'CliffsNotes' Book Club Recap

Join the '__CliffsNotes' club__—where there's no pressure to pre-read the book, no membership required, no cost, and lots of discussion in just 90 minutes. Each month, you will hear a __summary of highlights__ from a recently-published business book. This discussion summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. We'll keep you "in the know" on the latest and greatest concepts and models. __Register here__ for upcoming events.
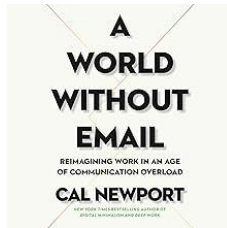
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A World Without Email
By Cal Newport

Discussion Highlights

Presented by Carla Dancy Smith

Intro/ Context:

Hyperactive Hive Mind

- 1980s email introduced "low-friction communication at scale."
- 2019, the average worker was sending and receiving 126 business emails per day (1 every 4 minutes)
- Self reports - people spend 3 hours a day sending / receiving emails

→ Issue is not the tool but the way of working that email introduced "Hyperactive Hive Mind"

"A workflow centered around ongoing conversation fueled by unstructured and unscheduled messages delivered through digital communication tools like email and instant messenger services."

Why are we OK with this??!! Quote: Email is NOT a job!

Can we reject the attraction of an always-on, hyperactive mind

Part 1: The Case Against Email

1. Email reduces productivity
   - 2011 Organization Studies - average worker divided workday into 88 "episodes" - 60 of which were dedicated to communications
   - Univ of California, Irvine studied 40 employees over 12 days - workers checked inboxes on average 77 times a day, with the most being 400 times daily
   - Emails increased in 2005 to 69/ day to 92/day in 2011
   - 2018 study by RescueTime - analyzed 50,000+ workers: checking email or instant messages once every six minutes. Longest uninterrupted time was no more than 40 mins
   - The Sequential Brain in a Parallel World

2. Email makes us miserable

- 2017- French labor law "Right to Disconnect" (companies >50 people required to have policies about email after work hours)
- Ariana Huffington's company created "Thrive Away" - when someone's on vacation, the sender gets a message that their message was automatically deleted
- Email creates more work: when not allowed to email, they slightly increased the friction (to make the request) that resulted in a reduced amount of requests made for someone's time and attention

3. Email has a mind of its own

- Unintentional Drivers that drove us to Hive Minds
    - Hive Mind Driver #1: The Hidden costs of Asynchrony
    - Hive Mind Drive #2: The cycle of responsiveness
    - Hive Mind Drive #3: The Caveman at the Computer Screen

Part 2: Principles for a World Without Email

4. The Attention Capital Principle

Analogy - The early 21st century car factory approach to work - "craft method:, updated to the industrial age assembly line had great impact on manufacturing - innovation - same creative thinking applied to addressing email overwhelm

Progress made with manual workers, but what about knowledge workers?
Peter Drucker calls the push to make knowledge work more productive is the "central challenge" of our time.

The necessity and potential of mindset shift is the foundation for Principles in Part 2.

The Attention Capital Principle
The productivity of the knowledge sector can be significantly increased if we identify workflows that better optimize the human brain's ability to sustainably add value to information.

What do better deployments of attention capital look like
- switch focus from optimizing people to optimizing processes
- separating specialized work form administrative tasks
- reducing the raw quantity of work expected to be produced

5. The Process Principle

Looked at industrial engineering and productivity advances - Pullman brass works example - informal vs process

The Process Principle
Introducing smart production processes to knowledge work can dramatically increase performance and make the work less draining.

Case studies
Optimize: "digital sunset"; use tools - Flow, Trello, Slack; importance of process expressed form top; expectation that every employee spend the first 90 minutes every day in a deep work block - "you need time away from inputs to figure out how to best systematize those inputs."

6. The Protocol Principle

Premise idea: by adding complexity to the rules we use to structure our communication, the actual amount of information required by the interactions can be reduced.

The Protocol Principle
Designing rules that optimize when and how coordination occurs in the workplace is a pain in the short term but can result in significantly more productive operation in the long-term.

Protocols might include:
- Meeting scheduling protocols - eliminate back and forth messages
- Office hours protocols - reduce cognitive cycle, and the bouncing back and forth
- Client protocols - manage expectations (put in contract)
- Nonpersonal email protocols - free from individuals
- Short message protocols
- Status meeting protocols - example "huddles" in hospitals

7. The Specialization Principle

The Specialization Principle

In the knowledge sector, working on fewer things, but doing each thing with more quality and accountability, can be the foundation for significantly more productivity.

Less can be more, work reduction strategies

- Outsource what you don't do well
- Trade accountability for autonomy

Sprint, don't wander - agile thinking

Super Charge support

- Structure support
- Build smart interfaces between support and specialists
- Simulate your own Support staff - partition your time, do both roles

Conclusion - The 21st Century Moonshot

Have opportunity to make knowledge work more productive and more fulfilling