



Research on the Future of Learning and Business

■ People in 2002

In the future, people customizing for themselves, choosing resources. Our job = helping people help themselves.

Three out four children in the undeveloped world are receiving no education, and are not likely to.

The shift in responsibility from organization to individual. Drucker, Emerson.

People, not cogs. Death of Taylorism. Death of the Snake Oil Salesman. Death of mass marketing.

Today

Knowledge is power. Most people are reluctant to give it up. But sharing knowledge with one another is the key to leveraging intellectual capital. In the Information Age, everyone in the organization is a learner and a mentor and a coach. To get ahead in the world to come, organizations must respect and incent the recording, sharing, and intake of learning. Inertia will drag many old-style companies to the grave.

America's school system grants high school diplomas to people who cannot read a bus schedule. Half of a high-school grads lack the fundamental skills required of an entry-level knowledge worker. Corporations of the future will often need to train their own in basic skills. Underskilled employees will flock to corporations with respected educational programs.

Workers are learners, and learners are workers. The two activities are becoming indistinguishable. When things didn't change much, workers could get by with periodic updates. Now that change is rampant and new information gushes forth day and night, learning is continuous. No longer can organizations imply that learning has

lower status than work – by asking people to study on their own time, not to read books or kick back to reflect between 9 and 5, and to keep the kibitzing in the coffee room to a minimum.

Today, all knowledge workers are free agents. Tom Peters counsels readers to think of themselves as individual corporations. *Fast Company* touts You, Inc. Even executives have said, “We are all temps.”

Tomorrow

Progress has brought us longer hours, less security, more stress, shorter vacations, and unhappy lives on the job. Recognition that something is not right will fuel a new way of thinking about how organizations should work.

Waves of screenagers, accustomed to computers and electronic games from infancy, are joining the workforce absent the blinders of their parents. Some youth will often surpass the productivity of their elders in short order.

Ubiquitous information makes people at all levels responsible for making unaided decisions. “An individual without information cannot take responsibility; an individual with information cannot help but take responsibility.”^[1] Employees become members, stakeholders.

As people’s performance and potential for performance becomes paramount, training will cease to be a staff function. Creating and maintaining an innovative, flexible, challenged, and enthusiastic workshop will become a basic function of management.

Recognizing that soft skills (or “emotional intelligence”) count twice as much in success as technical competence and IQ combined, performance improvement initiatives will make much more use of collaboration, team learning, small group activities, etc. Medieval (but generally accepted) accounting principles will be shoved aside by measurement systems that treat knowledge as an asset, training as an investment, and inflexible infrastructure a liability. Reports on customer relationships and what’s happening outside of the company will become more important than internal bean-counting.

Managers become leaders and coaches instead of watchdogs and controllers. In most industries, they will be paying more attention to knowledge than to hard assets, inspiring rather than cracking the whip. Groups will find that their front-line members know more about how the company’s working than their insulated supervisors.

Customers increasingly pump their own gas, get answers to their questions without asking others, and interact directly with corporate systems. The more the customer knows, the more overhead they lift from the corporation’s shoulders. “Training” extends outside the firewall.

People will work where it’s convenient to work. Offices will be used for meetings with customers and colleagues. Most “office work” will be done from people’s homes or

nearby cube farms. When you're not tethered to a phone line, and hi-res telecom brings a co-worker on the other side of the world as close as someone down the hall, geography becomes immaterial.

Oversimplifying the work of Harvard Professor Chris Argyris, people will be more authentic and honest. Valid knowledge crowds out dysfunctional BS.

Corporations need responsive, proactive, engaged, problem-solving people who continually learn how to better serve their customers. What they've got today is often an organization made vulnerable by resting on lip service rather than reality, dated systems held together with Scotch Tape and bailing wire, and outmoded schools of thought.

Teleworking

Are telecommuters more productive?

- 30% yes
- 50% same
- 4% no
- 16% don't know

Companies offering telecommuting option in 1993: 6%; in 1998: 33%^[2]

Evolution – We're Neanderthals



eLearning will open the floodgates of human potential. The gains will come from taking advantage of our understanding of how people learn and leveraging this with the technology of networks and computers.

eLearning won't be taking advantage of more powerful human brains. The hands on the evolutionary clock move very slowly. A couple of thousand years is an instant.

Our brains were formed before the invention of agriculture. We're ideally

suited for life on the savannah. Our eyes detect the slightest movements. We're social – and able to work together to hunt big game. We're hardwired for speaking languages to communicate with one another.

On the other hand, we're not well suited for sedentary lives indoors, wearing neckties or brassieres, drinking coffee, eating junk food, doing paperwork, or living beyond the age of 25. Evolution didn't select our ancient ancestors because they could recognize long-term consequences (environmental catastrophe, overpopulation, the Information Age) because they were powerless to do anything about them.

When we meet our own recalcitrance to accepting new ways of looking at things, just remember that our emotions, motivators, and internal chemistry having changed a whole lot since the invention of the wheel. Or fire.

We humans naturally seek to learn, enjoy companionship, work in teams, are comforted by positive strokes, and flee danger. Things haven't changed all that much^[3].

[\[1\]](#) Jan Carlson

[\[2\]](#) CHALLENGER, GRAY & CHRISTMAS

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