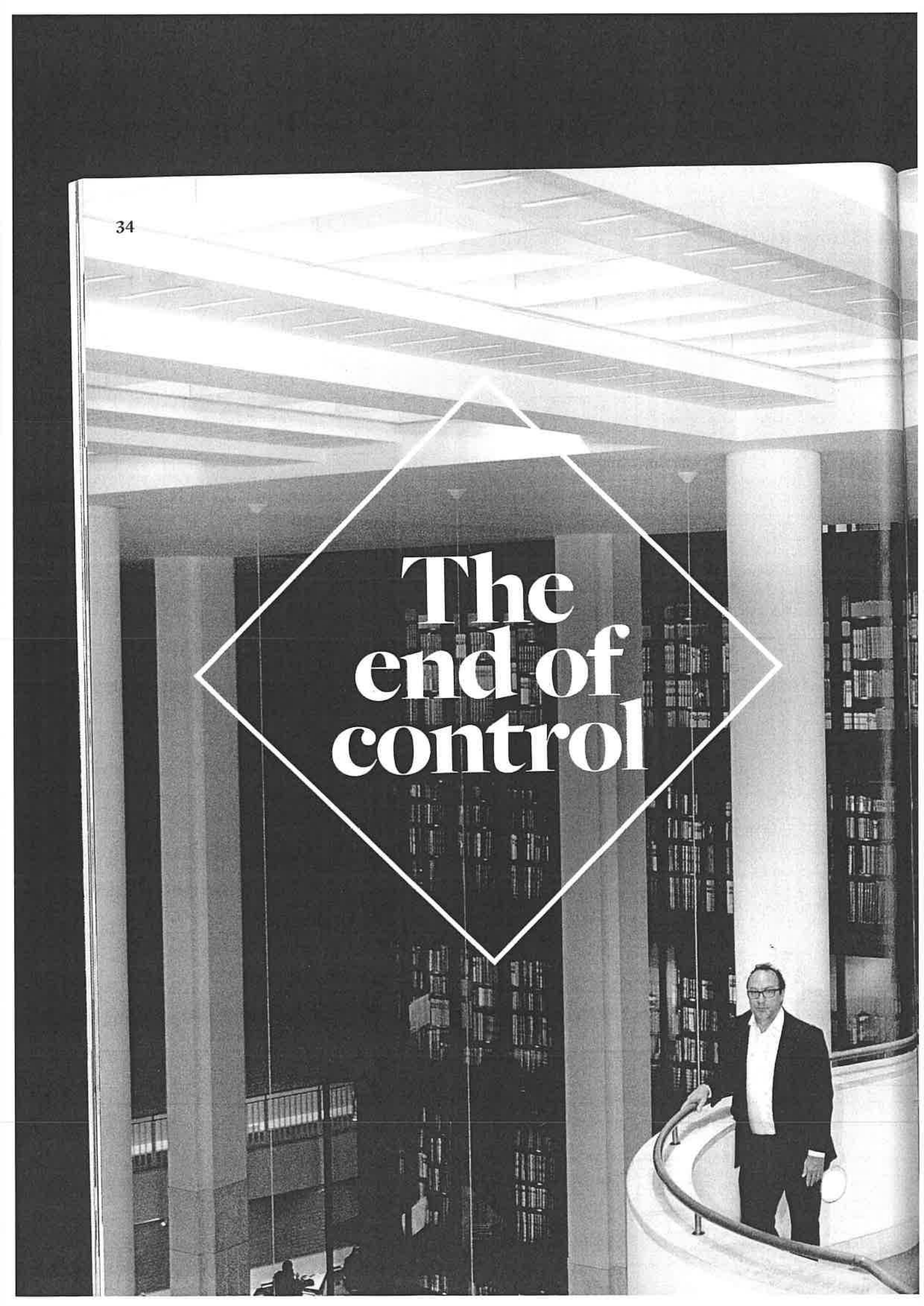




# The end of control

SCOTT M (2016)  
THE END OF CONTROL.  
PROFESSIONAL MANAGER  
WINTER 2016.

A REDEFINITION  
OF MANAGEMENT, BY  
WIKIPEDIA FOUNDER  
AND CMI GOLD MEDAL  
WINNER JIMMY WALES

WORDS *Matt Scott*  
PHOTOGRAPHY *Sam Peach*

WIKIPEDIA FOUNDER Jimmy Wales wants to rethink the way we manage people and business. The online encyclopaedia's entry on management says the role of a manager has "five basic functions: planning, organising, coordinating, commanding and controlling".

For Wales, this definition is too restrictive. In particular, he'd like to change the last two functions on the list.

"The commanding and controlling aspect of management is changing substantially," he says. "Managers need new skills, and one of those skills is delegation and allowing teams to be more autonomous in order to be more agile." Wales favours the idea of "inspiring and coaching".

"We no longer live in a world where you have the luxury of communicating information up the hierarchy and then once a year making a big decision. The company needs to be nimble at the end points, so you have to really think about what that means in terms of old command and control hierarchies.

"At the end of the day, management is inspiring people to do the things that need to be done," he adds.

Our meeting takes place in the British Library, home to seminal works such as the Magna Carta and Leonardo da Vinci's notebook. The institution houses more than 150 million items, written in most known languages, and taking up over 625km of shelving. It still adds three million new items

## "PEOPLE HAVE TO BE SELF-DIRECTED OTHERWISE IT IS USELESS - YOU CAN'T CONTROL WHAT EVERYBODY IS DOING ALL THE TIME"

every year to its collection, making it an apt location for interviewing the founder of the world's largest online encyclopaedia.

Wales puts immense thought into answering every question put to him; his responses are concise and considered. He's an easy person to talk to, comfortable discussing anything from economic theory to computer games, while remaining keenly focused on what he personally wants to achieve.

His vision for Wikipedia is "a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge". It's an ambitious, noble goal, made all the more extraordinary in that he wants to achieve it with a team made up mostly of volunteers. The Alabama native, who now works and lives in central London, founded the site in 2001 and it now boasts more than 37 million articles in more than 250 languages, with 500 million people visiting its pages each month.

Much of Wikipedia's popularity, says Wales, is down to the openness it engenders and the ability of its user community constantly to expand, update and modify content pages.

### Leading and inspiring

"The success of Wikipedia came from the fact we were a product of the dotcom crash," he says. "We had no resources and so I didn't have any choice but

to delegate within a community, to trust that people would do the right things and to guide that process rather than to attempt to top-down command and control everything.

"This decentralisation is really organic to our model and has been a part of everything we've done."

At the start of the Wikipedia project, Wales drew inspiration from the Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek who argued, to quote Wikipedia, "that a centrally planned economy could never match the efficiency of the open market".

Wales believes that businesses must adapt to and learn from Hayek's teachings to succeed in the modern world, even if this can at first seem alien to managers used to working in planned, corporate environments.

"Sometimes people have such an ingrained, top-down, command-and-control view," he says, "that they have a hard time even comprehending how people can come together in small group collaboration, organise themselves, make plans and carry those plans out effectively without someone directing the work from the top."

"The ability to step back and trust people to do things and, if they aren't doing those things, find other people who will, is the core of my management style - much more so than trying to direct people's work."

"People have to be self-directed otherwise it is useless - you can't control what everybody is doing all the time."

Wales clearly has passion for the Wikipedia project and its underlying values of free speech and equality. He sees himself as a leader of people, whose role it is to inspire through positivity rather than direct and dictate. This approach to management led to CMI recognising Wales with

## BIG DATA BRINGS BIG RESPONSIBILITY

As the former managing director of Google UK, Dan Copley has worked inside the company that, perhaps more than any other, has changed people's lives. Google's own Objectives and Key Results system is a

much-admired step up from traditional appraisals.

Today, Copley is using his experience at Google to help emerging companies push forward.

The sheer volume and velocity of information and

insight available today can put a lot more pressure on the shoulders of decision-makers, says Copley, but managers should not be daunted by their increased responsibilities.

Technology is itself helping to quantify and qualify these new streams of data.

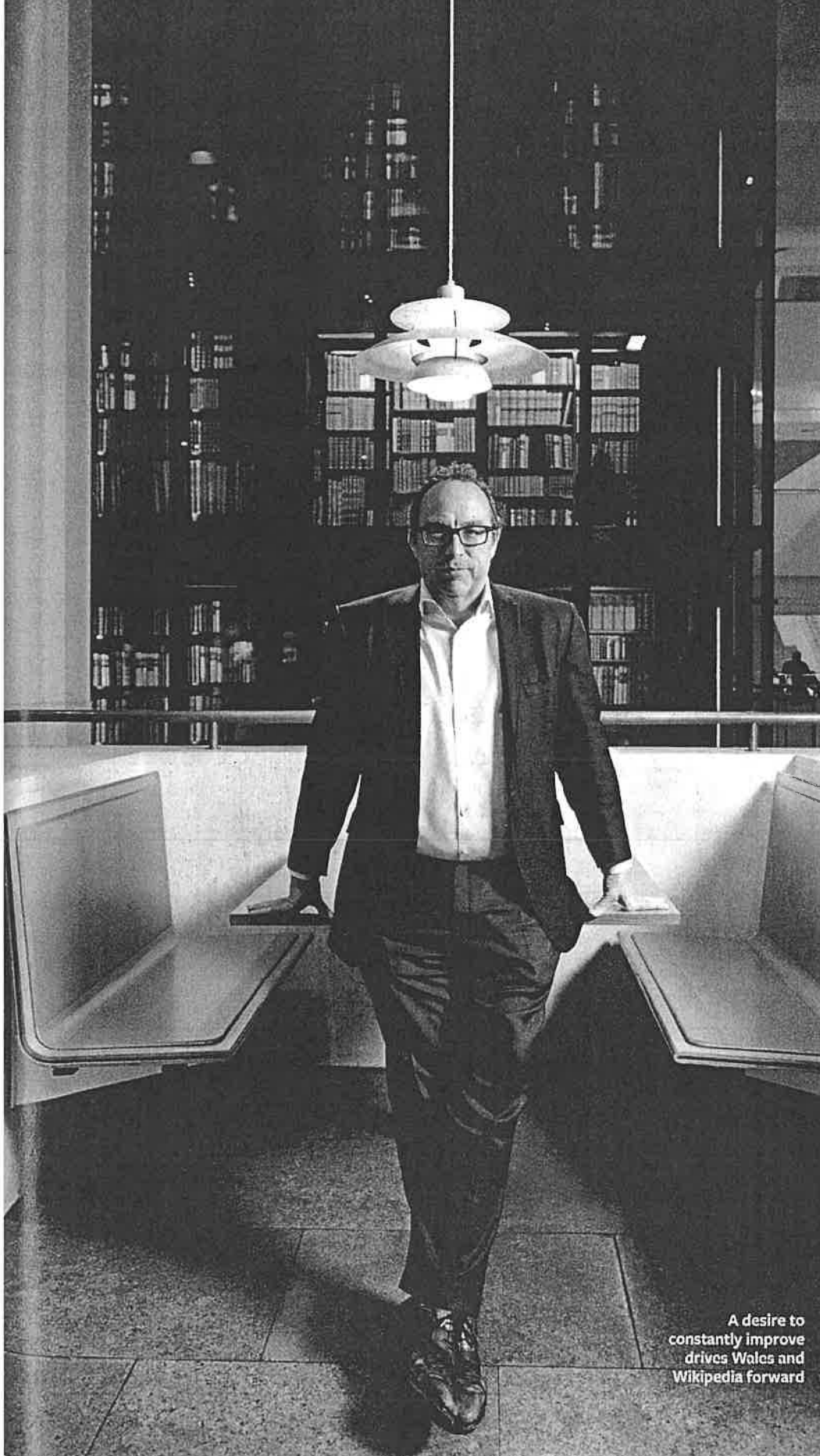
"Everything nowadays moves at internet speed, but the good news is that digital gives management the tools to measure, evaluate and act at the same pace," says Copley. "The organisations that will

thrive in this environment are those that regularly step back to ask 'what is now possible that can provide a time-to-insight advantage?', and then invest in the systems to get it."

"If you find yourself thinking, 'there really ought to be a service to help me do X', it almost certainly already exists. Search for it online and you are likely to find it."

And if your search concludes that no one has yet built the service you need - perhaps that is your next business opportunity."





## WIKIPEDIA

### ZERO

Right now, Wales is campaigning for greater Wikipedia coverage in the developing world by encouraging contributors to translate pages into local languages and develop new content relevant to audiences in developing nations.

"I really enjoy seeing people coming together, particularly in the developing world, and very passionately building Wikipedia in their own language and really feeling like they are part of something important and useful," he says.

As part of this push, Wales has helped set up partnerships with telecoms companies to provide mobile phones with Wikipedia integrated into the handset for developing nations such as Serbia, Thailand and Malaysia.

Wikipedia Zero, which is available in 63 countries with 72 operators, is also partnering with mobile phone companies to provide access to Wikipedia and its sister projects free of data charges, opening up access to millions of users who otherwise could not have afforded to access the encyclopaedia.

A desire to  
constantly improve  
drives Wales and  
Wikipedia forward

## THE RISKS OF CHASING METRICS

Wales is not alone in believing that modern technology is an enabler, rather than a redefiner, of management.

Simon Calver CCMi is the former CEO of LOVEFiLM and Mothercare who's spent much of his career as a professional manager in big corporates such as Dell and PepsiCo.

Now a partner investing in early-stage tech startups with the Business Growth Fund's £200m venture fund, Calver has a useful, hybrid view of management in a digital world.

"People still respond to people," he says. "But managers do have to adapt to change. You can't manage the same way as you did before in this new [digital] environment."

"Five to 10 years ago, you would receive 20 emails a day, now you get 200. Triage and management of information has become vital to understand what is important and what's not. It's easy to become distracted, and strategy is

as much about saying no as saying yes."

Managers, says Calver, can no longer sit on the sidelines. In this new, digital-centric world they must be more actively involved in the day-to-day running of their businesses and the lives of the people they employ.

"Management is not an armchair or spectator sport any more," says Calver. "It is an active-participation sport. Real-time performance analysis is a reality, and it provides access to information a lot sooner, which means you can make decisions a lot quicker than before."

"Management is now a much more interactive and iterative process than just a formal annual review. With 'score-boarding' and 'dash-boarding' you can visibly see [how people are performing], and there is nothing better than creating a bit of healthy competition between people."

In this age of constant experimentation and product iteration, modern organisations generate vast

amounts of data. This is empowering for managers, but also has its downside.

Calver warns of the danger of "metric-chasing", and says that business leaders need to ensure that there is always a clear focus on what exactly the business wants to achieve from each and every project undertaken.

"You need to avoid the knee-jerk management of chasing a metric for two weeks and then chasing another," he says. "In an environment where more information is available more readily and more quickly, you need to be even more focused on what the strategically important measures to track and monitor are, and ensure the whole organisation is aligned behind those few critical things – otherwise they will be a complete distraction."

"Having all those tools and information is great, but there is no substitute for a simple, clear and engaging vision for people to be part of and managers to lead with from the front."



PAUL JESSEY/OUTLINE



## "IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE A CULTURE THAT ACCEPTS REASONABLE FAILURE"

the task of using resources efficiently and effectively has always been and continues to be important.

"There is a mistake that people sometimes make in imagining the world is changing into something completely different than it ever was before, but a lot of the basics stay the same."

But while technology might not have changed the fundamental role of a manager, it is changing the way they carry out their work.

More than ever, managers today can adapt approaches to problems in real-time, and learn from experiments on the fly. In years gone by, such problem-solving could have taken months or years to resolve and caused untold long-lasting damage in the process. Wales says that this means companies have to be constantly innovating and learning from their failures – otherwise they'll be left behind in the dust created by their competitors.

"If you're not failing at least some of the time, then you are not innovating or being risky enough," says Wales.

"You never want an organisation to get into a position where no one is allowed to take a risk and fail, because what you are more likely to do is have the whole organisation fail as other people innovate and change faster than you do. It is important to have a culture that accepts reasonable failure."

Such a culture requires an underlying network of systems and processes to ensure that everyone is working together in pursuit of the same primary objective, something that Wales knows well from his experience of setting up Wikipedia. The online encyclopaedia has an array of textbook-like protocols that means, while anyone can update a page, there are strict rules that must be adhered to and a community of avid Wikipedians ready to come down heavy on anyone who steps out of line – even if that is Wales himself.

"If people imagine the software is the magic then they are missing a lot of what's going on," says Wales. "Opening a wiki and thinking it will turn into anything useful without some principles and ideas behind it is folly."

"The community that exists at Wikipedia is really passionate about quality. That means we have a lot of discussions and dialogues about how to achieve that, and the results are mixed but remarkable. There are always things we want to improve and I think if we ever lose that spirit of wanting to improve then we will have lost something really important." □

the Gold Medal Award for 2015, something that he says is a "great honour".

"One of the most important jobs of a manager is to inspire people and to lead them – you can't do that without a vision and principles," he says. "I believe in being very positive. I don't think negativity and yelling at people works, it just gives a lot of kickback and people don't like that."

"My management focus is on inspiring and coaching my team, so it's a great honour to be recognised for this with the Gold Medal Award."

### Management in a digital age

We should be wary of overstating the impact of technology on management practice, says Wales. He sees technology as an enabler for management rather than the next step on an evolutionary path.

"Just because we are in a digital age, I don't think anything fundamental about management or people has changed," he says. "People are still people, and

Jimmy Wales is a guest speaker at CMI's annual President's Dinner on 8 March 2016 [managers.org.uk/presidents-dinner](http://managers.org.uk/presidents-dinner)