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Review of *The Millenium Matrix*

by Rex Miller (Jossey-Bass, 2004)

Reviewed by Charlie Grantham

With the holiday season upon us we thought we'd take a look at a slightly different kind of book.

Well, sort of. Rex Miller has done a wonderful job of laying out the relationship between changes in communications technologies and the future of the church in Western society. Now hold on, we haven't succumbed to the righteous cacophony of the recent US election. This is actually serious stuff.

Although we are not theologians, we are scholarly enough to realize that when you begin to see convergence of ideas from disparate fields of study it's an indication that the underlying ideas just might be worth paying attention to.

And so when a mutual friend put us in touch with Rex because she believed we had so much in common, we were almost immediately struck with his analysis of how advances in communication technology have fundamentally altered the way church(es) fit into society in general.

And more to the point, how those technologies actually change the way in which churches function, organize themselves, and serve their communities. We believe there is a natural extension of Miller's core ideas into the things we normally pay attention to – the world of work. After all, the Internet has certainly changed the way (most of us) do business, right?

When Miller talks about the church, he means organized religion as the sacred (as opposed to secular) part of modern life. But, he goes further. And that's why we found this book so interesting. For example, the over-arching matrix he lays out looks at how the metaphor of work changes as society has moved from an oral communication through print media into radio and then television broadcasting, and finally into all the interactive digital media. In Miller's view the digital media transform the metaphor of work into:

Federation: work is organized around federations of common interests. In this structure, the consumer and producer collaborate on the production and delivery of goods.

Well, that couldn't get be more aligned with our views if we had written it ourselves.

Tracing history, we believe that work's central organizing metaphor has moved from the **Farm** in an oral culture, to a **Factory** in the print era, to **Services** in the broadcast era, and now to the **Federation**. Many might argue that today our society is still in a transition from broadcast and digital (and thus from a Services Economy to a "Federation" Economy – or, in the terminology we use more frequently, a Network Economy).

The really intriguing part of all this is the way Miller links these shifts in behaviors and thought patterns to the experiences that each generation has growing up with a dominant kind of communications technology. There are major implications stemming from the way we learn about the world, about national and international news, and about what's going on in

our businesses, our churches, and our neighborhoods. Hearing stories is a very different experience from reading the paper, and that in turn is a very different way of absorbing information than listening to it and seeing it “live” on the nightly television news.

The observation that we are in transition from a broadcast/services era to an interactive/federation economy certainly seems to fit our belief that the future of work (i.e., the federation economy) already appears in some sectors in the economy – but not yet everywhere. It is a striking direction, however, that we basically agree with.

And there are other pearls of wisdom in the book that also caught our attention. To wit:

We are at that very point in time when a 400 year old age is dying and another is struggling to be born – a shifting of culture, science, society, and institutions enormously greater than the world has ever experienced.” (Dee Hock, founding father of Visa International, quoted on page 127).

And:

We have a rising hunger not only for leaders we trust but for leaders who lead by trust rather than by fear or coercion.

And one more:

Most organizations certainly don't think of themselves as growth-driven and certainly don't recognize the symptoms. But the fact remains that many of them are. Size and Rigidity eventually break down in an environment of speed and complexity. It's as simple as that.

In conclusion, we believe *The Millennium Matrix* is a very worthy read, whether you are interested in the history and future of organized religion or not. We certainly learned a lot about the function of another segment of our society that many of us often ignore. Quite to our surprise we discovered another kind of human organization struggling with the exact same challenges that modern businesses are facing. There are clearly many parallels between the future of work and the future of the church.

The Millennium Matrix is available online from Amazon.com at [this link](#).

About the Work Design Collaborative and *Future of Work Agenda*

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