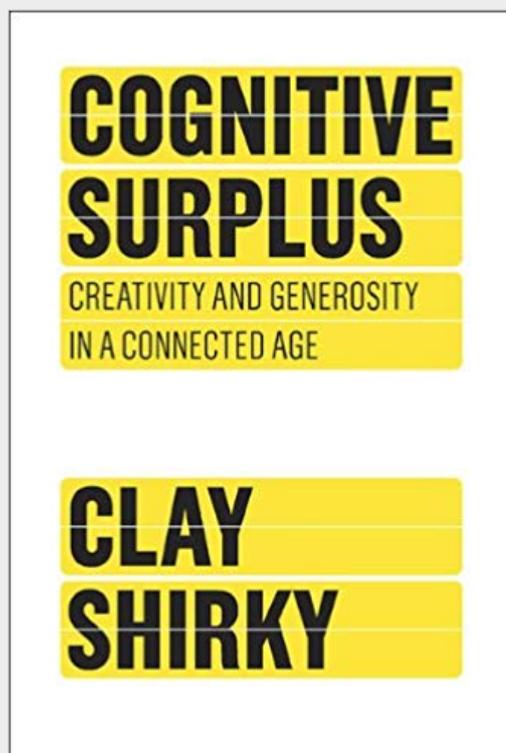


Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age

by Clay Shirky



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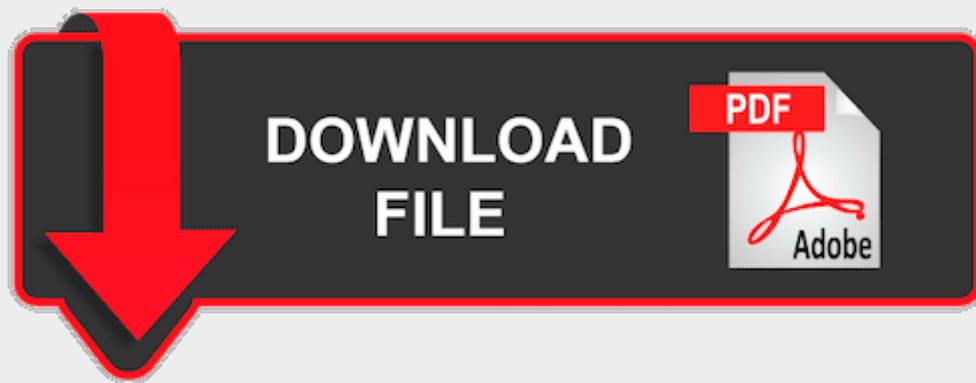
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The author of the breakout hit *Here Comes Everybody* reveals how new technology is changing us from consumers to collaborators, unleashing a torrent of creative production that will transform our world. For decades, technology encouraged people to squander their time and intellect as passive consumers. Today, tech has finally caught up with human potential. In *Cognitive Surplus*, Internet guru Clay Shirky forecasts the thrilling changes we will all enjoy as new digital technology puts our untapped resources of talent and goodwill to use at last. Since we Americans were suburbanized and educated by the postwar boom, we've had a surfeit of intellect, energy, and time-what Shirky calls a cognitive surplus. But this abundance had little impact on the common good because television consumed the lion's share of it-and we consume TV passively, in isolation from one another. Now, for the first time, people are embracing new media that allow us to pool our efforts at vanishingly low cost. The results of this aggregated effort range from mind expanding-reference tools like Wikipedia-to lifesaving-such as Ushahidi.com, which has allowed Kenyans to sidestep government censorship and report on acts of violence in real time. Shirky argues persuasively that this cognitive surplus-rather than being some strange new departure from normal behavior-actually returns our society to forms of collaboration that were natural to us up through the early twentieth century. He also charts the vast effects that our cognitive surplus-aided by new technologies-will have on twenty-first-century society, and how we can best exploit those effects. Shirky envisions an era of lower creative quality on average but greater innovation, an increase in transparency in all areas of society, and a dramatic rise in productivity that will transform our civilization. The potential impact of cognitive surplus is enormous. As Shirky points out, Wikipedia was built out of roughly 1 percent of the man-hours that Americans spend watching TV every year. Wikipedia and other current products of cognitive surplus are only the iceberg's tip. Shirky shows

how society and our daily lives will be improved dramatically as we learn to exploit our goodwill and free time like never before. Watch a Video



Reviews of the **Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age** by Clay Shirky

1. Teonyo

Cognitive Surplus is a very narrowly defined book that offers up few thoughts of interest and mostly dwells on information that likely is already known by many using social media, or those like myself who have read a few books about the media, including some of the heavyweights (McLuhan, Boorstin, Gleick, etc.).

The author Clay Shirky looks at social media through the means, motives, and opportunity of users. Criminologists will recognize these are the three key elements of any investigation of a crime. It's a mildly imaginative methodology for Shirky's purpose which is to examine how the global surplus of cognition, made possible by our relative abundance of discretionary time, is being put to use through activities organized around social networks.

Frankly, I have a tough time defining the audience for this book. There is precious little uncovered here that would inform, or interest, even more intellectual users of the mobile net, or so I would imagine. I know from discussions with my 15-year-old son that there's not much here. I think I can cover it with him as I chauffeur him around tomorrow.

For instance, Shirky makes a point of informing the reader that the mobile net gives users control over expressing themselves, whether it's artistic, professional, or even bumming a ride to work over a carpool platform. This freedom is being used in a lot of silly pursuits, but also in exercises to organize democratic activities, shed light on global news events, or ease

daily living. In a stab at profundity, Shirky uses the metaphor of social connective tissue to describe the social network, which in his estimation is primarily mobile.

But if there's little for those who populate the social network, then there's less for those whose work and reading informs their understanding of the net. Disclosure: I'm an IT analyst, but have never researched or analyzed social media. That said, there was confirmation of what I already knew, but not a single idea that was new to me.

There are much more informative books on the net and social media (I've reviewed some of them) for those interested in understanding the phenomena that is shaping our age.

2. Gindian

Clay Shirky captured the ethos of social media with his book "Here comes everybody." He follows that book up with one that concentrates on the fundamentals of turning our cognitive surplus into value. Cognitive Surplus provides a compelling and clear description of the fundamentals of social media and collaboration as well providing principles that are guiding developments and innovation in this space.

There are many books out there that either describe the social media phenomenon or profess to provide a 'recipe' for success. Neither of these approaches can provide you with the insight needed to effectively experiment and deploy social media for the simple reason that social media is changing too fast.

The book is organized into seven chapters that outline a complete way of thinking about social media.

Chapter 1: Gin, Television and Cognitive Surplus sets the context of social change and evolution of free time. This chapter sets the context for the rest of the story giving you the perspective to think through the issues.

Chapter 2: Means discusses the transition of the means of production from one of scarcity controlled by professionals to abundance and the participation of amateurs.

Chapter 3: Motive captures the essence of the reasons why people

contribute their time, talent and attention to collective action. Here Shirky talks about issues of autonomy, competence, generosity and sharing.

Chapter 4: Opportunity recognizes the importance of creating ways of taking advantage of group participation. This chapter contains discussions of behavioral economics and the situations which generates group participation.

Chapter 5: Culture discusses the differences between extrinsic rewards - where people are paid to perform a task and the culture of intrinsic rewards - where compensation comes outside of a formal contracted pay.

Chapter 6: Personal, Communal, Public, Civic this chapter brings it all together giving the book a solid foundation illustrated by compelling examples.

Chapter 7: Looking for the Mouse is as meaty a chapter as any in the book. Normally the final chapter wraps up, but here Shirky discusses 11 principles associated with tapping into cognitive surplus. These principles are among the best in the book.

This book gives you a way to thinking about how people contribute their time, attention and knowledge and therefore how you can think about social media. In my opinion, this is THE BOOK to read if you are new to the subject of mass collaboration, social media, Web 2.0 etc. Here is why:

Strengths

Shirky provides a comprehensive discussion of the fundamentals of cognitive surplus and how those fundamentals have changed over time. This provides the reader with a solid foundation to translate their experiences and understanding into a new media.

The book does not talk about specific technologies. I do not think I read the term blog or wiki too often. This is strength, because frankly the technology is changing is too fast. Shirky does discuss the reasons why applications like Napster met with such success.

The book has a gentle blend of academic and journalistic writing. There is real depth of thinking in the book. One example is the discussion about the fallacy of Gen X being different or irrational. At the same time the writing is clean, well organized and easy to read.

The book provides a thoughtful discussion of the principles that drive social media and give the reader a framework that they can apply to their own situation. A word of warning, you will have to think about your situation and these ideas

Challenges

Readers looking for a recipe will be somewhat disappointed as Shirky recognizes that social media solutions will continue to depend on design principles more than detailed processes.

The book occasionally falls back into a policy mode as it describes social trends and societal implications. This can draw you off the main argument from time to time.

This book is dense with great insight and thinking. I list this as a challenge for people who are looking for quick read. You will get more than a simple 12-step process from reading this book.

Overall

Overall recommended for anyone who wants to understand the social media and mass collaboration phenomenon. This book is strongly recommended as a first book to start reading about social media.

Business executives reading the book can gain a deeper understanding of social media that will help them avoid the - we're on Facebook so therefore we are social solution.

Technologists will initially be disappointed as this is not a technical book, but I ask them to read the book carefully and think about how technologies create the means to bring collaboration together. After all, successful social collaboration involves a unique blend of social and technical systems. The technical piece is significantly more straightforward than getting the right social systems and this is what this book is all about.

3. Bintahars

Currently, the world's educated population has in excess of one trillion hours of free time each year. For many years, television has been the primary use of this free time, accounting for an average of over twenty hours a week per person. A shift is occurring; the old media that was created by professionals for consumption by others is being replaced by media that everyone can produce, share and, consume. For the first time in human history, people live in a "World where being part of a globally

interconnected group is the normal case for most citizens" (p.24).

Cognitive Surplus: How Technology Makes Consumers into Collaborators is a must read for nonprofit leaders and anyone interested in understanding how technology has the potential to change the world for good on a scale far beyond any scale used to measure previous collaborative ventures for bettering humanity via the use of volunteers. Less of a "how to" and more of a "what could be" book, Cognitive Surplus empowers readers to imagine a different kind of world in which people intentionally and strategically partner with others around shared interests. To facilitate this type of new thinking, Shirky explores the overall motive, means and opportunity related to our current cognitive surplus alongside stories of how groups have already successfully leveraged a portion of it for good.

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