

FOUR DEAD KINGS

— AT WORK —



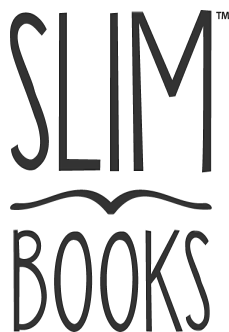
A SlimBook by David Rolston

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Four Dead Kings at Work

The Decentralization and Blending of Work in the 21st Century

A SlimBook by David W Rolston, PhD



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Four Dead Kings at Work: The Decentralization and Blending of Work
in the 21st Century

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Preface

Why *Beige*?

I use the term *beige* throughout this book to represent the *decentralizing* and *blending* that is occurring in many different ways in the workplace. I chose the term based on a common theme that occurs in science fiction books. These books envision a time in the future when the world no longer has distinct races; rather, by then we are all beige.

The most fundamental trends in the workplace today are the tendency to decentralize all aspects of work, and the associated tendency for those decentralized elements to blend together until everything is *beige*. This book is about the forces that are driving the “beiging” process, the long-standing “kings” of the workplace that are being killed off by these forces, and what will arise to replace them.

Introduction

Beige

Not a very exciting topic. In fact, everybody knows that *beige is boring*, and not exactly what you'd think of as the key to understanding the way the world will work in the 21st century. But let me tell you why I think it is.

There are radical changes coming to the workplace. The key to understanding how these changes will impact your life is to understand that the world *is* beige. Work in the 21st century will be decentralized and blended – or *beige* – in several different ways.

1. *The Workplace is now the Beigeplace*

There was a day when the average worker “went to work” every day of the workweek. The lines between home and the workplace were visible and distinct. Now, those lines are rapidly blurring. In the 21st century the workplace can be anywhere. It certainly can be in that old traditional office. But it can also be in a car, in Starbucks, or even in a bed. The workplace has become the *beigeplace* and it will never go back again.

2. *The Segmented Life is now the BeigeLife*

Just as home used to be separated from work by clear lines, work life was also separated from home life. Those lines will be relics of history for life in the 21st century. As the future unfolds, we will all experience being of life where work, pleasure, social interaction, charity activities, and all other aspects of life are blended together in one continuous stream.

3. *The Expert Decision is now the Beige Decision*

In days gone by, “expert decisions” were generally made by individual experts who expected those decisions to be accepted by customers and partners without question. In today’s world, decisions are often challenged by non-experts using information derived from the Internet. For example, the Internet has become a de facto second opinion for almost all medical assessments and decisions. In most cases, today’s patients will arrive at the doctor’s office with a wad of printouts under their arms. The result is that there is much more involvement from customers, clients, patients, and partners in the decision-making process. What in the past would have been a simple case of an “expert decision” has become a “beige decision.”

4. *The Company Employee Is Now the Beige Employee*

In days of yore, there was an implicit contrast that existed between employer and employee. The employee gave loyalty to the company and gained job security in exchange. Even though that contract was implied rather than stated, it did have enormous influence on employees. The duty of loyalty produced company employees who worked for one employer, and only one employer, for their entire working lives. Those days are gone. Employees in the 21st century will engage in many different kinds of work and will work for many different organizations or even for multiple organizations simultaneously. The prototypical worker of the future will be a beige worker who serves many masters.

Four Dead Kings At Work

The first four chapters of this book explain *why* these changes are occurring. They describe the tectonic forces that are fracturing and reforming the world of the past. These forces include the basic growth of the Internet, the explosion of mobility, the migration of data and applications to the cloud, the evolution of the relationships between company and employee, and the explosion of crowd sourcing.

Each of these forces tend to make some aspect of the world more beige by blurring what were previously bright lines of demarcation. All of this blurring, when taken together, is having a radical impact on the workplace and on our lives in general. In particular, several of the huge assumptions that we've always made about our work lives (the "kings" that ruled the workplace) are about to be deconstructed. The impact on our lives will be huge.

Following the chapters about the forces are four chapters that describe the *dead kings* – the major established bedrocks of work that will cease to exist over the next few years. The last chapter describes how the future will evolve after the kings have been dethroned. Let's begin!

Force 1

Connectivity: The Earth Flattener

One of the best-selling books of the last decade is Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat* [2.1]. Although Friedman's excellent book is the best-known reference for the concept of Internet-based globalization, the basic concept of connectivity is actually what drove the formation of the Internet long before Friedman articulated it.

Two decades after its inception, the Internet was still largely unknown and unused by most people. The user interface was arcane and complex, and typically restricted to government programs. The Internet we know and use today was not available. The real impact of the Internet began in the early 1990s when it was opened for commercial use with easy-to-use graphical interfaces that were developed that allow the average consumer to access the vast wealth of information and connection online.

The initial growth of the Internet was staggering. By the end of 1993, the number of users was doubling every three months, and that growth trend has remained ever since. At the time Friedman claimed the world was flat, only 15% of the world's population was connected to the Internet. In the intervening decade, the world has gotten much flatter. Almost eight people are added to the Internet every second. As of 2012, there were about 2.5 billion people (33% of the global world's population) connected to the Internet.

While it's interesting to observe the growth of the Internet in terms of raw numbers, it's also interesting to note *where* the growth is

occurring. Growth in North America during the last decade is an impressive 153%, but the growth in Africa during the same period was 3607%. During this same period, Latin America experienced growth of 1311%, Asia saw growth of 842%, and the Middle East surged with growth of 2640% [2.2]. It's also interesting to note that beyond Internet connections, Africa now has about 700 million cell phone connections [2.3]. This type of growth begins to bring the *entire* world together, not just the developed world.

As of 2012, the Internet was a network of computers. There were almost a billion computers – some of which were smartphones and other mobile devices – but still, only computers [2.4]. In the near future, the Internet will begin to connect billions of devices that aren't computers of any form. Most of these devices will be some type of sensor that allows someone at a great distance to get detailed data about some aspect of some spot on the planet. These sensors will be connected to a myriad of people and devices. Devices as disparate as washing machines, heart monitors, cars, and train tracks will all become part of the Internet.

Historically one of the great dividers of civilization has been language. There are currently around 7,000 spoken languages in the world today [2.5]. As the Internet has expanded around the globe, it has flattened the languages of the world in two ways:

1. *Standardization of English* – For many years, cultural researchers envisioned the development of a single common language that would unite the world. Given the interconnection provided by the Internet (and its initial dominance by the Western world), English is rapidly being adopted as the *lingua franca* of the world.

Business people from around the world are gravitating toward English as the common trade language for their global work.

2. *Automated translation* – We are finally living in the day when automated translation is possible. Applications such as Google Translate already provide extensive online translation services and a number of companies are showing early versions of real-time translation [2.6]

The trend toward rising interconnectivity has also driven the emergence of a new global elite – the *beige business leader*, who understands the coming together of once-separate cultures. These hybrid individuals understand multiple cultures, and are comfortable dealing with diverse business environments around the world. In many cases, these beige leaders will have lived in several different regions of the world.

In the future, no one country, culture, or people group will dominate. The future belongs to those who are beige. Future companies and future leaders will only be successful if they can effectively manage in a beige environment that will have increasingly complex cultural and geographic characteristics.

All of these elements of connectivity are hammering down the earth so that it becomes flatter and flatter every day. The simple magnitude of the Internet connects people around the globe in ways that could only be imagined 30 years ago. Soon the availability of sensors (and other devices on the Internet) will bring fundamentally new forms of connectivity that could only be imagined five years ago

That connectivity has massive secondary effects, including the blending of languages, companies, and cultures. Thus the future is about a beige earth where all aspects of humanity are blended into one homogenous whole. *Individual* countries, cultures, languages, families, and organizations will become increasingly insignificant.

Force 2

Mobile + Cloud: The Anywhere Twins

Over the last few years, most of the growth in connectivity has been in the mobile sector. This phenomenon will have an enormous impact on all aspects of our lives, including the way we work. In 2000, there were less than one billion mobile subscriptions in the world. In 2012, the number of mobile subscriptions exceeds six billion and the number of mobile devices in the world will soon exceed the number of people on earth [3.1]. In 2012, 5.1 billion people owned cell phones whereas only 4.2 billion owned a toothbrush [3.2]. As of 2012, more children owned cell phones than books [3.3].

Mobile connectivity to the Internet began when WiFi was first introduced into laptops. This move toward mobility was important, but the real spark that drove a dramatic social change was introduced in 2003. In this case, it took black to make beige. The Blackberry phone was an amazing device that made it possible to read email on the fly. Blackberry users could read work and personal emails at home, on the subway, or out at dinner. In fact, by 2006, reading emails on the Blackberry was so addictive that it became affectionately known as the “CrackBerry”.

The introduction of the Blackberry also introduced the capability to access the Internet on a mobile device, providing the spark for the mobile Internet revolution. Once the spark was introduced, the fire spread quickly. Soon, other mobile phones and tablets were introduced, causing the average person to have email, Internet access,

and image transmission capabilities with them and available all the time.

Today, there are 1.7 billion mobile Internet connections. Almost 300 billion emails are sent every day and are being read on a mobile device [3.4]. The availability of this huge number of mobile Internet connections provides a foundational capability, but the real utility comes with the availability of software *applications* on mobile devices. The explosion in growth of these types of applications lead to what is now a standard expression: "There's an app for that."

The last piece in the "mobile everything" puzzle was the availability of *cloud-based* applications and data. For years, we've made claims that the availability of the Internet made working from home just like working from the office. And, for all those years, those statements have been only partially true. The availability of email and other forms of basic connectivity made it possible to stay connected. But, in many cases, there were key applications and data that were available only in the office. In fact, they were often only available in specific offices that were connected to a particular computer system. Not only was it impossible to access those applications and data from home, it was also impossible to access them while on a business trip.

For example, in the past, many companies had internal databases that tracked information for thousands of customers. In most cases, that information could only be accessed from inside a specific company office. With the introduction of Salesforce.com, all that information was stored in the cloud and became available to any authorized user at any location with an Internet connection. Many other applications that support cloud-based data have since emerged. For example, consider a

simple but extremely powerful application such as Dropbox [3.10]. With Dropbox, a user can simply drag and drop a file onto the “dropbox” location on a screen. It is then available to that user, and other authorized users, anywhere in the world. Not only is that data available both at home and in the office, but it is available anywhere through the use of mobile devices.

The final nail in the “place” coffin was driven when these applications became available on mobile devices. Today, a huge percentage of applications are available anywhere either as apps running directly on a mobile device or as SaaS applications that run through the cloud. The basic connectivity afforded by the Internet drove the being of the *world* overall. The wide availability of the Internet on mobile devices coupled with the cloud-based availability of data and applications on those Internet-connected devices changed the lives of *individuals*. It removed the natural barriers that have always prevented various aspects of life from intermixing. Once it became possible to read work emails and run work applications from any location, the mixing of work time and personal time (and thus the emergence of the *beigelife*) became inevitable.