



# Boardroom Minutes

SEPTEMBER 2005

## BUSINESS CAUSES, SOCIAL CAUSES

### THE POWER OF PARTICIPATION IS REAL

More than 26 million people mobilized to support a cause in less than a year. Wow.

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### McNEALY: PARTICIPATE OR PERISH

Creating value in the Participation Age.

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Detailed first steps you can take today.

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» **BUSINESS CAUSES, SOCIAL CAUSES: THE POWER OF PARTICIPATION**

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## Participate or perish.



Historians like to give descriptive names to different eras that were shaped by powerful technological forces. Because of this penchant for naming things, humans slogged their way through the Stone Age and the Bronze Age without even realizing it (the naming came later) and, more recently, the Steam Age and then Industrial Age — a period of such profound change that it's also described as a “revolution.”

In the last 25 years, we have been living through the Information Age, so named because of the impact information technologies — the creation, distribution and management of intangible information — have had on our lives.

It's a valid label. The commerce of information today represents an enormous amount of all economic activity in the world. Millions upon millions of people produce information, refine it, store it and distribute it; billions consume it in the same way we consume air, food, and water. Some of us even suffer withdrawal symptoms if denied access to it.

Unfortunately, though, there's just one thing wrong with this picture. The Information Age isn't a destination...it's a rest stop on the way to the next momentous period in time. Let me be one of the first to welcome you to the [“Participation Age.”](#)

According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, participation is “the act of taking part or sharing in something.” It's a simple word describing a simple concept, but it's a powerful word as well, one that defines the dominant technological forces at work in the world today.

The technologies driving us forward are no longer information-centric. Instead, in the last 15 years, advances in technology have made it possible for more and more people to connect with each other to participate and to share workflows, to compete for jobs, to purchase goods and services, to learn and create.

Information Age thinking says, “Control the creation and distribution of information and you dominate markets; dominate markets and you can use that position to extract profits.” Participation Age thinking says, “Value is created through networked human beings who share, interact, and solve problems. An individual's value is a function of who they

connect to, how often, and in what ways.”

As a result, network effects are quite real in the Participation Age. That's why peer-to-peer networks remain so popular and why blogging is now so hot.

It's why eBay has flourished — not because it is a dot-com start-up, but because it facilitates direct connections and participation among individuals. Same with online gaming.

### **A New Call to Arms**

We believe that both enabling and utilizing participation also defines our mission at Sun, so much so that “[Participate or Perish](#)” is our new call to arms.

We believe that our success will come by enabling as many people as possible to participate. That means cutting the cost of connective technologies, making it simpler, safer, and more convenient for people to get together. It means eliminating digital divides with low-cost tools and technologies to drive even more participation and connection.

The goal is not to be a provider of low-cost computing, it's to be a creator of high-value participation.

And we believe the process is self-sustaining. The more participation we foster, the more additional opportunities will be created by everyone in the network.

We understand that this is a big job, but it's the kind of challenge people come to Sun to tackle. We are, and have always been, radical problem solvers and proud of it.

Radical problem solvers show people things they cannot see for themselves. We ask questions nobody else asks, challenge assumptions, propose solutions, and engineer systems that no one else can.

We are not incrementalists. Count on incrementalists for revisions, not revolutions.

Sun people believe in tackling seemingly impossible challenges head on. We know “impossible” is just the word people use for big and important problems. Creating opportunities for people to participate and connect to one another is just the kind of challenge that Sun was created to take on.

As a result, living in the Participation Age makes our strategy both simple (albeit difficult) and clear.

We will increase shareholder value and provide our clients with opportunities never available to them before:

- By helping our clients overcome their most daunting challenges
- By sharing the solutions we develop to grow communities, to increase participation, and to create opportunities
- And by creating innovations that make problems solvable and bring value and opportunity within reach

Sun was founded and has prospered on the ideas that the “Network is the Computer” and that “Everyone and Everything are Connected.” Over our 23 years we have promoted these ideas first to individuals, then to workgroups and enterprises, and then out onto the Web and to virtual communities around the world. Now, the circle has turned back to where we started and we are once again talking to individuals about participating and connecting — but this time on a worldwide scale.

Stick around. Things are going to get really interesting.

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## Business Causes, Social Causes: The Power of Participation

On July 2, 2005, Sun, together with organizers of the Live 8 concert series in Philadelphia, powered a text messaging campaign and provided Web infrastructure support that contributed to mobilizing 26.4 million people globally to pledge their support for ending extreme poverty in Africa.



The [Live 8 Web site](#), powered by Sun, received 300 million hits on the day of the concert. Imagine how numbers like this could affect your bottom line. Whether or not this is a cause that concerns you personally, the numbers and potential alone are staggering. All over the world, people are embracing the power of participation with devices as simple as cell phones.

Ready or not, [the Participation Age](#) is here. Your readiness to embrace the technologies that allow for large-scale participation will be a key factor in how quickly your business grows in the coming years.

“Participation is not just about writing a blog or sending your code into the network,” says Sun President and COO Jonathan Schwartz. “Participation is about driving economic opportunity. It’s about wealth creation. It’s about economic progress as much as it is social progress, and they’ve become intertwined as a result of technology.”

### From Participation to Profit

What does this mean for executives who have a business to run? More people participating means more business. More customers drive greater economies of scale, which leads to lower transaction costs and thus lower price points. Remember when there was a bank fee for paying your bills online? It’s free now because of the minuscule cost per user given the vast amount of people doing it.

#### Related Items

- » [IDC Report on the Messaging Campaign](#)
- » [Computerworld Article: “Eliminating the Digital Divide”](#)
- » [Join the ONE Campaign](#)
- » [UN Conference Audio-cast: “The Participation Age”](#)
- » [Sun and eBay: Sharing for Success](#)

Participation networks also drive your business forward because your customers are more involved. Active customers give real-time feedback that enables you to improve your products and services while simultaneously increasing loyalty. In the case of online bill paying, customers who have taken the time to enter all their data into your system are less likely to change banks because they're invested with you. This reduces your churn, which increases your average revenue per user (ARPU). Executives have an obligation to shareholders to involve people more if it reduces churn and drives higher ARPU.

Similar examples can be seen in the stock trading industry, where the Internet has driven more people to participate, thus lowering the cost of transactions and increasing the addressable market. In the government arena, the ability to put forms online and reduce the staff needed in local offices reduces costs for everyone and leads to a more educated and enfranchised populace. For governments in developing countries, digital infrastructures are actually cheaper to set up than physical infrastructures, so the technologies lead not only to a more informed voting public, but also to a reduction in the digital divide between developed and developing countries.

### **Rockin' the World**

Which brings us to one of the reasons that Sun teamed with the Live 8 concert organizers. By leveraging Sun's core competency in technologies that fuel the Participation Age, Live 8 organizers were able to leverage the network to fuel a social movement. The concerts were held in July in six cities around the world with top performers including Coldplay, Elton John, U2, and many others, who donated their talents to the effort. More than one million people were in attendance and two billion viewers participated via TV worldwide.

Sun's solution involved a text messaging infrastructure that allowed people to join the cause by sending their name via text message to UNITE (84683). The momentum of the movement was captured visually via a data stream fed by Sun's system to the concert's 5x50-foot Jumbotron that was part of the Live 8 Philadelphia visual display systems.

The service-oriented architecture (SOA) solution scaled rapidly to support tens of thousands of text messages. [The solution was architected, built, tested, and deployed](#) in six weeks, demonstrating the efficiency and flexibility of Sun technology and services. Fans who participated in the campaign received a reply text message back from Sun thanking them for their support and directing them to the Live 8 Web site to join the march to make poverty history.



"Combining millions of voices from around the world in support of Africa epitomizes the power of sharing," said John Gage, chief researcher at Sun Microsystems. "This is

a time like no other, and we're thrilled to help build this global community." The concerts were a prelude to the [G8 Summit in Edinburgh](#), Scotland, which had at the top of its agenda African poverty, debt relief, and famine. The text campaign Sun delivered to Live 8 organizers leveraged the work Sun did for U2 lead singer Bono in support of the ONE campaign.

### **The Bottom Line**

We're now living in an age that enables more democratized participation than has ever been possible before. In the Industrial Age, railroad technology allowed for the movement of people and resources, thereby shrinking the world. In the Participation Age, with blogs, [Wikis](#), eBay storefronts, instant messaging, and e-mail, the game has changed again by expanding the individual, who can now sit in one place and be everywhere at the same time. Embracing the power and participation of the user will be a key trend to growing and maintaining your business.

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## Choice vs. Balance

### Making the Tough Choices to Balance Your Life

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Part 2 of a two-part series

By Susan Cramm



Part 1 of this article discussed the unfortunate reality that over one-half of working professionals surveyed<sup>1</sup> aren't living a balanced life and that corporate leaders are in denial or believe that policies that address work-life balance issues impede competitiveness. Since answers are not going to come from above, it's up to those in the unbalanced majority to help resolve work-life balance issues — for themselves and for those whom they lead.

Here's an e-mail I received recently from a woman named Jean (a pseudonym) that describes the work-life balance dilemma perfectly:

*"I have spent 15 years in the same company trying to 'get to the top.' As a result, I have a daughter who is completely alienated from me and a husband who lives a complete life without me. My daughter suddenly has three years left in school and it has taken me 15 years to realize that she is much more important than work. I am dumbfounded how to change the situation, though.*

*"My company is very rigid about time keeping and there is no such thing as a 'half-day' position in the IT field. I vacillate between wanting to change jobs to accommodate a half-day position (but I know financially this is impossible) and staying where I am because I worked so hard to get here (where exactly 'here' is, I actually have no idea)."*

It's tragic to work hard for many years — to have missed out on what matters most and be left without a clue as to what to do next. On the surface, it would appear that successful professionals like Jean have all the work-life balance tools they need — organizational and financial — to take control of their lives.

From an organizational perspective, they are in positions where they shape plans, define work commitments and schedules, and delegate to others. They should also have the financial security necessary to define their boundaries — to say "yes" or "no" and, if necessary, find alternative employment if their needs do not synch with those

of the enterprise.

In reality, the near-frenetic demands of business and personal life bring many of these professionals to their knees. They find themselves exhausted by the end of the day and unable to gain the perspective necessary to plan, manage, or delegate. On the urgent/important time management dimensions, they are caught servicing the urgent and unable to ascertain the important.

### **The First Step to Work-Life Balance**

For Jean, and everyone else in similar situations, the first step to achieving work-life balance is to say “no” and find some time to think things through. Saying “no” doesn’t require using the word “no”; it means setting priorities, attending to them and delegating or deferring the rest while blocking “think time” on the calendar.

*“...the first step to achieving work-life balance is to say ‘no’ and find some time to think things through.”*

You can start the thinking process by examining your values and developing clarity on how you define success. In his book “Living a Life That Matters,” Rabbi Harold Kushner writes that “our souls are split, part of us reaching for goodness, part of us chasing fame and fortune.” As we strive for fame and fortune — the need to feel significant and important — we find ourselves neglecting our families, and while we don’t like it, we tell ourselves we have no choice.

As we get older or experience loss or trauma, many of us realize that the tradeoff between significance and goodness is too great and our values shift accordingly. This is the fundamental tension for many people experiencing work-life balance issues — they want to create a more significant life, but only those who value “goodness” over “significance” will be able to exert the discipline necessary to change their lives.

*“...only those who value ‘goodness’ over ‘significance’ will be able to exert the discipline necessary to change their*

### **Stop Chasing an Impossible Dream**

Jean is clearly struggling with defining success and the implications to her career. Many “work-life moaners” (to use Jack Welch’s vernacular) wish for balance with little or no negative impact to careers — an almost impossible dream when success is defined by identity with a particular company, title, and money. For example, turning down relocation opportunities usually limits vertical career growth (within the same company, at least).

Job sharing, as profiled in a February 2005 *Harvard Business Review* article, “Two Executives, One Career,” may result in retaining one’s position and title, but at lower pay. And starting your own company

or working for yourself may be financially beneficial, but usually results in loss of organizational status.

If, from a values perspective, you are ready to define success based on subjective factors, including family, independence, variety, giving to others, etc., you need to get your finances in order. This may mean figuring out how to live on less and saving money to fund a possible transition. Work-life balance requires changes that demand negotiation with current or future employers. Negotiations are much more productive if both sides understand that either has the power to walk away.

With a financial plan in place, it's time to figure out what you want to do more of and what is standing in the way. Write a list of work activities that give you energy (where the time melts away) as well as those that zap energy, and rate how well your current job feeds your soul. Next, make a list of what you want to do more of, less of and keep the same.

If you love your job, but it's too much of a good thing (in terms of work hour requirements), define some boundaries (having breakfast with the kids, amount of travel, frequency of exercise, getting home for dinner) and figure how much time is needed to "buy back" with improved time management, delegation, and managing up.

Don't ask for permission or tell people "no," just clearly articulate what you can do and when — the work-life balance motto being, "don't complain, don't explain." If your current position requires more than you can give, leverage your equity with your employer (you have more than you think if you have performed well over a number of years) to move into a lateral (or reduced) position, or to negotiate job sharing, contracting, or part-time work.

### **Work-Life Balance Is an Individual Responsibility**

If you don't love your job, move on — either within the company if you have a good reputation and relationship, to another company, or on your own. Making a career shift is extremely difficult due to the personal introspection, planning, and execution required. If you decide to go this route, it's a good idea to retain a career coach to help you understand your personality and motivators, assess your talents, skills, and knowledge, develop career goals and business plans, and market yourself.

As we look into the future, the work-life balance dilemma is going to change as organizations strive to replace the linear career path ("a path to the top") with non-linear career paths that make sense in delayed, downsized, and outsourced organizations.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, however, the responsibility for work-life balance resides with the individual. It is possible for those who understand that "the path to a truly successful and significant life is through friendship, family, and acts of generosity and self-sacrifice"<sup>3</sup> to have the courage to manage their careers and discipline themselves to live below their means.

### **About Susan Cramm**

Susan Cramm is the founder and president of Valuedance, a coaching firm in San Clemente, California, that assists executives in formulating their strategic agenda and supporting organizational, process, and technology plans. Working primarily one-on-one, Cramm applies her expertise in strategic planning, executive leadership, investment analysis information technology, and change management to realign leadership practices towards a more tightly focused and well-coordinated agenda.

Cramm is the former CFO and executive vice president at Chevys Mexican Restaurants. Prior to Chevys, Cramm held the positions of CIO and vice president of the Information Technology Group and senior director of strategic and financial planning at Taco Bell Corporation.

Susan Cramm is a recognized industry expert on IT leadership and coaching. She is a frequent speaker at industry conferences and published writer. For more information about Susan and her views, see [www.valuedance.com](http://www.valuedance.com) and [www.cio.com](http://www.cio.com), for which she writes the monthly “Executive Coach” columns.

Susan received her master’s degree in management from Northwestern University, specializing in finance, marketing, and quantitative methods.

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<sup>1</sup> CIO Magazine, Sept. 17, 2002, “IT Careers and Work-Life Balance”; Fast Company, July 1, 1999, “Results From How Much is Enough.”

<sup>2</sup> Journal of Organizational Behavior, “[Conceptualizing and Evaluating Career Success](#),” Peter Heslin.

<sup>3</sup> “Living a Life That Matters,” Harold Kushner, First Anchor Books, 2001.