

## A Ubiquity Interview with Thomas H. Davenport

Thomas H. Davenport, the noted knowledge management and process innovation expert, is author of the new book "Thinking for a Living: How to Get Better Performance and Results from Knowledge Workers" (Harvard Business School Press).

**UBIQUITY:** At the beginning of your book you've reprinted a cartoon showing an executive asking his assistant, "Wilson, what exactly is a knowledge worker and do we have any on the staff?" That's pretty funny. How realistic do you think it is in typical organizations?

**DAVENPORT:** Well, I certainly think there's a lot of fuzziness, ambiguity, and imprecision about what a knowledge worker is, and it's not a term most managers use easily. They don't say, "Okay, these are my knowledge workers, these are my non-knowledge workers." So despite the fact that the term's been around for a long time, very few people have been comfortable using it as a managerial concept.

**UBIQUITY:** So how would you define a knowledge worker?

**DAVENPORT:** I define them as people with high degrees of education or expertise whose primary job function involves some activity related to knowledge.

**UBIQUITY:** Let's do a pop quiz. What about an airline pilot?

**DAVENPORT:** I would say yes because pilots are applying a significant amount of knowledge as the primary part of their jobs.

**UBIQUITY:** What about actors?

**DAVENPORT:** Yes, because in interpreting the script their primary job is applying their acquired knowledge to a specific role.

**UBIQUITY:** So then you're saying that knowledge work comes in various types and is present in various degrees, is that right?

**DAVENPORT:** Yes. That's why I emphasize that we're talking about one's *primary* job role. One of the confusing things about the term is that virtually everybody has to make *some* use of knowledge in a job. Making pizza requires some knowledge, but knowledge is not a primary component of the job.















