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<th>Human factor in the multimedia environment</th>
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Paper No. 33
Key points of presentation:

1. People have always preferred multimedia to single medium when it comes to communication. We have enriched our communication, for example, by adding pictures, graphs, and tables to boring text. As technology advances, we have now combined sound and image to produce movies or videos. Multimedia have therefore always been known to us. So why the recent fuss? The short answer is .... digitalization.

2. Digitalization is the process or better yet, the capability to reduce all those various media in their original analog formats to digits, 0 and 1. This capability gives a common platform for all the various media to converge and integrate with one another. Such capability, supported by high speed transmission and powerful compression technology have created a very exciting multimedia environment such as the information superhighway as we know it today.

3. In this exciting Multimedia Environment, people will be able to reach out from their homes or businesses to exchange information in the form of voice, video, data, and images in any combination they need, with no more effort than it takes to dial a phone call today.

4. Here’s how Bell Atlantic Chief Executive, Raymond Smith describes the exciting multimedia environment: "Take entertainment and add interactivity and you have video-on-demand, games, and the ability to change camera angles or call up more information on-screen. Add the ability to make transactions and you transform traditional retailing, banking, gaming, and advertising. Add the power to communicate - the ability to call up a real live person for a personal interaction-and you combine the efficiency of the electronic 'superstore' with the intimacy of the corner grocery."
Telephone and cable companies in Asia are busy upgrading their networks to bring such services to the consumers. One of the most ambitious interactive testbeds, the "full service network" is now being developed by Hong Kong Telecom, which initially will offer viewers a selection of movies and an "interactive shopping and services mall."

Why is Hong Kong Telecom and one or two other Asian telecom companies diverting their energy from managing and marketing their telecom network to marketing the contents through their network? It is because once the networks are built, the key to competitive success will be in programming. "Pure common carriers won't win, because there will be multiple networks for customers to choose from in the future, if you plan to compete and win in this market, you better have the right content, which can be packaged to meet highly individualized customer needs."

6. In the bigger context, many companies such as telecoms, banks, software companies are all caught up in the convergence movement caused by digitalization. Telecoms are getting themselves into the entertainment business by providing video on demand. Many banks have waken up to the fact that they are really in the information process business, and they are now offering services on internet. Microsoft has long recognized the information processing aspect of banks, and has tried hard to get into the banking business, had they not been stopped by the Justice Department.

7. Digitalization has caused many industries to have to redraw their traditional operations parameters. Examples used in the speech ....Federal Express .... Levi....Publishing...libraries

8. Now that we have got a glimpse of what this exciting multimedia environment has in store for us, we can explore the human factor in it. The human factor can cover a wide range of topics such as acceptance/rejection of multimedia; exploiting the opportunities/threatened by multimedia. To me, it is a bit futile to even discuss acceptance or rejection, and so on. It would be more meaningful to talk about the impact on people on the assumption that if we don't embrace it, we will likely be left out. What I will concentrate on therefore is to explore the impact has on people from a human resource management perspective.

9. One thing is clear. In the multimedia environment, consumers will expect most companies to start changing how services are to be provided to them... in a multimedia way, that is.

10. To win, or even to just survive, companies will have no choice but to reconfigure how they do business in the multimedia environment. The traditional focus of information flowing up and down the organization will have to give way to horizontal information flow and breaking down
functional silos. Within the organization, it will have to call for cooperation of many disciplines. External cooperation and collaboration between companies and industries will become important as more and more industries converge. Foes will become friends and friends will have to become better friends. On the other hand, some new foes will come from the most unexpected industries. For example, few banks would consider Microsoft their potential competitor, but overnight, Microsoft could become their competitor #1.

11. As information flow across organization becomes more important, companies will tend to become flatter so that fewer up-down information bottlenecks will exist. Flatter organization will bring forth many HR issues, two important ones are
   • wide span of control
   • manage information flow rather than people

12. The power of microprocessors doubles every 18 months. Andy Grove certainly believes in it, and Intel is also living it. The speed of technological and other knowledge advancement is phenomenal. Organisations as well as people must be able to keep up and capitalize on the new development in technology and other knowledge. Learning organisations are no longer just buzz words, but they must become realities. In addition, building a learning organization is not enough, and will render the effort useless individuals also know how to develop themselves consciously and systematically.