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The Decoded Company

Know Your Talent Better Than You Know Your Customers

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

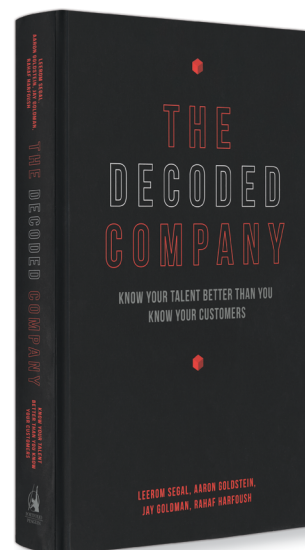
Amazon delights customers with recommendations that are spot on. Google amazes us by generating answers before we've even finished asking a question. These companies know who we are and what we want. The key to their magic is Big Data. Personalizing the consumer experience with the collection and analysis of consumer data is widely recognized as one of the biggest business opportunities of the 21st century. But there is a flip side to this that has largely been missed.

What if we were able to use data about employees to personalize and customize their experience — to increase their engagement, help them learn faster on the job and figure out which teams they should be on? In *The Decoded Company*, the authors outline the six principles they've used to decode work and unlock the maximum potential of their talent, and share success stories from other organizations that have embraced this approach.

The Decoded Company is an actionable blueprint for any company that wants the best from its people and isn't afraid of radical approaches to get it.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- To personalize processes to the individual based on experience and offering training interventions precisely at the teachable moment.
- To codify organizational battle scars using actual code that watches your blind spots and gives your people a decision-making superpower.
- To prevail over hierarchies, reducing bureaucracy, increasing transparency and being wildly inspiring to teams.



by Leerom Segal,
Aaron Goldstein, Jay Goldman
and Rahaf Harfoush

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE DECODED COMPANY

by Leerom Segal, Aaron Goldstein, Jay Goldman and Rahaf Harfoush

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Introduction

Unbelievable advances in consumer technology have changed almost every facet of our lives over the last 20 years, and yet the rickety technology of management that most managers use today is older than they are. *The Decoded Company* argues that the consumer technology revolution sparked by the Internet has only begun to invade the workplace.

Companies like Facebook, Google and Amazon have understood how to leverage data as a sixth sense, how to personalize their customers' experiences with that data, and how to completely embrace the open and participatory nature of the Web. *The Decoded Company* encourages organizations of any size to reject the notion that their people are interchangeable "resources" and to invest in systems and processes that are action-oriented, people-centered, disruptive and sometimes radical.

The benefits of decoding your organization include increased agility and speed, evidence-based decision making, decreased bureaucracy and the ability to predict problems before they occur.

The true advantage of decoding your company is for it to become a center of gravity, attracting and retaining the best talent your industry has to offer and unlocking crazy-high engagement from them. ●

The Decoded Company

The Decoded advantage helps you leverage the knowledge that exists in your company right now to

create a work environment that is not just running more smoothly but is insanely engaging. There are three trends which have laid the groundwork necessary for the model to become possible:

- 1. Informed intuition:** Your systems analyze data to monitor your blind spots and to look for patterns that match lessons learned, literally codified into your company's operating system.
- 2. Personalize everything:** The rejection of one-size-fits-all anything. Personalized services empower organizations to free themselves from the restrictive referee that terrorizes their teams.
- 3. The connected enterprise:** We have become the connected society, constantly networked to our friends and family. Those same principles of openness, transparency and connectedness are destined to transform our business culture no less radically than they have our consumer culture.

At its heart, a Decoded Company is an ongoing experiment. Experimentation requires risk-taking. You have to encourage your people to constantly push limits and test established practices. They have to feel secure enough to fail. Empowering risk-taking means removing obstacles. Your data will tell you what needs to be taken away.

A Decoded Company has made the significant commitment to instrumenting everything it does. It has data coursing through its veins. It has educated and trained its people to be data literate, so they can interpret it and make the right decisions based on it.



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There are three Decoded principles to embrace.

- Principle 1: Technology as a Coach and Trainer
- Principle 2: Data as a Sixth Sense
- Principle 3: Engineered Ecosystems ●

Technology as a Coach

Technology as a coach is the use of data and systems to transform your technology from a referee shouting “offside!” to a coach who provides real-time guidance and recommendations to help your people avoid behavior patterns that have proven problematic in the past. A referee enforces rules; a coach helps your team win. Technology as a coach allows your organization to radically accelerate execution and manage risk without drowning in bureaucracy.

The evolution of the Web as a social platform has given organizations their most powerful tool yet to drive their segmentation efforts into the realm of hyperpersonalization. The Internet makes it easy for anyone to create content — content that can easily be mined for information.

Consumer-focused marketers have long used demographic buckets to segment their target audience by gender, age, marital status, socioeconomic level, geography, etc. Behavioral targeting, in contrast, ignores demographics in favor of the actual behaviors of a potential buyer.

We no longer need to categorize ourselves or our potential customers under broad umbrellas such as gender or socioeconomic level. Instead, we all exist on a continuum where each unique individual can find their place, and products are designed or optimized specifically for them.

Consumers today have the ability to customize nearly every aspect of their lives. Everything is getting the mass personalization treatment, from sneakers to ice cream.

One of the most promising fields of data science is adaptive learning: using data to create algorithms that learn from a user’s behavior and adapt accordingly.

The Recalibration of Employee Expectations

Our daily online experiences as consumers are changing our expectations for the technology systems we interact with at work. As consumer services continue to improve our lives, the gaps between what employees need and what they are getting are becoming more and more evident.

According to a recent study, over a quarter of employees said they regularly downloaded and used noncorporate applications at work that help them work better.

Workplace systems are built around business needs, processes and metrics and are almost always designed and purchased by people who won’t be forced to actually use them. Consumer technologies, on the other hand, are built on user desires: They are intelligent, well designed, useful and personalized, and they deliver what the user wants, when they want it. Simply put, they provide a better experience.

As Decoded Companies well know, their talent is their most important asset and differentiator. Most CEOs, even of non-Decoded Companies, rate talent attraction and retention as the biggest challenges facing their organizations, especially with the projected labor shortage in North America. And yet, despite the looming crisis, it seems that they are investing the lion’s share of their economic resources in developing new markets and attracting new customers instead of in developing the tools that would enable them to better understand their own labor force.

If data can unlock such potential externally with customers, imagine what it could unleash if we applied that same strategic and analytic focus to our own people.

It’s time to start using some of these new data-driven tools to make the workplace more efficient, more personalized and more fun.

The Rule of 5 Degrees

If you start out 5 degrees off course, you will wind up completely missing your mark. Very early and very slight course corrections are much less disruptive than infrequent and massive ones. At its best it’s the difference between feedback (you did something wrong a while ago) and feed forward (based on past data and patterns, it looks like you might be about to do something wrong).

Almost every company gets annual reviews wrong. Sticking to an annual cycle just because that’s the way companies have always done it makes no sense at all. Goals need more fluidity to remain relevant and motivating. Today’s goals need to be renegotiated whenever needed. Plus, continual feedback is critical. The more iterative you get in your feedback, the better. Agility requires you to be able to adjust targets quickly and continue to move forward.

At Clarity, Dan Martell’s seven employees use a dashboard tracking 35 data points that breaks their growth

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target down to a weekly figure, helping them stay on track. The system has more than paid for itself by rewarding his people with deeper engagement and better compensation. Martell gives his employees weekly performance bonuses. “We measure every metric on a weekly basis, and that gives us 52 opportunities to adjust and be flexible, so we can meet our goals.”

At Klick, performance reviews are grounded in a weekly one-on-one coaching session between an employee and their manager. The weekly structure provides Klick’s Genome data system with a series of data points that can be very useful in identifying trends in an employee’s performance. This data enables managers to give highly relevant and personalized feedback.

At Klick, human resources has come to be seen as a support function for the strategic development of talent. The traditional HR department was replaced with what they call a Concierge Service, whose mission is to continually deliver the best possible products and services to the staff. This department is able to respond to specific requests based on the unique needs of individuals and the value they deliver. It runs on the principles of merit rather than seniority. The concierges’ objective is to turn Klick into a center of gravity that attracts and retains the best and most engaged talent.

Scheduling a 20-minute weekly meeting with your team to evaluate goals, check in on progress and provide consistent feedback can replace the dreaded annual review with 52 opportunities to make sure your team is happy, motivated and productive.

One of the main components of a Decoded Company is its ability to react to patterns and not exceptions. Everyone has bad weeks and good weeks; weekly one-on-one meetings create a fair system that addresses the real issues identified over time.

Some companies are responding to changing consumer expectations by allowing their employees a wider scope of choice and control over workplace technology. Bring your own device (BYOD) sounds like an IT policy, but for companies like GE, the freedom to pick the type of technology you use at work is a large part of their recruitment and retention strategy. ●

Technology as a Trainer

Technology can evolve into a trainer who learns from your whole organization’s base of experiences and applies

those insights to training, development, recruiting and even project management processes. It rejects the concept of monolithic training programs in favor of deeply personalized experiences delivered only when they’re needed. Decoded organizations use technology as a trainer (and coach) to guide their people in a proactive, transparent and accountable way, watching their blind spots and stepping in before someone gets in trouble.

Three critical factors influence a training program’s effectiveness:

- Context is the recognition that training materials are more likely to be retained when they contain relevant information to your task at the time you need to do it.
- Practice is the ability to apply what you’ve learned immediately, in your day-to-day job.
- Feedback is the necessary fine-tuning that helps identify opportunities for improved performance.

Recognized by real-time data analysis, a teachable moment is the exact instant when an employee should receive training, which is then delivered in a customized way that caters to that employee’s exact needs. Delivering just-in-time training is a good beginning, but the real value comes in customizing it to meet the learner’s unique needs.

Even companies as advanced and cutting-edge as Google have struggled with outdated training practices. In 2012, it gave GoogleEDU, its two-year-old learning and development program, a Decoded style makeover, instituting a new philosophy that focused on delivering data-driven, personalized insights to its 33,000-plus employees.

Google aimed to identify the right teachable moments to deliver highly relevant information based on an understanding of each individual’s needs. It turned to the data it collects internally to shed some light, starting with performance reviews, to identify areas of learning where people could use improvements. Google also had various statistics to look at to pinpoint when, in a person’s career trajectory, it makes the most sense to take a particular course or training program.

US Airways wanted to use technology to help them train their CSRs, but the system it had was clunky, it relied on too many manual inputs, and, worse still, it didn’t allow the representatives to use it themselves. The automated data system US Airways ultimately installed in collaboration with NICE helped employees develop a clear and objective picture of what was expected of them.

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The idea that training is an expense and not an investment is just one of many indications of how outdated current accounting processes are.

A person's ability to learn is like "compounding interest on an investment: after two or three years, a relentless learner stands head and shoulders above his peers," as James Slavet wrote. "So try asking your team this question: How did you get 1 percent better this week?" Being aware and measuring each team's learning progression can be a powerful tool. "One percent per week adds up." ●

Data as a Sixth Sense

Developing data as a sixth sense is the second principle of becoming a Decoded Company.

Comparing the dashboard of a World War I-era Fokker DR-1 with the dash of an F-22 Raptor, the most advanced fighter jet in the world, is a good way to understand the idea of data as a sixth sense. World War I pilots had very few instruments to gather data and no computer to analyze it with. Their decisions were based entirely on training and gut feel. The F-22 has a plethora of sensors and instruments to gather data and a computer to make sense of all that info. The heads-up display, HUD, displays all of the pertinent info the pilot needs in one central place, so he or she doesn't have to spend time trying to make sense of all the data. The pilot still has the final say on what their plane does, but those decisions are much more informed. Making use of the info in the dash to aid in decisions is using your data as a sixth sense.

Data as a sixth sense is our ability to pair analytics with instincts to gain a perspective that's grounded in data but tempered by experience, giving us an unprecedented amount of information to assess a situation. It allows us to leverage our existing experience and strip out our personal biases.

Decoded Companies use their data to protect their talent and help them thrive:

1. Decoded Companies are open and clear about the data they collect.
2. Decoded Companies collect things that are on the corporate record.
3. In the absence of the corporate public record, Decoded Companies employ a clearly adhered-to opt-in clause.

While corporations are able to capture more and richer information than ever before, they have also learned to be careful about how they use it. Target learned that women who hadn't told anyone that they were pregnant were disturbed when they received flyers in the mail that were obviously targeted to expectant mothers.

Like any tool worth using, data can be used either constructively or destructively. The key factor is to get opt-ins from employees, especially if you are going to measure things like phone calls and conversations. Without their buy-in, you'll lose the trust of your talent, and the company's culture — and performance — will suffer.

The Right Type of Data

There are two types of data: self-reported and ambient.

- Self-reported data requires a user's manual input in order to measure it. Filling out timesheets, surveys, performance evaluations and expense reports are all examples.
- Ambient data is information about a behavior that is automatically collected without the users having to actively enter each data point. Swiping in to work with an active RFID badge, sending emails, making calls and adding events to an electronic calendar are all examples.

Self-reported data is rife with biases. Too much of the information being tracked has been filtered through the interpretations of the people who input it. While there are times and places when self-reported data can be valuable, Decoded organizations should focus their attention on tracking and analyzing ambient data. Ambient data enables companies to track behavior without having to depend upon behavioral changes to do it. Ambient data peels back the layer between what we say and what we actually do.

Although self-reported data is subject to the biases of the employees, the scale and scope of the talent base tends to negate any individual schemas and results in essentially ambient data. This is well worth remembering: You can fill gaps in ambient data with self-reported data as long as it comes from a large enough sample population.

The Idea of Economy

Peter Arvai of Prezi is experimenting with a new feature for the Prezi platform that will allow the company to track the creation and spread of an idea by both its employees and the external Prezi community. Users will be able to borrow ideas found in other Prezi users' presentations in a

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way that's sourced and tracked. The collected data will be able to identify who in your company is coming up with the best ideas and who is facilitating the exchange and spread of those ideas, enabling them to bubble up.

Decoded is all about using available data to discover ways to make teams more efficient and productive. Venture capitalist James Slavet proposed a new set of metrics that organizations should measure to identify areas where they can improve:

- **Flow-state percentage:** overall efficiency. Flow state is a state of concentration in which we are completely and utterly immersed in the task at hand. The ego falls away. Time flies. We are "in the zone." Hourly interruptions wreak havoc with flow. Slavet recommends asking employees to track their flow states during an average day.
- **Positive feedback ratio:** chatter and kudos. One of the best ways to establish positive rapport with colleagues is to always reward positive behaviors. At Klick, Chatter acts like an internal Twitter channel, and Kudos are brief messages of thanks that team members are encouraged to post when they have a positive interaction with a colleague.

As a company moves toward a more data-centric approach, it's important to factor in the human element and not get lost in the technology. Remember, your sixth sense uses data to augment your instincts, not replace them.

Anything that can be measured can give your informed intuition a boost. Collecting data for one thing can lead to insights about another. It's better to measure the whole iceberg even if you're only going to report on the visible tip above the waterline. Casting a wide-enough analytics net will turn up an amazing array of unexpected insights. ●

Engineered Ecosystems

Engineered ecosystems are corporate cultures that are intentionally and deliberately optimized to create a center of gravity for their industry's best talent. They reject established management philosophies and approaches unless they can demonstrate their value empirically. They believe in a people-first approach that puts their talent above their customers and their customers above their profits. They invest in systems to decode their people and

understand their wants and needs as well as (or better than) they understand their customers.

The video game company Valve uses a data-focused approach to bypass traditional hierarchy in favor of a flexible and agile network that places an incredible amount of trust in the hands of each employee. Valve doesn't believe in job descriptions or managers. Really. It sees its organization as an organically grown collective of bright, self-motivated people who are empowered to "choose their own adventure" in deciding which direction the company should move in.

It's understandable why most companies are balking at these kinds of changes. The emerging norms go against the hierarchical structures that have defined corporate cultures for decades. The new collaborative models that are emerging replace seniority with meritocracy and hierarchies with ecosystems. They have open structures and create data-centric cultures that help motivate and empower talent.

Data-Driven Management: The Ecosystem Engineer

There is a role for a new ecosystem engineer, someone who focuses on the analysis, design, implementation and maintenance of highly experimental corporate cultures that are firmly based on the practices of data-driven management.

At Klick, the ecosystem engineer manages all of the concierges. They are responsible for helping to deliberately shape the culture into one that has become a center of gravity for the best talent.

As workplaces adapt to being more flexible, meritocratic and open, data, combined with the ability to share it easily, increasingly becomes the glue that binds everything together. Companies like InnoCentive and Netflix are creating environments that are decentralized without being chaotic, that strive for autonomy instead of bureaucracy, and that maintain market focus while being agile enough to recognize and act upon new opportunities. Most of all, they are using data to maintain happy, healthy and productive cultures.

Vineet Nayar, vice chairman of HCLY (a global IT outsourcing firm), believes that the core business of any corporation is to create shared value for customers. "If you do not put the employee first — if the business of management and managers is not to put the employee first — there is no way you can get the customer first."

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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives provide another opportunity to promote cultural values. The Klick It Forward program was created in order to forge a connection between Klick's charitable efforts and employee workflow. As work gets completed, employees get credits to spend on various causes. Each time he or she makes a contribution, a badge is added to the employee's Genome profile, letting their colleagues know the causes they support.

Gary Hamel, creator of the online community Management Innovation eXchange (MIX), launched the Management 2.0 Hackathon with the question: How can we harness the power of the Web — its technologies, approaches and underlying principles — to reinvent management? More than 900 participants from five continents came together in person and online. Twelve principles that embodied the foundation of the social workplace were identified:

- Openness
- Community
- Meritocracy
- Activism
- Collaboration
- Meaning
- Autonomy
- Serendipity
- Decentralization
- Experimentation
- Speed
- Trust

As the Web continues to enable people to be even more social, more connected and more collaborative, workplaces are evolving organically to reflect these changes. MIX has identified several ways the teams are applying these new behaviors and perspectives within the workplace to create environments where

- coordination happens without centralization;
- contribution matters more than credentials;
- power flows to those who add value;

- the wisdom of many trumps the authority of the few;
- new ideas get amplified rather than crushed;
- performance is judged by peers;
- contribution is opt-in rather than commanded;
- the default is to share information rather than hoard it.

A core challenge for any enterprise is balancing the complexity of people orchestration with the delivery of a consistent level of quality and service. This equilibrium is unlocked by data.

Whole Foods is an intriguing example of a company that has successfully bridged the gap between soft-hearted values and logic-driven business acumen. The company's investment in environmental sustainability, diversity, transparency and collaboration is balanced by its laser focus on data-driven performance and efficiency. The combination has resulted in a highly motivated workforce with a deep sense of community who value productivity. "There's this notion that you can't be touchy-feely and serious," says Co-CEO John Mackey. "We don't fit the stereotypes. There's plenty of managerial edge in this company — the culture creates it."

Netflix's engineered ecosystem turns on recruiting and training "stunning colleagues," motivated self-starters who thrive in an environment of autonomy and flexibility. "Our model is to increase employee freedom as we grow rather than limit it, to continue to attract and nourish innovative people," CEO Reed Hastings notes. For Hastings, the key is to grow talent density faster than complexity. Netflix has no specific vacation policy. Its travel, expense and gift policies can be summed up in five little words: Act in Netflix's best interests. Netflix defines its management model as "context, not control."

Intuit is focused on creating a culture that values informed experimentation. President and CEO Brad Smith has made it his priority to develop an internal culture of innovation. Unstructured time allows employees to spend 10 percent of their work time on a project they are passionate about, even if it falls outside their normal job descriptions. "Idea jams" are focused brainstorming sessions held periodically for employees to develop and present concepts. The Intuit Brainstorm tool enables employees to submit ideas and receive feedback and ratings on them.

InnoCentive has built an open-innovation crowd-sourcing platform on which companies can tap into a

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network of diverse communities and problem solvers to tackle some of the biggest challenges — a community of 260,000 individuals from more than 200 countries solve problems in various disciplines. Clients post challenges on an open innovation marketplace and set a prize for the person or team who can offer a solution. As of 2012, more than \$35 million in award money has been posted on the site.

The companies we've talked about all have used the collaborative, meritocratic and flexible nature of the consumer social Web to empower their talent and creatively solve challenges. And they all place tremendous value on developing and retaining their talent. These things are reflective of the three main drivers of human motivation: autonomy, mastery and purpose. When those factors are aligned, the easiest thing for managers to do is get out of the way and let their talent tell them what's needed. ●

Getting Started

Every company is different, but here are some useful tools to get you started on your journey toward being Decoded.

Talk with your team. Kick-start a conversation about why becoming Decoded is such an essential skill for your organization. This will lead to increased buy-in and more support for the experiment that you're planning on conducting.

Understand the now. You need to know where you're starting from. A starter set of questions for you to answer will provide clarity about your current state.

Map out the roles within your group. For each role, map out the major activities that they are responsible for, and identify those that need to be reconsidered; map out the systems that they touch and when they touch them; analyze the impact, frequency, effort and time for each of the touch points; evaluate how they get visibility, how they spend their time, how to prioritize their work and their framework.

Map out all of your available data sources. Remember to look out for self-reported and ambient data, but give preference to ambient data.

Establish a Decoded lab. Pull people from different groups.

Instrument everything. Instrument as much of your organization as you can, with a view toward collecting ambient data. It may be useful to start designing experiments at this early point as that often teases out missing sources of data or creates prerequisite self-reported data

exercises that you need to complete (e.g., a survey of all employees to create a baseline).

Establish evidence-based leadership. Start by working with your lab to figure out some easy experiments that require little or no external buy-in and have quantifiable success metrics. It helps if you have historical data about how those processes are working now, so you can analyze it and establish historical metrics. Put your experiment in place, measure carefully and report on the outcome.

Hire technology as a coach and trainer. Replace the annual performance review and your current goal-setting process with an approach that's driven by data and hooked into a dashboard they see every day. Look for places you can apply personalization in order to deliver only relevant content. Coaching starts with identifying the teachable moments within your company. Work with your lab to review each of the activities you identified. At some point, make the investment in working with an infographics designer who can work magic with your data.

Engineer your connected enterprise. Make your systems way more social. Look for opportunities to add profile pages, photos, etc. Figure out what drives your use of social Web properties, and then look for ways to introduce the same elements within your company.

Future-proof. Roll out a data warehouse, and encourage your team to use it as a lab and playground. Expand your data collection efforts to the offline. Increase your team's data literacy and coding skills. Deputize evangelists throughout your organization.

Ask for help and guidance, share the results of your experiments and help drive the movement forward. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Decoded Company*, you'll also like:

1. ***Trust Agents* by Chris Brogan, Julien Smith.** Trust agents are digitally savvy people who use the Web to humanize businesses using transparency, honesty, and genuine relationships. As a result, they wield enough online influence to build up or bring down a business's reputation.
2. ***Six Pixels of Separation* by Mitch Joel.** Digital marketing expert Mitch Joel integrates digital marketing, social media, personal branding and entrepreneurship in a clear, entertaining and instructive way that everyone can understand and apply.
3. ***The Talent Powered Organization* by Robert Homas, Peter Cheese, Elizabeth Craig.** The key to strategic success is talent — an organization's people, from its current and future leaders to its frontline employees, but few organizations are managing their talent strategically.