

Technology Provides Information, People Possess Knowledge

David Connell, David J. Connell & Associates

As companies look to the next millennium, the on-going developments in information management continue to be the primary source for improvement. Too often, however, organizations jump head first into solutions without knowing the real problem.

All the improvements in hardware and software enable organizations to share information internally, among users, and externally, with customers and suppliers. This usually means more information to manage, but not better management of information.

In today's economic climate, businesses must be able to seek out problems instead of reacting to them, to be able to turn changes into opportunities. Successfully managing information will lead to a better understanding of problems, of the factors that effect change, and of emerging business strategies. Leading companies know how to translate information into competitive advantages.

Einstein once said that, "To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle requires creative imagination." He also said, "The mere formulation of a problem is often far more essential than its solution."

To remain responsive to competitive pressures and to future changes many organizations have spread out decision-making authority. Empowering employees who are closest to where the changes are taking place makes companies more aware of competitor strategies and more responsive to customer needs.

In the past, information about competitors and about the company's own performance was sent up the ladder to the offices of the vice presidents and president because they were the ones making the decisions. Today, the challenge is to make the same information available throughout the organization, from the president's desk to the factory floor.

Today, organizations look to technology to improve their ability to manage information (just as they invested in computer hardware twenty years ago to increase productivity). An investment in computerized information systems is not enough. Creating the right environment to share knowledge is essential to an organization's success. It's one thing to get the right information to the right people at the right time, but employees must be able to use the information.

A company that sustains a learning environment maximizes the involvement of employees in decision making and encourages creative thinking. Throughout our lives we have been conditioned to look for the "right" answer. At school, we were tested on what we knew not how well we could think; and at work, we strive to do what we think the boss wants. Too often our search for the "right" answer makes us blind to alternatives. Such thinking is inadequate in a learning organization.

The new, empowered employee will possess creative thinking skills. They will use information to identify critical challenges, assess potential solutions, and turn these into competitive advantages.

David Connell, B.Econ., B.Comm., M.B.A., is President of David J. Connell & Associates, a market consulting company based in Caledon. David has over ten years experience in marketing and business development.

www.djconnell.on.ca Tel.: 1-800-830-3552