

# Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations

by Oset Babur

*Here Comes Everybody*  
Clay Shirky (2009)

Shirky's book discusses how social tools support group organization and communication in an entirely new way, one that was previously impossible. He does so by including anecdotes from users of social media sites like WordPress and Blogspot, and how they used these social media tools to achieve a purpose- basically, his book looks to exemplify the tool part of social media tools, even though we as a society seem to take this for granted, now.

Shirky starts by talking about some different concepts, and I'll touch on a few of them that stood out to me most. First, is **post-managerial organization**, which states that when any organization takes on a task, the difficulty of getting everyone to coordinate increases with the size of the group. He focuses on managing the hierarchies that arise out of large groups, and sees top-down organization as the way to go for these kinds of organizations. Another concept he talks about is **collaborative production**, which I understand to be cooperation 2.0, meaning no one person gets to take the credit for the product, and the project requires the participation of many. He uses Flickr as an example of a tool that reduces the amount of cooperation needed, because it pools together photos in one big album- no need to communicate or get together to do so.

In his third chapter, Shirkey discusses how everyone is a media outlet, just from their smartphones and laptops. He talks about mass amateurization, and the difference between being a professional at anything, and someone who can sit in his basement and put together a blog- he uses a running example of someone who has her phone stolen, and then puts together a blog to get it back. This blog is replacing the person hitting the streets, posting "lost phone" flyers, and efforts of that kind, and also gives the search a much wider wingspan. That being said, Shirkey notes that the general public is aware that mass amateurization does not equal mass trustworthiness, which is where the distinction between professional responsibility and the ability to tweet from your phone come head to head. A different pro he gives for mass amateurization is that the tools involved are better- we can post to a WordPress from our phone, without a printing press, and if we want to change the interface of our blog, we can just click to do so, not buy a new press, metaphorically. Faster is better, according to Shirky.

After applauding how great it is that we can share our breakfast with the click of a button, Shirkey talks about the necessity of social filters.

He differentiates between what's posted in public, and what's intended for the public- like the post I read, over time, the internet has grown out of sites like Livejournal and Xanga where people post things for their friends, without concern that there's a wider audience who has access to all that user content. Amateur work is self-reinforcing, and Shirkey emphasizes that this leads to a massive influx of user content (from every teenage girl that wants to post a selfie, just to gain a few likes and compliments on her new highlights), and it becomes up to us as social media users to filter what matters- to us. If you're that teenage girl's boyfriend, then it probably does matter to you how her hair looks, but if you're a student at miles away at MIT, it probably doesn't.

In the following chapter, Shirkey talks about **rapid and simple group formation**, another interesting contrast. Again, this is to show how social media helps people organize in a way that would otherwise be too big of an undertaking. Interest groups of a few students or people who agree on how an issue should be handled can transfer their efforts to a much wider audience through the use of websites and blogs, and can gain followers on other continents, on different time zones- otherwise, such a unification would be very difficult, almost impossible. Basically, simple group formation is being replaced by rapid group formation, because we have the tools to do it. Again, he emphasizes that we take rapid group formation for granted, because once we've gotten used to tools like email and blogs, it's hard to remember how people came together without them- and also hard to appreciate how much harder it was back then. He concludes with an optimistic note, that the more groups and organizations need to form, the more tools will be created, because innovation is supported by need.

Chapter 8 was particularly fascinating to me, because Shirkey talks about the power social tools have to serve social dilemmas. He touches on the concept of **social capital**, which comes up in a lot of political science texts, so I was interested to see how Shirkey would put it in a media context. I'm a big fan of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, and Shirkey discusses one of the points Putnam makes, that social capital is on the decline in the US because it is increasingly difficult to get people together so that they can create it. After all, the concept of the neighborhood block party is just about as outdated as the flip phone, and so it seems only reasonable that social capital should be an outdated idea, too. Scott Heiferman responds to Putnam's dilemma, by using communication tools as a good substitute for the methods of organization that people seem to no longer have time for- like travel. He discusses concepts like picture messaging (which reminded me of today's Snapchat), and the perks of being able to update others on your activities with a second's notice. Heiferman basically takes the decline in social capital as a challenge, and then updates the response by using media as a way to build social capital in a way faster than ever before. While these tools are too new for Shirkey to discuss, today's Instagram, Snapchat, and Vine are all means to that end, in my view.

Yet another interesting point Shirkey makes in regards to user-generated content, is that self-filtering is an empowering motion; people decide what is relevant to them, and therefore regulate what content makes it onto their morning breakfast newsfeed scroll, or RSS feeds. Shirkey places a lot of weight in deferring to the users' judgment, because it determines what content fails and what content succeeds; here, this binomial distribution focuses, basically, on page views. He also states that the internet has the capacity to create a global talent view to draw from at any time- do you need to post a video of a singing cat to your friend's Facebook wall for

her birthday? Someone has a YouTube account devoted to this. And so on. The same can be said for things like Apple forums, or Linux support sites- people are willing to share their expertise on support forums on the internet, and this is another form of the global talent pool uniting people for a positive cause.

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