

Building block of success is the individual

By Irwin J. Hoffman

IN a new book to be published in 1985, John Naisbitt, author of "Megatrends," describes changes affecting the corporation in America. His theory, that the hierarchal structures of our corporate institutions are giving way to networking structures, is stronger than ever. This trend, along with his observations regarding the inevitability of a shrinking work force within this decade and a subsequent "seller's market" of talent, will adversely affect our educational institutions.

Some futurists predict that institutions that don't recognize the efficacy of networking and the commitment of workers to their tasks that networking encourages will have problems in this new society. In fact, Naisbitt postulates that institutions must provide opportunities for employees to feel an "ownership" in their work or these institutions will not be able to attract personnel in the coming "seller's market."

One corporation Naisbitt describes turned a bleak financial picture around by turning its corporate structure upside down. Top-end executives became the facilitators for the low end, those who dealt with the public. The dramatic reversal in this corporation could be replicated within our educational institutions.

The question is mechanism. Networking theorists indicate that in a network each person feels an important contribution, so that at a point in time the energy and effort of the tasks at hand revolve around that individual. The individual is always important on a continuing basis and on occasion is the center of activity. Each person thus feels an "ownership" of the activity and a personal commitment to the task.

It is a rare hierarchal system that produces these feelings in employees. There is a growing consensus that the administrative staff of a school district, like

corporation executives, should become facilitators of the educational delivery system. More often than not, these individuals impede the delivery system, depress morale, stifle creativity and facilitate only ennui, paper work and misguided concepts of equity.

Of course, there are those exceptional administrators who can encourage the individual to feel important in a hierarchal system. These are the insightful leaders who should be asked to restructure the school system to reflect the changes reshaping society.

The computer laboratory can be the embryo of change in our schools. There, students and teachers are partners in learning. It is rare to find a successful computer teacher who does not admit learning from his students, networking with them in such a way that each individual feels important and committed.

Similarly, the computer laboratory can be the vehicle to break down the "wall" that separates disciplines within a school. This artificial barrier disappears when teachers cooperate on educational units, learn from each other, share software and hardware, plan budgets and work together in the laboratory.

Now is the time to creatively redesign and retool the education enterprise; to invert the structure and re-examine heretofore accepted tasks.

Staffs should network in intra-school and inter-school arrangements. Teachers and administrators should be encouraged to develop personal commitments to what they teach and oversee. The dispassionate fiats of "old" model administrators should be of historical interest only; education should proceed as a cooperative venture between students, teachers and facilitators — formerly known as administrators.

Many creative educators say the current pressure to raise scores on standardized tests is destroying exciting teaching. The innovative teacher is being punished because of the poor teacher. It would be better to get rid of the poor teacher and give the good teacher time to teach why and when along with the how. The how is taking up a disproportionate share of a student's time

because it is the easiest concept to measure.

We are misleading the public when we extol the virtues of raising scores on standardized tests at the expense of thinking. Technological advances require us to stress when and why we do things. The how is quite often done for us.

Teaching unions will have to change. Staffs of schools should not be forced to accept new faculty members whose major qualification is age. If no staff wants a contract teacher, he or she should be made a facilitator without pupil contact. If he cannot perform in this capacity he should be let go.

Facilitators are needed to advise and implement budgets, enforce discipline, handle paper work, community relations, etc. These jobs should be equal in importance to that of the teacher and not the reward for superior teaching or astute political acumen. Competent teachers should be able to find their financial rewards in teaching.

If Naisbitt is correct and societal institutions are only going to survive if they change their attitudes toward the value of the human being, then the educational system will have to do more than offer larger salaries.

The computer laboratory at George Washington High School was developed through networking. Its acclaimed success is due to the farsighted vision of certain administrators in the Denver Public Schools who allowed us to be creative, innovative and productive. In general, industrial-age education has a priori assumptions antithetical to the above freedoms.

Until our current model is changed, the nurturing of a networking environment is impossible. Entrepreneurial enterprises are gradually embracing Naisbitt's new model; so must educational institutions.

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