

complaint is it's just too slow. We can't live with week-old news. So we're thinking daily now."

Carter sees an electronic product based on networks connected to PCs. "We could have it out in minutes instead of days." Presently, company's 75,000 employees are living in 2 or 3 different electronic worlds so getting everyone hooked up won't be easy -- an oft-heard complaint.

"Even now I can get to 40,000 people electronically in an hour. At some point those other 35,000 will be electronically connected. At some point you have to think everyone will be."

HOLD THE PHONE: X-GENERATION MORE UPBEAT THAN BOOMERS?

"Generation X" workers (under 30) are more positive about the workplace than boomers (30-49). Between July - Sept '94, 4,300 workers were asked about a wide range of work-related issues in a survey by The Wyatt Company. Some results:

- 50% of Xers say their company is well managed, vs. 41% of boomers.
- 46% of Xers say work activities are well coordinated across work areas, vs. 37% of boomers.
- 38% of Xers feel their company promotes the most competent people, vs. 23% of boomers.

There were significant gaps between management & rank-&-file workers on a number of questions:

- Hourly employees & senior managers are at odds over what is preventing change at their companies. For instance, 40% of hourly workers cite lack of management visibility & support as a barrier to change, while only 16% of senior managers themselves point to this. By contrast, 54% of senior managers cite employee resistance as a key barrier to change, while only 34% of hourly workers think this is so. [Ed note: My oh my!]

"One might conclude that the more positive attitude of Xers is directly related to their shorter length of time in the workforce. This may be part of the answer, but another factor may be that Xers have entered the workforce with more realistic expectations than boomers," explains Wyatt consultant Jacques Leger.

ITEM OF IMPORTANCE TO PROFESSIONALS

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BENCHMARKING PR: VALUABLE TOOL OR MISLEADING PANACEA?

Everyone's been doing it, but is it the right place to look for improvement? Conduct investigatory visits to other organizations -- sometimes similar, sometimes not. Then compare & realign to fit the "better" pattern, if there is one.

There appear to be 4 modes of benchmarking:

1. Execs or teams from 2 or more organizations just talk to each other about what they're doing, why, what works.
2. A 3rd party -- usually a pr or mgmt consulting firm -- visits the benchmarking partners & reports.
3. A trade or professional ass'n surveys the partners using a questionnaire sponsored by the instigating partner.
4. The big mgmt consulting firms or the consulting arms of the big accounting firms come in & "judge" a pr dept's performance based on their "exhaustive" databases from other organizations.

The latter = danger! Too often they don't understand communications or relationships. And they tend to have a cookie cutter approach: if one outfit somewhere cut the dep't to 3 people, then clearly every organization ought to be able to get along with 3 people.

SOME PROS & CONS

1. As the antithesis to NIH (not invented here), benchmarking can be very useful. Anything that gets inbred organizations to look outside can help.
2. As a form of evaluation, albeit fairly subjective, it beats not doing any (and studies tell us most don't -- see prr 12/19/94).
3. Often it's seen as an easy way around thinking holistically & indigenously about your organization, its specific culture & values & people, plus what will work within its method of operation. Becomes a fad-multiplier: What worked for them will work here, too.

So often are comparisons really apples vs. oranges that, in reports we've seen, the footnotes to permit accurate comparison are longer than the findings!

4. **Reinforces damaging fad management.** There's no competitive advantage, USP or differentiating factor in copying.
5. **Financial comparison is rarely done,** certainly not in auditors terms that would make it useful & trustworthy.
6. **Accuracy check:** are they telling it like it is or bragging a bit? Be sure to benchmark *what hasn't worked*.
7. **How to lure others to participate?** Go after data that appeals to them, too, so they're willing to take the risk of revealing themselves. By designing the line of questioning and first answering it for your outfit, you can determine a) whether others will be able to answer, even if willing; b) if it has real utility or is just more garbage data.
8. **Best practices are most valuable.** The processes, products, strategies, structure that make community or shareholder relations extremely effective, for instance. Or just a single program or project. Expecting to find whole pr operations worth emulating -- which many senior managers are -- is a kamikaze flight.

In *Managing on the Edge*, Richard Pascale gives 2 reasons why benchmarking is "grist for thought, not a prescription":

1. **Managerial ideas began to acquire the velocity of fads after WWII.** He charts 26 fads between '50-'88, eg: T-Groups, Theories X, Y & Z, MBO, Zero-Base Budgeting, Quality Circles, etc. "One unintended consequence: it fosters superficiality."
2. In '82, *In Search of Excellence* identified 43 "excellent" companies. Pascale charts the status of these companies 5 yrs later. By '87, 14 were still "excellent." Today many of those have stumbled.

ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY ADDS TO COMMUNITY BENEFIT REPORT

"From time to time we hear members of the public question what they get from their local, tax-exempt hospital," writes Richard Pozniak of South Shore Hospital. "We've addressed this by publishing our annual community benefit report (pr 10/26)...and now another report which focuses on our economic value to the region. We are told this economic report is the only one of its kind that deals specifically with a single hospital. Similar reports have been done on geographic clusters of tax-exempt hospitals." (Also by universities, federal facilities, industries, some others)

CONTENTS SHOW VITALITY TO REGION BEYOND OFFERING CARE

Identifies the economic importance of the hospital -- jobs it provides, expenditures & investments it makes in terms of people, goods & services on the regional economy -- as well as money spent & invested by employees. For example:

Just published independent report was done by a grad student from U Mass Amherst as part of his thesis project

- SSH is the largest provider of jobs in the Town of Weymouth, accounting for 15% of available jobs, is the 5th largest employer on the South Shore and one of the top 35 employers in the state.
- In 1993, the hospital purchased more than \$12 million worth of goods & services in the region alone; hospital employees spent \$3 million at businesses located within one mile of the hospital campus.

49-pg report, or executive summary, was sent to all elected & appointed officials in the region, local business coalitions, state & federal lawmakers, media, & other influential external stakeholders. "I had a special breakfast meeting for local government leaders to present them with an advance copy. They were impressed with the results. It's an important communications tool."

A FIRST: EMPLOYEES DON'T RANK SUPERVISORS 1ST INFO CHOICE

There's no formula for best meeting employees' info needs. Asking them to rank their preferred sources helps. For Carl Carter, mgr, employee pub'ns, BellSouth Telecommunications (Birmingham) the result was revolutionary:

"Twice we've asked employees what is their preferred source in terms of usefulness. We listed 11 different ways of receiving info -- including group meetings, talking with the boss. Pretty dramatically, the weekly newsletter was most often among the top 3. The other top rated were e-mail & group meetings. **The supervisor came in 5th.**"

Every known study has hitherto found "hearing it from my immediate supervisor" the preference. ("Group meetings" in this study could be what many mean by that.)

LACK OF TIME CAUSING CHANGE?

Our industry is moving faster than ever. What we used to measure in weeks or months, now we measure in days or hours. So people are saying **they don't have time to sit with the boss & talk.** Face-to-face, depending on management styles, takes longer. Meetings take longer. People don't have time, they say 'give me an e-mail.'

He doesn't refute the value of face-to-face. "For some things it's the only way you can communicate -- downsizing, major changes. You don't communicate those things in newsletters or e-mail. But day-to-day, for what's happening in the industry, in the company, in the life, we're seeing a major shift."

Dep't is currently doing an e-mail product that goes to middle mgrs & above (about 1,000). Recent survey of these 1,000 has so far brought in 600 returns. "Shows tremendous interest. Virtually all of them read it."

FROM WEEKLY TO DAILY

6 years ago, company changed from a quarterly slick mag to a 4-page weekly newsletter ("not a lot fancier than prr"). The change seemed formidable. "At the time, it was about the fastest thing anyone had seen. Now, the universal