowledge and service" work in that article was this:

Knowledge and service workers range from research scientists and cardiac surgeons through draftswomen and store managers to 16-year olds who flip hamburgers in fast-food restaurants on Saturday afternoons. Their ranks also include people whose work makes them "machine operators": dishwashers, janitors, data-entry operators.

At that time Drucker was not particularly concerned with where and when these knowledge workers accomplished their tasks; his focus was on improving their productivity, which he called the "single greatest challenge facing managers in the developed countries of the world."

However, in 2007, in a global economy that is enabled by powerful information technologies and driven by creativity and innovation, most knowledge workers are increasingly mobile, location-independent, and free to choose where, when, and for whom they will work.

As local economic developers consider whether to invest in new kinds of infrastructure and new work environments as part of their efforts to attract, retain, and leverage talent, we need to develop and agree on more precise definitions of who is a "knowledge worker," how many of them there are in a given region, and what kinds of services and infrastructure they want and need to be successful.

A Basic Definition

The broadest view of knowledge work is that it is an activity that either requires specialized knowledge or skills, or creates new knowledge. In contrast to physical labor, knowledge work focuses primarily on *creating* or *applying* information or knowledge to create value.

So what exactly *is* a knowledge worker, and how can the nature of his or her work be described? At the most generic level, the term "knowledge worker" refers to individuals who possess high levels of education and/or expertise in a particular area, and who use their cognitive skills to engage in complex problem solving.

Wikipedia defines a knowledge worker as:

Someone who works primarily with information or one who develops and uses knowledge in the workplace (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_worker).

Babson College Professor Thomas Davenport, who has probably studied knowledge work and knowledge workers more than almost any other active scholar today, has this to say about the concept:

I certainly think there's a lot of fuzziness, ambiguity, and imprecision about what a knowledge worker is, and it's not a term most managers use easily. They don't say, "Okay, these are my knowledge workers, these are my non-knowledge workers." So despite the fact that the term's been around for a long time, very few people have been comfortable using it as a managerial concept.

(From an interview conducted by *Ubiquity Magazine*, available online at: http://www.acm.org/ubiquity/interviews/v6i34_davenport.html)

Davenport then proceeds to define knowledge workers as “*people with high degrees of education or expertise whose primary job function involves some activity related to knowledge.*”

These very broad definitions, however, encompass almost all forms of meaningful work. Even a barber, a hair stylist, a hamburger flipper, or an assembly line worker has some degree of specialized knowledge about what he or she must do to be successful, although there are certainly differing levels of productivity and effectiveness depending on an individual’s knowledge and experience.

Thus, knowledge workers indisputably include individuals in the traditional professions, such as doctors, lawyers, scientists, educators, and engineers. Most of us would also include those who work in senior positions in marketing, advertising, consulting, finance, insurance, and strategy development, to name just a few functional specialties. And then there are also specialized knowledge-based jobs like airline pilots, musicians, senior business executives, and even government officials.

Because their work typically entails the interpretation and manipulation of information as well as the creation of new knowledge (as opposed to relatively routine data collection and processing), knowledge workers are usually considered a distinctly different “breed” than their less-skilled white-collar counterparts such as bank tellers, bookkeepers, call center specialists, or clerks who perform relatively routine work in highly structured and procedurally-constrained ways.

However, some would argue that those latter workers are increasingly taking on more “knowledge worker-like” qualities, due to the availability of computer-based technologies for conducting many of their routine activities; and today even factory-floor production management requires significant high-tech literacy and knowledge.

A Basic Typology of Knowledge Work

As these examples of who “knowledge workers” are and what they do already indicate, knowledge work encompasses an enormously diverse set of tasks and jobs. Clearly, the nature of the work in these jobs varies all over the map.

Take for example the tasks of a software customer support technician versus those of a marketing strategist. A customer support technician often relies on a small number of routines to solve a particular customer problem, identifying the nature of the problem and then linking it to one or more pre-conceived solutions provided within a database of solutions.

The job of a marketing strategist, on the other hand, is often much more imaginative and original. In this case, he or she may analyze marketing data and combine it with personal insight, intuition, etc. in order to design a new strategy (e.g., gaining market share). The process of converting a mass of raw information from many sources into something as abstract as a strategy is normally a much more complex and creative act than “merely” solving a customer’s technical problem. In addition, this kind of knowledge worker frequently does not know for quite some time whether his or her activities solved a particular problem.

We believe that these apparent differences can be captured by two “ideal type” categories of knowledge workers: *Knowledge Executors* and *Knowledge Generators*. This distinction parallels the work of Richard Florida, who studied what he calls the “creative class” and identified a broad range of personal values, work styles, and motivations that are distinctive to that group of individuals.

Knowledge Executors are those workers who apply existing knowledge by manipulating information through processes created or invented by others. Knowledge Generators, on the other hand, create new knowledge by manipulating information to develop new solutions to a given problem, or to create new concepts or products.

It must be stressed that we view Knowledge Executors and Knowledge Generators as “ideal types” and that we do not believe that any single type of knowledge worker can be placed neatly or exclusively in one category or the other. Rather, we propose that all knowledge work entails both kinds of activities but that each particular job can be placed along a continuum: some jobs entail more knowledge execution than knowledge generation, and visa versa.

However, the dominant question for anyone considering a flexible or distributed work program is whether someone’s work activities could be performed just as effectively from a remote location (or multiple locations over time). While most of the examples cited here are reasonably location-independent, there are often special circumstances that “bind” an individual to a specific workplace for at least some portion of his or her work time.

For example, an engineer working with specialized high-tech equipment would most likely not be able to afford multiple installations of that equipment at, say, several corporate locations and a home office. And some knowledge worker tasks do require physical proximity to other people. While there have been some advances in surgical robotics, we don’t expect to see surgeons performing remote operations from their spare bedrooms in the very near future.

The difficulty with generalizations about knowledge workers is that knowledge work is inherently diverse and varied. Almost any definition of a knowledge-based job will include some tasks that are essentially location-independent, but only some jobs have become totally “post-geographic.”

That’s part of what makes organizational initiatives to foster distributed work so inherently challenging and frustratingly complex. As we noted in our newsletter series and white paper on distributed work last fall (“[How Come Distributed Work is Still the Next Big Thing?](#)”), this whole topic remains more an art than a science.

As usual, your comments and reactions are more than welcome. As always, please send your thoughts to us at comments@thefutureofwork.net.

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4) BEST OF THE BLOG

Here's a small sampling of excerpts/lead-ins from our recent weblog posts. Please get in the habit of reading the [Future of Work weblog](#) regularly – bookmark it, or if you have an RSS news reader, subscribe to it. And please contribute as well. We're more than happy to reprint your stories, or to consider featuring you as a Guest Writer. We believe we're creating a unique knowledge base of what's going on out there today, and what's going to be going on tomorrow. If you want to learn about the future of work, [our blog](#) is the place to go (along with this very newsletter, of course). Just click on each headline below to visit the full original blog post.

[The Kalamazoo Promise](#) (February 3)

Our good friend and colleague (and *Future of Work* member) **Candace Fitzpatrick** sent us a link to a very intriguing story about Kalamazoo, Michigan. We'd already heard about the "Kalamazoo Promise," but the story Candace sent us ("[Promise\(d\) Land](#)") that appeared in Jeff Thredgold's January 17 "Weekly Economic Update" newsletter (free to subscribers) is the best description we've come across about this very creative effort to revitalize a depressed regional economy. So what is the Kalamazoo Promise? Put simply, it's a commitment by some of Kalamazoo's citizens to provide every local high school graduate with a college education. . .

[Taking Charge of Your Job - and Your Life](#) (February 6)

There was a wonderfully interesting op-ed piece in [USA Today](#) today. Called "[Get a job? No, make a job,](#)" it's a good story about the rise of entrepreneurialism and education for entrepreneurs in the United States. The core message: there's a whole lot more self-employed "free agents" and entrepreneurs building businesses than ever before - but our education systems simply don't do much to teach people how to start or run a business. . .

[Business Week's Take on the Virtual Workplace](#) (February 12)

[Business Week](#) has just published a great series of articles on the virtual workplace. **Rachael King** wrote the articles, which appear as part of the [CEO Guide to Technology](#). We are particularly pleased about the articles, because **Charlie Grantham** and I contributed significantly to Rachael's research, and actually pointed her to several of the case studies she cites. We're especially happy that the [WIRED West Michigan project](#) (sponsored by the [West Michigan Strategic Alliance](#)) and the [Routt County, Colorado, location-neutral business survey](#) are featured, since those are two of the most innovative community-based examples of the "New Economy" that we're aware of. . .

[Capital One's Future of Work program featured on NPR](#) (February 14)

Our friends at the [WIRED West Michigan project](#) alerted me to a good story about mobile work that was broadcast yesterday on [NPR's Marketplace program](#) ("[Business moves toward the mobile office](#)"). Marketplace's website not only offers a podcast of the broadcast (just click on "Listen to this program"), but also includes a full text transcript that you can read at your leisure. And for a bonus, check out the selection of great photos of the Capital One workplace in Richmond, Virginia. . .

Will the Future of Work Include Prizes for Innovation? (February 22)

Everyone's looking for the best way to stimulate innovation and creativity these days. Indeed, I'm seeing more and more references to "the innovation economy" as a way of describing the fundamental economic transformation underway across the world. So I was intrigued last week when I came across an article in the *New York Times* last week titled "[Silicon Valley Meets 'American Idol' With Prizes to Inspire Inventors](#)." The basic idea is to establish more competitive "races" like the one that the X Prize Foundation set up to stimulate invention of a private spacecraft. . . .

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5)THE WDC BOOKSHELF: STUFF WE'RE READING RIGHT NOW

Every once in a while we like to share with you what it is that we at WDC are reading. We are admittedly book junkies always on the lookout for new and interesting insights into our favorite subject, the future of work. So here are a few of the books that we're working our way through at present.

Note: we've included links to the where you can find these books on Amazon.com, but we want to be completely candid that we have no financial arrangements with Amazon or any other booksellers; we just want to make it easy for you to read what others are saying about our favorite authors and tomes.

So, in no particular order, here's what you'd find on our desks and nightstands this month.

The Great Good Place, by Ray Oldenburg

This is the classic discussion of shared workplaces and other public places. Oldenburg is generally credited with coining the term "third place" (neither home nor corporate office) as a way to describe all those more-or-less public places where people gather to be together, experience camaraderie, and – occasionally – get some work done. Oldenburg is a sociologist who actually spent many long hours watching people gathering in third places – "cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons and other hangouts at the heart of a community." He wasn't specifically looking for what we now call "remote work centers," but his pioneering discovery of third places has inspired us for many years.

Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything, by Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams.

Don Tapscott is another great thinker, though he comes from a very different place than Ray Oldenburg. This book is the product of research carried out by Tapscott's New Paradigm think tank. It lays out in clear, precise language the essential transformation that is sweeping the global economy today. It's not just about "open source," although that radical approach is central to the transformation. It's also about the growing predominance of business-to-consumer interactive communication, and about what happens when people both learn from each other and teach other at the same time. A great overview of the dramatic but incomplete overhaul of our economic base that is still evolving in largely unseen and unexpected ways.

[Measuring Workplace Performance](#) (Second Edition), by Michael O’Neill

Linking workplace (or, as we like to call it, work environment) design to business performance has been the “holy grail” for facilities and real estate professionals for decades. It’s clearly not an easy task because workplaces are “only” the context in which people think, communicate, and create knowledge. There’s so many other variables affecting business outcomes that it seems almost the height of arrogance to claim that workplace design can actually affect the bottom line in any way other than cost reduction. Yet Michael O’Neill of Herman Miller comes closer to anyone we know at establishing that linkage. The book is a bit “heavy” and academic, but we recommend it to anyone interested in thinking through how where you are impacts what you do.

[Nuts, Bolts, and Jolts](#), by Richard Moran

This is a slightly different kind of book. Rich Moran is a good friend, and a very smart manager whose observations about life in the office and on the road are right up there with Scott Adams and Dilbert of cube farm fame.

Rich is also the author of *Never Confuse a Memo with Reality: And Other Business Lessons too Simple Not to Know*, *Cancel the Meeting, Keep the Doughnuts*; and *Fear No Yellow Stickies*, whose titles should give you some idea of the way his mind works. *Nuts, Bolts, and Jolts* is subtitled “Fundamental Business and Life Lessons You Must Know,” and it’s the one I pick up when I’m too soured on life to take any of my other books seriously – when I need some R&R from the real world some good chuckles, and some “ah-ha’s.” You won’t regret adding this one to the pile – and I suspect you’ll get through it, as I have, a lot more quickly than many of the weightier tomes also recommended here.

By the way, Rich has just begun a blog that offers him another forum and all of us the help we need to get through those long days in our many offices, airports, and hotel rooms. Check him out regularly at <http://richmoran.livejournal.com>.

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6) IN OUR HUMBLE OPINION: WE NEED A NEW NEW URBANISM

Commentary by Charlie Grantham and Jim Ware

Buford and the boys are off on Spring hiatus down in good ‘ol Cancun again. We asked them to check out the immigration patterns of folks headed that way from up north, where it has been so nasty this year. Anyway, in their humble absence we’re on our own.

So here goes. Y’all let us know how we do without the gang.

Now, if Don Quixote can tip at windmills, we can take on a sacred cow now and then. We know we’re going to catch a load of doo-doo with this one, but what the hey?

New Urbanism----yeech! We've had it up to our eyeballs on this one. The language alone is killing us. "Nontraditional design," "transit-oriented development," and "traditional neighborhood development." Come on people, are we in some sort of mind-blender committee meeting chaired by a clear-speaking-deficit-syndrome Dilbert, or what?

Look, this all got started by a few (at the time) radical architects and urban planners, among them our beloved **Jane Jacobs** ([*The Death and Life of Great American Cities*](#) – link is to Amazon.com) and **Louis Mumford** ([*From The Ground Up: Observations On Contemporary Architecture, Housing, Highway Building, And Civic Design*](#)).

Hey, we admit those folks were all very well-intended and even relatively intelligent, and we know they were reacting to suburban sprawl and a highly regrettable but utter dependence on automobiles for transportation.

We're all for that, but as with any fashion trend, this one has gotten really warped out of shape. You know, the trend where something gets more and more exaggerated until it becomes funny and meaningless. Think of hem lines for women's skirts and tail fins on cars. New Urbanism has turned into the tail fin of urban planning. Cute at first, almost without functional meaning, and fast becoming some sort of snob appeal thing. Listen, we are not alone here (or in the Universe, but that's another story).

To be clear, we're not taking political sides in this debate, although some of you know we have been known to do that on rare occasions (insert a smiley face here, dear Editor).

From the right: Some members of the right wing view new urbanism as a "collectivist plot designed to rob Americans of their civil freedoms, property rights, and free-flowing traffic." That is soooo good we swear we can't make it up. Check out Wikipedia.org for all the academic footnotes and such.

And from the other side of the aisle: "New urbanism is an example of capitalistic excess, aligned with forces of greed that would purge the underclass from urban areas for the benefit of the gentrifying elite."

Okay, okay, let's come back from the brink, lest we get trapped in a Britney Spears kind of meltdown thing. Anyone looking for a high and tight buzz haircut?

So what is this "New Urbanism" shtick and why don't we like it?

In our view it's a very retrograde design based on a belief that, if only if we could go back to the neighborhoods and – here's the stretch – communities we had before the automobile everything would be way cool. New Urbanists operate off a set of thirteen principles (see [*New Urbanism: Comprehensive Report & Best Practices Guide*](#), by Robert Steuteville, Philip Langdon, et al., Ithaca, New York, 2006 – paperback edition). Those principles include everything being within walking distance and mixed housing types so you can have young, old, rich, poor, kids, and childless couples all together and they'll gather with lemonade at the soccer field and have community barbecues every Saturday.

Yeah, yeah, the cynicism crept in there a bit. We think that stuff's all well and good, but building cool housing, limiting auto traffic, and making sure everyone has a maple tree in the front yard and a cute picket fence isn't going to create a **community!**

And community is what people want, right here in River City (and there in Maple City and Centerville and even in Chicago Heights and the Bronx and just about everywhere else too). So, In Our Humble Opinion (gotcha!), the whole New Urbanism thing is good only as far as it goes. Getting to the twenty yard line with no touchdown won't win many games.

What's missing? Plenty. Let's start at the top and work our way down.

Technology. Nowhere do we hear any talk about how IT can help foster a sense of community. Now, we may be missing something and we're sure some wise butt out there will send us the link to **the** article we've missed.

Now for a little color and personalization. Charlie actually lived for a time in one of those "new urban" developments that actually organized itself via the Internet for community action.

There was even a resident geek who went around and helped set up home networks for everyone and acted as the neighborhood tech guru. Today that would be a community ISP with bulletin board hosts and resident bloggers. And, get this, when Charlie and his neighbors asked the developer (while the community was still being built out) to add in more bandwidth capability, he said he didn't think network access was all that important. After all, everyone already had phone service.

Give us a break! Today there are plenty of stories out there about local schools with home pages, community bulletin boards, blogs, and even web cams so the parents can observe what's happening during the day. The City of San Francisco posts recordings of Supervisors' meetings on the web. And that's only what we know about firsthand.

Modern transportation technologies. Now this one has potential. Designing and building neighborhoods to cut down on the need for automobiles is a very cool thing to do, especially now that Al Gore has a little gold statue in his living room. But, and here we go again, how do neighborhoods get connected to each other? Think about it: if you have all those little villages where people can walk anywhere what happens when they want to visit another village?

Should they fire up the ol' horseless carriage and drive five miles to the next village center? Wrong-a-mundo, Ollie. Here's where we really find fault with New Urbanism: it doesn't extend out far enough. Start thinking **regions** instead of towns; start dealing with about 50,000 or so people, not 10,000. And while you're at it, please tell us how you intend to support lifestyles where the average commute adds up to 1,000 miles a week as loads of folks trek individually from New Urban Center 01 to New Urban Center 08.

Yes, we have some answers to that one (surprise!). How about community-owned electric transportation, like electric [Zipcars](#) or [City Carsharing](#)? Or even, heaven forbid, mass transit. And for those of you who are interested we did a little white paper a few months back on how changes in transportation technology, such as railroads and very light jets, have a

direct impact on urban planning ([“Back to the Future: Small Cities, Small Planes, Big Deal”](#)). The point is that the connections to this larger transportation grid have to be incorporated into urban planning. Give me a jet and you can keep the granny cottage.

Unique branding. If you have seen one Celebration, Florida, or Carefree, Arizona, you’ve seen ‘em all. Honestly, go out there and look around at some New Urban developments. Check out Kentlands, Maryland, Verrado in Phoenix, Arizona, or pick one of your own. Those places have a “brand” as about as community-specific as McDonald’s (no offense; we do like Big Macs on occasion even if our arteries don’t).

And yes, Martha, we do believe people want to live in places that have a unique identity. New Urbanism started as a reaction to the Levittown syndrome and it has, as a fashion, become like hairstyles that are so unique they all look the same (by the way, what is it with people putting Elmer’s Glue in their hair to make it stick up all over? We used to call that “bedhead” but these days it looks like half the population is having a bad hair day by design). So, anyway, pay attention to the strengths you’ve already got in your community, hang on to ‘em for dear life, and bring the whole world in on your secret. You might just discover that there are whole lot more folks out there who’d move to your town in a flash if they just knew about it.

Admittedly, we’ve seen *some* uniqueness coming out of some of the most recent New Urbanism developments like Stapleton outside Denver; but we remain more than a tad skeptical that variety will be baked into the design recipe going forward.

Social factors. This is our big quack. We’ve become enamored lately of the social institutions and practices that come together to create genuine communities. While physical design is certainly an enabler, it is **not** a sufficient condition for human beings to form communities. And that, dear hearts, is our rant: people want community, not just a “space” to live in.

Let’s talk social action; diversity; performing arts; quality schools and libraries (with programs, not just books); civic involvement; and, yes siree, faith-based and other voluntary organizations. We just don’t see much consideration of these factors in the current state of practice among the New Urbanism gurus.

Hey, we may just end up starting our own little “New New Urbanism” movement We might even change our names to something that sounds more French. Good Lord, we could be famous, have limo’s pick us up, and people might actually write down what we say, believe it, and, and, and then there would be this movie, and we’d have “associates” to write these rants on our behalf.

Oh come on, get over it. We’re starting to believe our own press. Sorry to digress – here comes the surge (or, as we prefer, the escalation). In Our Humble Opinion (Part Two!) this whole New Urbanism fad will be rescued, transformed, enhanced, awakened (thanks to Melissa Etheridge) and extended by a healthy injection of clear thinking from the environmental specialists and other “green” folks who know how to link aesthetics to practicality.

New Urbanism may be a good first step, but transforming a whole way of life is a long journey. Just don't ever kid yourself that New Urbanism is **the** answer. And don't ever forget that what really matters is asking the right question.

Please direct your comments to comments@thefutureofwork.net. We'd love to publish your reactions and suggestions. And thanks for listening.

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This issue of *Future of Work Agenda* was produced by Jim Ware and Charlie Grantham of the Work Design Collaborative, LLC.

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