

**News****What is your IT organisation doing to fuel workers' passion?**

John Hagel and John Seely Brown DECEMBER 7, 2010

---

Passion drives performance. What is your IT organisation doing to fuel passion at every level?

In our opening column, we talked about the decades-long decline in financial performance. Return on assets across all companies have fallen 75 per cent for all public companies in the US since 1965. A profoundly destabilising technology infrastructure is a big part of this transformation.

Another key metric in decline is passion. According to the just-released 2010 Shift Index, four of five workers surveyed are not passionate about their jobs.

Sure, they are working longer hours during the downturn, but that doesn't mean they are engaged or that they will stick with you when the economy improves. Without truly passionate workers, companies will find it difficult to turn round the steady deterioration in financial performance.

Passionate workers are more likely to take challenges and transform them into opportunities.

But passionate workers are easily frustrated by institutional, technical, and cultural barriers that make it difficult to learn and connect with others.

With the right technology infrastructure, however, organisations can fuel rather than frustrate passion. Here's how.

**Disposition for passion**

Passionate workers possess two valuable dispositions.

**Questing:** when asked how they react to challenges, passionate employees we surveyed most often responded that they see an opportunity to learn something or solve problems rather than viewing the unusual as a nuisance or a distraction.

Passionate workers seek out challenges to test their abilities, rather than waiting for them to surface. The passionate are twice as likely as disengaged workers to display this questing disposition.

As a leader, you want people with questing dispositions to move to the next level of performance improvement.

**Connecting:** Passionate workers have a strong desire to reach out and connect with others who can help them get better faster. We found passionate workers are twice as likely as disengaged workers to have a connecting disposition. They exchange knowledge outside the firm through conferences and social media much more often than workers who lack passion.

Our research suggests that effective knowledge exchange will be crucial to performance improvement.

These dispositions of questing and connecting reinforce each other – both positively and negatively. If you have a questing disposition, but you lack the ability to connect, you can't learn new things as easily from others. If you have a connecting disposition, but can't focus your attention on interesting challenges, you're not as likely to use connections you establish to improve performance.

**Implications for technology**

Since these dispositions are increasingly central to sustained performance improvement, the question for IT organisations becomes how to create the conditions that support passionate workers.

Most IT organisations have a hard time facilitating people with connecting and questing dispositions. Many people inside big corporations, in particular, view enabling tools such as social media or cloud computing as toys, distractions, or security breaches. In fact, from our experience in discussions with a range of IT executives, most IT departments are ambivalent about, if not actively resisting, the next generation of technologies.

But to help workers pursue their passion, leaders must:

### **Change the mindset**

Most executives are deeply suspicious of workers' passions, unless they define passion simply as working longer hours to get the usual rote tasks done. Instead, passion is the quest for unexpected challenges. Questing and connecting are huge opportunities to drive performance improvement, if you can encourage and support these traits.

### **Identify relevant edges**

The edges of your firm and your industry – whether geographic, demographic, or between companies – offer the environments where questing and connecting dispositions flourish.

Edges are fertile ground for innovation, attracting risk takers who can drive knowledge creation and economic growth. They are where the questing and the connecting dispositions have the most freedom. Find the edges with the most opportunity and the least resistance, and mobilise passionate people to these edges so they can attack performance challenges emerging there.

### **Deploy the right platforms and tools**

New technology can significantly enhance the impact of passionate employees. Cloud computing, and the sophisticated analytic tools that can be accessed in the cloud, provide individuals with the resources they need to experiment and improvise in addressing performance challenges.

Rather than waiting in a long line to receive resources from a central IT organisation, employees can use the emerging cloud infrastructure and access everything from raw server capacity to sophisticated research tools. They can rapidly scale up and back IT resources and take promising approaches to market.

But it's not just cloud computing. Passionate workers can now use social networks to stay in touch with a much larger group of individuals. Shared workspaces provide an increasingly rich environment for these individuals to connect with each other and others outside the firm jointly to develop promising approaches to difficult performance challenges.

In fact, these two categories of IT, cloud computing and social software, weave together in powerful ways to integrate both the questing and connecting dispositions of passionate workers. Employees begin to see the compounding effects of connecting with relevant and diverse expertise wherever it resides and combining that expertise with a rich array of IT resources to pursue challenging performance quests.

As passionate workers on the edge of the enterprise demonstrate the kind of impact they can achieve, less engaged workers start to see how much they can accomplish through their initiatives, and passion begins to build in them, as well. As the less engaged connect with more passionate workers, they manifest more of the questing and connecting dispositions. Passion starts to spread.

Emerging technologies play a central role in breaking down many of the institutional barriers that frustrate passionate workers. Rather than feeling blocked, these workers begin to feel more empowered. As passionate employees thrive, companies in turn will find themselves in a better position to deal with performance pressures. Instead of becoming a source of increasing stress, challenges become an opportunity for passionate workers to attain levels of performance never before possible.

*John Hagel III, and John Seely Brown are co-chairman and independent co-chairman, respectively, of the Deloitte Center for the Edge*

*Their books include [The Power of Pull](#), [The Only Sustainable Edge](#), [Out of the Box](#), [The Social Life of Information](#), [Net Worth](#), and [Net Gain](#).*

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2019. All rights reserved.