

moments” that project visions of a better life. Bloch closes his monumental three volume that explores the principle of hope with on the following hopeful note:

True genesis is not at the beginning, but at the end, and it starts to begin only when society and existence become radical, i.e. grasp their roots. But the root of history is the working, creating human being who reshapes and overhauls the given facts. Once he has grasped himself and established what is his, without expropriation and alienation, in real democracy, there arises in the world something which shines into the childhood of all and in which no one has yet been: homeland. (Bloch III, 1375–76)

The German word for “homeland” is “Heimat” – a term full of meaning that extends far beyond a physical place. Homeland (Heimat) is closely related to the German word for community (Gemeinwesen) and embodies the full richness of the term community of practice used by knowledge management. A community is not the beginning of a process, it is the end of people working together to create a homeland where they can freely develop and be creative.

Is it any wonder that in a culture in which people spend 40–60 hours of a week trying to figure out how to make work less onerous, that many of the dreams for a better life revolve around ways to get out of work, not how to transform that work? Much of our hope for a better life includes the hope that our work can be filled with meaning and reward. That it can be “elevated work,” work that makes a difference, work that at the end passes the “so what?” test. Work that lets us answer with pride the “What will you do with your one UN-replaceable life time?” question. Thinking for a living seems to be a desirable goal for many as it holds the possibility of replacing a life of drudgery with one of creativity.

When we bring our full one-pointed focus onto our work, make meditation of it, we re-enter the child-like state of play. When we bring our creativity and the power of our imagination to bear on a work problem, we again enter the childhood realm of play.

What about Knowledge Management?

We started our discussion with a description of knowledge management. In light of what we have said, what is the role of knowledge managers?

Knowledge management will, no doubt, continue to be of interest to a number of different professions. Information professionals (librarians, archivists, and records managers) will play a role in making information available. Their role will be even more vital as information is no longer in containers, such as books, articles, or documents, but reside in communities, some of which exist for only a

short period of time. These professionals can play a traditional role – to identify, store, and make available information for future users.

Technologists are just beginning to find ways to mine the vast amount of information in digital form and making it available for purposes quite different from those envisioned by the creator of information. Existing and new ways to formulate searches so that users will get what they need and now just what they want are becoming a part of our every-day lives.

Business theory and practice already largely adopts the principles of knowledge management and already recognizes that fundamental changes are necessary in the ways businesses, organizations, and governments are necessary in order to make knowledge creation more effective.

Many questions need to be answered – and many more will be raised.

In the meantime, individuals and societies need to answer the call to make work more like play. Play is the way children prepare to enter the adult world. It is the serious work of childhood. Children try on roles, they learn the rules of games that help them to gain mastery, they practice skills, and they invent worlds and enter them whole-heartedly. They know with the openness of a childhood mind that they are not the “ones who know”, not yet. They are still open. Their cup is not so full it can hold no more. As we enter a new Age of Knowledge, what better quality could we hope to bring to it?

For in the end – and at the beginning – life is about work – and work is about play.

Tom Sawyer and Socrates got it right.