

2. CORPORATE HACKING, THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS DIGITAL

Hacking is a life force. It can even be seen as a duty for the company, a way to free minds and to get out of the close, narrow, almost depressive situation which is the reality of so many companies and employees nowadays.

Hacking a company means adopting a new work attitude that is both rebellious and constructive. In many cases, it is also the only way to truly change an organization.

THE COMPANY, A SYSTEM READY TO BE HACKED

No matter what his area of expertise is, the hacker has a special relationship with the notion of system. “Any closed system is a problem for a hacker” wrote Amaelle Guiton, journalist at the famous french newspaper Libération. “Since [the hacker] likes to understand how things work, he will try to figure out every layer of a locked system¹” This is perfectly summarized: for a traditional hacker, any closed system is a provocation. And if the company is closed to any changes, well... It gets hacked! In theory, it's crystal clear. Unfortunately, the reality is that **you cannot hack your business the same way you would enter an outside system.**

Why? Because when you are immersed in the system, you necessarily end up, though unwillingly, becoming the system. For an employee, caught between the control of his hierarchy and the inertia of habits, a closed system is not a provocation, it's a terrible frustration. We have all experienced it one day or another: frustration can be a real source of energy... but an energy that often turns against itself. Turning into a corporate hacker is all about mobilizing your frustration to transform it into a positive energy focused on action, and to mobilize for a change in the system you are part of. This same system that allows us to be paid at the end of the month, and in which we maintain friendships and links of interest... This sure ain't easy!

¹ Antoine Lannuzel, «Les hackers participent à créer le monde de demain», WE Demain, May 13, 2013. http://wedemain.fr/Les-hackers-participent-a-creer-le-monde-de-demain_a237.html

And by the way: when we talk about the “system”, what are we talking about exactly? It is a very fine word, but the term “company” is vast and we need to specify the target. The hacker is always aiming for the heart of the system. To become a corporate hacker, it is necessary to aim for it –the “matrix”–, the place where it is possible to act to change working habits. Keep in mind that this is not Hollywood: we are not talking about infiltrating the Comex or the Board of Directors. **The real matrix, where everything is played out, is actually the culture of the company.** Everything depends on it and everything revolves around it. **Culture is the system that needs to be infiltrated and altered from within to make the digital transition,** to make things really change, and to ensure people find pleasure in working.

THE CORPORATE HACKER’S TARGET: CORPORATE CULTURE

A company’s culture is what constitutes its daily functioning as a development mode. It’s a set of rules, values, rituals, myths, and sometimes taboos. It can be partially encoded in charts, but it remains largely diffused and informal. Because of its elusive nature, the culture is never easy to define, but there is always the option of isolating certain components. As an example, you have the famous rule of “20% time spent on personal projects” at Google. It is much more than a principle of time organization or a social advantage: it is a central element of the company’s culture! Another more negative, yet common example: the default precept of mistrust and suspicion towards providers, which leads to signing delusional and completely abusive purchase terms and conditions. That too is culture.

Culture as an “Operating System of the Enterprise”

In a conscious or unconscious way, corporate culture shapes the way colleagues think and act, relationships between employees, and even permeates the company members’ language. Culture affects both the day-to-day operations and the development mode of the company, just as its appetite or resistance to change.

Let’s try an IT metaphor: culture is the operating system of the company—it is the “master program” that manages all software, programs and affects interactions, storage capacity, etc. The operating system is MAC OS

or Windows, and it's Android on your mobile. Wikipedia completes this definition perfectly: "An operating system (...) [allows] to introduce new functions and new hardware without compromising the software²". Again, the metaphor is relevant: the culture of a business is never static, it is (at least a minimum) open on the outside world and evolves without hindering the current activity of the company and its various functions. In a way, the company culture determines the adaptability of the latter and this is definitely where the corporate hacker will have to break in.

Goal: Hack Culture

"We do not create culture: culture comes with time, resulting from a consistent and persistent behaviour. If you really and concretely encourage sharing, then sharing will eventually become part of your culture. If you treat customers well, respect for customers will become part of your culture."

Jason Fried, David Heinemeier, Rework³

As the operating system of your computer, culture evolves regularly and in many small ways, until it gradually adapts to the world around it. These small changes are the operating system updates⁴: we integrate a new tool, we change a rule that does not really fit, we rethink the relationship between marketing and sales, or between project managers and control. These changes can result from a decision coming from "above"— the current management of the company —, but they can also happen naturally from a transposition of encountered experiences. They spread in viral mode from person to person, from team to team, from department to department... A sum of adjustments that are made more or less quickly and more or less intensively according to the concerned company.

² http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Système_d%27exploitation

³ Jason Fried, David Heinemeier, Rework : change the way you work forever, Maxima, March 8, 2012

⁴ See glossary p.188

The problem is, most companies have not taken the path of a viral cultural transformation. It's actually quite the opposite! Hyper-optimization working under cover, businesses went from reorganization to transformation, helped by consultants who often denied the specificity of individuals, teams, places and local contexts.

"Consultants bring to companies essential external expertise (...) [but] if the proposed modifications (...) go against the company's history, it will mean failure, with every imaginable trauma" concludes paleoanthropologist Pascal Picq⁵.

"Functional stupidity" ends up being the result, which is perfectly described by Andre Spicer, an expert at London's Cass Business School: "Functional stupidity is when people recruited for their intelligence stop using it because the organization culture refuses to ask difficult questions⁶". This intelligence resignation is noted by most of the discourage executives. Truth is, **the world of traditional business has shifted into the absurd long time ago. This absurdity is a bug in the system: this is where the corporate hacker is able to act to gradually change the company culture.**

The Small Step Theory:

"To hack the culture of a company is to find those little things you can do every day that end up snowballing."
Reuven Gorsht

Tackling the company culture and making it evolve: it is obviously easier said than done, as the task may seem Herculean. If the challenge seems too great to be done, it is because you are still approaching things with the ancient world reflexes—this mentality in which one first imagines the perfect system before putting it into

⁵ Pascal Picq, Un paléoanthropologue dans l'entreprise : S'adapter et innover pour survivre, Eyrolles, September 29, 2011

⁶ Olivier Monod, «Infographie, Votre entreprise est-elle stupide ?», L'Express, June 3, 2014. http://lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/infographie-votre-entreprise-est-elle-stupide_1547500.html

practice. If digital revolution and hacker culture have shown us something, it is precisely about the importance of getting started instead of planning everything in advance.

In order to reassure those who would be tempted to give up in the face of adversity, Basecamp founders Jason Fried and David Heinemeier⁷ quoted the story of polar explorer Ben Saunders. During his first solo expedition to the Far North (which lasted 72 days!), he said that “big decisions” were often so daunting and terrifying to consider that his decisions rarely went further than “[to] make it to this block of ice a few meters in front of [him]”⁸. In this anecdote relies the Small Steps Theory imagined by Saunders: by looking too much at the final objective, one gets easily discouraged. It is in small actions that we find the energy, and it’s this energy that makes us go further.

Doing so, step by step and virally, is the only way to switch to a new version of the company’s cultural software. Little by little, by iteration of rebellious actions⁹ and hacks learned and spread, culture will eventually deeply change and corporate hackers will eventually reveal a new corporate culture.

Whatever your business is, no matter what level of nonsense or resistance to change you may encounter, the most important thing will be to take the plunge. If you have made it to this part of the text, we are convinced that you are almost ready.

Some have come this way and others around the world are doing it. What do they have in common? They never seek to be the “big boss” and finally change everything. They started in their field, sometimes with a modest objective in mind, and spread their culture virally, because they showed that it was in their interest to follow the example.

⁷ Developed by the company formerly known as 37signals, Basecamp is a collaborative project management tool. The company was renamed "Basecamp" in 2014.

⁸ Jason Fried, David Heinemeier, Rework : change the way you work forever, Maxima, March 8, 2012

⁹ See glossary p.184

SOME CORPORATE HACKERS FIGURES

“When you do something, know that you will have against you those who would like to do the same thing, those who want the opposite... and the vast majority of those who don't want to do anything.”

Confucius

The term “hacking” has not yet been imbricated in companies’ mainstream language. Perhaps there are not enough known characters from that field. Yet there are many, here and there, working in companies, refusing to follow rules blindly. They decide to change things by working differently, and thus becoming pioneers of a great movement: corporate hackers.

Each decade has its emblematic figures, its personalities in rupture with the masses. If you look for articles on great hackers of history on the internet, you always find the same names: Julien Assange, Kevin Mitnick and Steve Jobs before Apple. Katniss, a character in Hunger Games, is also kind of a hacker: didn't she jostle the written rules to change the world from inside, a world where people are held in pure domination? Yet, hackers we are interested in are not known to the general public, or not yet. **The following examples are (almost) normal individuals, who have been able to turn into hackers in their own organization**, most often without really wanting it in the first place. Now, here they are, some examples to follow.

Frederick Cretinon, Stubbornness and Cleverness

This is the story of a stubborn passionate. Everything began in the 2000s in the world of hiking shoes¹⁰. French company Salomon had developed a good reputation, but hikers were changing: they didn't want to be limited by trails anymore, and they also wanted to run on land, snow, sand or rocks.

¹⁰ The different types of innovation are described in detail in Constantinos Markides and Paul Geroski's' Fast Second book, Jossey-Bass, October 29, 2004.

As a project manager at Salomon, Frédéric Crétinon was looking for the ideal shoe for these new adventurers. While questioning athletes, he made a discovery: every single one of them highlighted the importance of stability in the shoe, whereas all manufacturers had so far focused on its cushioning capacity. Engineers started to design a shoe meeting this requirement for stability. Eventually, Adidas bought Salomon in 2002, and the brand also had its own project for this promising market. It was impossible to run these two projects at the same time. At Adidas, ears were closed: all marketing studies showed that consumers wanted cushioning before stability. Therefore, Salomon's project got stopped.

The story could end there: it would sadly be commonplace. Frédéric Crétinon was, however, sure of him, and he had a corporate hacker's soul. Before giving in, he organized a life-size comparison test: he gave experienced athletes¹¹ a prototype of the two types of shoes, which they put to test in the Ardèche for four days, at a rate of 80 kilometers per day. First hack! The result was clear: the Salomon shoes had met more efficiently the athletes' requirements, especially in the course's extreme parts. Sadly, in the higher spheres, political logic was on the move: in spite of the obvious, they refused to take into account the result. Prohibition to go further.

And yet, these shoes did come out! The rest of the story is almost Hollywood-like, with a perfect happy ending. To summarize, what Frederick Cretinon did not get with his arguments, he got by trickery, since he still had an asset in his sleeve. "His" shoe had an original shape that pleased the eyes of some visitors. He had some prototypes made in the flashiest colours and exposed them on a table in the hallway near his desk. It worked: the shoes challenged everyone, even to the Communications Director, who borrowed a pair to wear ostensibly in front of visitors. The buzz ended up going back to Solomon's CEO. To be certain, the latter invited the most sportive members of his steering committee to test the shoe themselves during an endurance race in Spain . The test was conclusive again and everyone was happy. The Adidas prototype looked great for trails, and the Salomon shoe was perfect for adventure. In the end, both products got launched on the market. For Solomon, it was an immediate success.

¹¹ See glossary p.186

There will be a first hack. Then a second. Little by little, the culture of the company will evolve around new principles: more natural, more collaborative, more joyful, more adjusted, more effective. In this case, we can say that the company got hacked, and that it made a successful transition.

Of course, all of this did not happen in a snap. To accompany you on this path, we created the Makestorming. Let's start transforming the way you work!

MAKESTORMING, AN APPROACH TO HACKING YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Maybe you just have the first clue leading to action: "Yes, it cannot last, it has to change and I'm going to make it change!". Maybe you've already started to try changing things. If you did, you may have experienced resistance and difficulty to advance because of the duration, the isolation and the difficulty of starting from scratch.

Makestorming's role is to help you take action. Its role is certainly not to sell you a miracle key solution. This kind of method is like any procedure: it is the opium of resigning company man.

Of course, we would like to be guided step by step: it would be so much simpler if there was a specific tutorial to follow, but hackers do not wait for a tutorial to hack computer systems! In IT science as in business, hacking is not a well-balanced recipe, it is about relearning to think for oneself, and to dare. It is inventing and taking things in hand.

Corporate hackers, including those that have been presented to you as examples, all have one thing in common: they rolled up their sleeves to take action, they sought out allies and pulled themselves together, then they improved their practices slowly. They changed the work culture around them and they eventually imposed theirs. This is what we do everyday with our customers, and that's what we offer to do in the following pages.

Makestorming will give you some clear principles and guidelines to change the way you work on a daily basis and start the cultural revolution in your company. We will share with you tools, case studies and best practices to facilitate the implementation of corporate hacking.

MAKESTORMING DEFINITION

If we had to define it in a few words, we would say this:

Makestorming is an approach to reinvent work culture in an idea of hacking big organizations and to make the start-up world practices viral.

It spreads in organizations in viral mode, both bottom-up and top-down, depending on who owns it and who becomes an actor. It is based on five main principles that we will develop further:

**UNITY IS STRENGTH
DISOBEDIENCE FOR WELL-DOING
ACTION MORE THAN ACTION PLAN
"WHO-DOES-WHAT" INSTEAD OF "WHO-IS-WHO?"
WITH GREAT POWER, GREAT RESPONSIBILITIES**

These five simple principles summarize the most important things to remember in a new work environment. Five principles on which to start to hack the culture of traditional organizations and gradually, action by action, hack by hack, create tomorrow's company.

We will soon see examples of companies where Makestorming has been put in place, companies where it has even become the rule. Before going into detail, perhaps it is not vain to tell where Makestorming comes from, and how it was built. Because before presenting you this path, we had to create it and test it.