

# LEN NADLER ON . . .



## "LOOKING AT THE HORIZON"

*I have been invited by the editor of the Journal to continue these monthly articles as Malcolm Knowles goes on to other things. I am honored by the invitation, and aware of the responsibility of following in Malcolm's wake. I have been privileged to know Malcolm in a variety of relationships for over 20 years. Along with many other people, I respect his integrity and admire his contributions to the field of adult learning. For the next 12 months, I will be contributing an article each month, hoping to stimulate and excite you. I welcome your letters and expect I will get many. Some of my articles will reinforce what you know, while others will explore new areas. Some will be controversial, for our field should welcome controversy as we evolve. — Len Nadler.*

"Horizon" is a word used by Futurists to describe the point at which we leave the world of reality and move toward the realm of trends and predictions. It is important for all of us to constantly be looking toward the horizon, or we may discover very soon that "tomorrow is already here."

A trap is to focus on the world over the horizon and stumble on the obvious, which is between us and the horizon. For purposes of this article, I am defining the horizon as 1990. . . . The reason may become obvious, but let me state it up front. We have demographic data for the decade of the 1980s which are sound but different from

almost anything we have known in the past. The generation which grew up during the 1960s is now a major part of the population and work force. They have different life styles and different work styles. They appear to be seeking other benefits from life and work than we have known in the past.

Human Resource Development (HRD) focuses on bringing about the possibility of performance change through learning. This means that we must know as much about the learner and the work place as possible. There are many variables which could be considered but in this article I will focus on only three: (1) the work force, (2) changing life styles, and (3) emerging work styles.

### Work Force Participation

My own concern with demographic data can be traced to an incident in 1968. The occasion was the annual conference of the Adult Education Association and the speaker was Seymour Wolfbein. (He was then the director of the Manpower Development and Training Administration, and is now the dean of the School of Business, University of Pennsylvania.)

Remember 1968? It was the first recession of recent memory. At the same time, we had an enormous number of 18-year-olds entering the workforce. Dr. Wolfbein chided the audience for ignoring the demographic data. Although the recession could not have been predicted, the 18-year-olds could.

After all, they have been around for 18 years! Since that time, I have been watching the data as reported first, in the *Manpower Report of the President*, and now the *Employment and Training Report of the President*. This annual publication is available at little cost from the Government Printing Office. The following data come from the statistical tables in that report.

Figure 1 (based on Table E-7 of the report) shows the comparative work force from 1970 to 1990. In this instance, 1990 is not over the horizon. Why? All those who will be in the work force have already been born! If there is any significant change in the birth rate (and I am not suggesting there will be) it would not affect the work force until 1996!

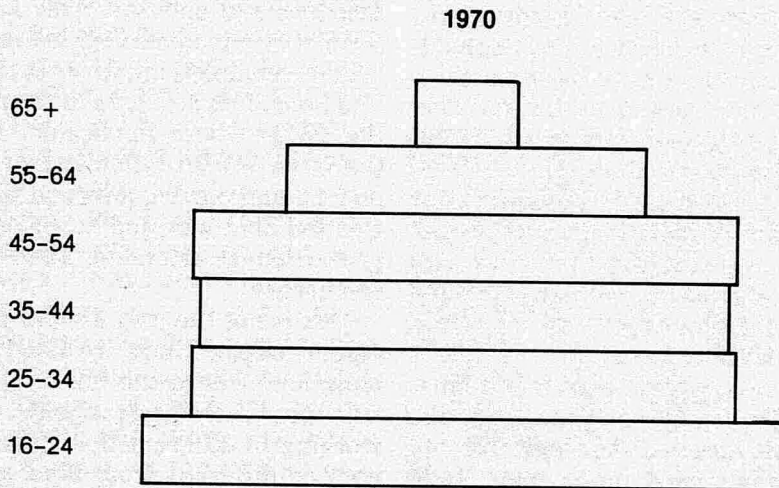
The contrast between 1970 and 1990 does not show up sufficiently in the table in Figure 1 so I have translated these data into the other two figures. Figure 2 shows the work force for 1970. Notice that it resembles the traditional pyramid we associate with both the work force and the work place. Increases in health care and a changed attitude toward older workers have had effect, even in 1970, in having more older people in the work force than was previously the case.

Now look at Figure 3. When I showed this to a group someone remarked that it looked like a tree. This can help us contrast the difference. In the 20-year period, the

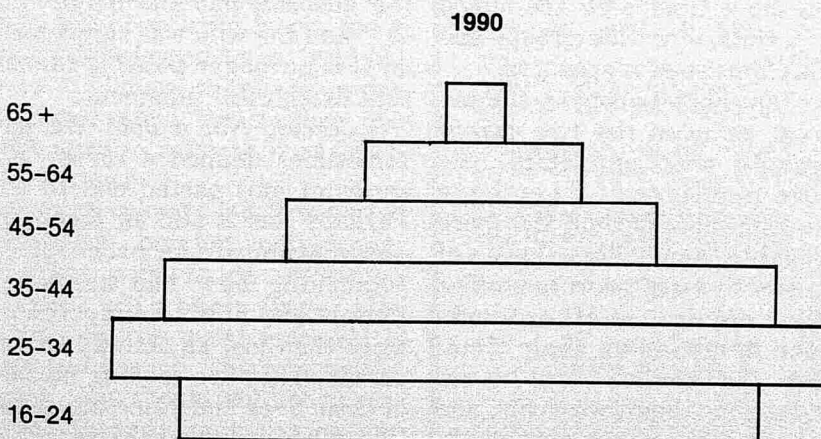
**Figure 1**  
**WORK FORCE PARTICIPATION**

	1970	1977	1985	1990
16-24	23.2	25.0	22.2	19.3
25-34	20.5	25.5	28.8	28.9
35-44	19.5	18.2	22.2	25.3
45-54	19.8	17.0	14.3	15.4
55-64	13.1	11.5	9.9	8.8
65 +	3.7	3.0	2.4	2.3

**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**



configuration of the work force has changed. What are some of the implications?

The age brackets are those given by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and we should not be trapped by them. If we contrast the work force below the age of 44 for 1970 and 1990, we find that in 1970 the figure was 62.2 percent while it will rise by 1990 to 73.5 percent! Put another way, by 1990 almost three-fourths of the work force will be below the age of 44. With retirement now at 70, or beyond, what are the job possibilities for this "younger" group?

How about your organization? Will you be producing dissatisfied people who will be looking for promotions (into supervisory and managerial ranks) but with insufficient opportunities?

At the other end of the age scale (16-24) does your organization rely on the steady flow of younger people to keep your labor costs down? With fewer young people available, what will happen to this traditional source of "cheap labor"?

The tables represent national figures and there may be some significant differences in the geographical areas from which your organization draws its work force. Generally, however, there will be fewer individuals at the entry level who are postponing retirement. By contrast there will be more at the senior levels.

There are additional implications which can be derived from these data, but perhaps I have given enough here to get you started in thinking through the implications for your organization.

### Change in Life Styles

How people live, their life styles, always influence how they work. Therefore, let us take a brief look at life styles. This is by no means as easy to present as the data on the work force. The work force can be counted, the numbers are predictable, and changes come slowly. None of these factors apply to a discussion of life styles.

This makes life styles more difficult to discuss, but not any less important to our look at the horizon. Of the many possibilities, let us look at just a few.

- *Single Parents:* We now have more households with a single

parent than ever before in history. Before making any value judgments, accept the reality. Many of these single households are the result of divorce — the rate is estimated to be that one out of every two first marriages (at present) will result in divorce. In many cases this results in one or two children living with only one parent. In earlier times (perhaps 10 years ago) you could make the generalization that the single parent was a woman. This is no longer the case. Also, we find that in some states single people can adopt children. Of course, there are also some women who find themselves pregnant and unmarried and opt for keeping the child.

For all these reasons, and perhaps others, we have people who want to work but find some difficulty in holding a job. An alternative is to force them on to welfare, and then complain because they do not want to work. For some of the less schooled and minority citizens this has been a historic practice. Today, there are single parents who are what we term middle-class, even professionals, and they will refuse to remain in a dependent state. It is not that they will refuse welfare as much as they will demand to be employed. Of even more significance, they have much to contribute to the work force and the general economy of the country.

• *Disposable Income:* The birth rate has declined. This has produced a side effect which is easy to overlook. With fewer children, and sometimes no children, adults have more disposable income. There is less need to spend money on food, clothing, medical care, etc. for several children.

Having fewer children, and more disposable income, has resulted in more money being spent for leisure-time activities. The proliferation of recreation vehicles, recreation sites, etc. is some evidence of this change.

Of course, there is the counterbalancing factor of inflation, and now the recession. It is still too early to see the impact of these twin problems. In 1973-75 it was predicted that people would stay

at home and watch their spending very carefully. At the same time, parking at Disneyworld was overcrowded, and restaurants and other recreational facilities thrived.

With more disposable income, and little preparation for this phenomenon, we should not be surprised if the work place and life generally is viewed differently than in the past. Once again, let us avoid moral judgments but rather try to understand how increased disposable income affects behavior.

• *Disposable Time:* There has been a gradual shortening of the work week through a variety of influences. Of course, we still have the picture of the manager who works much more than the generally accepted 40 hours. A recent issue of *Fortune* described business and industry leaders, and a common thread was they worked much more than the 40 hour week. And they expected their immediate subordinates to do the same.

For much of the work force, this is not the case. Previously overtime was considered an incentive. More recently it is apparent that workers are no longer as interested in working overtime, without sufficient notice, and unless they have the opportunity to reject the offer without penalty.

To this general picture we must add the single parents and disposable income. The single parents want and need much more time with their children. Overtime, uncertain work hours, social pressure for out-of-work peer relationships must all give way to the need to spend more time with the single parent child. For this group, disposable time is at a premium.

For the childless couple, the unmarried, or even the two parent household with one child, the picture is different. They have more disposable income and more disposable time. This does not suggest they want overtime, office parties, picnics, or other work-related demands on their time. Rather, they tend to want to use their time for their own goals, and generally these are not work-related.

It is difficult to separate life styles and work styles. They are closely intertwined and this is being recognized as we explore that elusive activity called "Quality of Work Life." It is still possible, however, to identify some major trends in this decade that will have a strong impact on how work is done. . . .

• *Dual-Career Couples:* The women's liberation movement (or whatever label you wish to use) began making its impact about 10 years ago. Today, we are facing some of the results. The movement of women into previously unavailable levels of management is obvious and will continue to expand.

More subtle, but equally important, is the dual-career couple. My wife and I have seen this in some of the workshops and conferences we design and conduct for clients. In the 1960s, there were participants and wives. By 1970 it became participants and spouses. This latter term was introduced as husbands began accompanying wives to these functions. It is still a valid term for the 1980s where applicable. But, there is a new situation and we are now having participants and participants! Both wife and husband are professionals attending the same conference!

This is not the only kind of dual-career couple. There are also those situations where the husband and wife are both professionals, but working in different fields. This is not too different from blue collar areas where both husband and wife are working, but for different companies. A significant difference is that it was usually assumed that the husband had the major "career" and the wife was supplemental. It is no longer possible to make that categorical judgment.

• *Career, Not a Job:* We have sometimes defined a career as a series of jobs pasted end to end. Perhaps this is still an acceptable description of the process, but something new has happened. People are now looking toward more than just an activity to earn money. They are seeking meaning in their lives and rejecting repetitive and ritualistic behavior on the job.

One evidence of the increased interest in the American Society for Training and Development's Career Development Division. We should not assume that all of these members are involved in the activity of career development, but it certainly indicates that there are many members who are trying to explore what this is all about.

Some of the pressure is from the generation of the 1960s who are seeking more meaning from the world of work. We should not scoff at them or tell them to bide their time. They are seeking answers to legitimate questions about the relationship of work and living. I believe the answers are there and they are positive — but they are not the answers of the past.

There is another large group, which has recently come under close scrutiny. This is the 45-year-olds (give or take five years). I usually encounter this when one of them, usually a successful person in the world of work, comes to me and says, "I have had a successful work career. It is not that I am dissatisfied, but I have been working for about 20 years. I probably have at least another 20 years — and I just can't see myself doing the same kinds of things for the next 20 years. I want out! Where can I go from here?"

This may also be a person with more disposable income (the children are out of the home and on their own) and more disposable time. It tends, at present, to be a male rather than a female but it is only a matter of time before that changes. The work of Levinson, *Seasons of a Man's Life*, has given us some clues that this is not unusual. We even have labels for it now. It is referred to as "mid-life crisis." (Those who are more oriented toward the nuclear age might wish to refer to it as "mid-life meltdown.")

These people are not looking for another job, but for another career. They want to do something different with their lives. Unfortunately, the usual response is to get another job. This may be the answer, but should we not be exploring internal mobility rather than external? In large organiza-

tions, there might be some opportunities which are being missed.

• *Flexi-time*: I am afraid to assume that everybody knows about flexi-time. As I work with different groups and ask about their understanding I find that too few people know what flexi-time really is.

Briefly, in its simplest form, each day has a core period of time when everybody is on the job. Before this core, and after it, there is flexibility. An individual can come in two hours late or leave two hours early, but must be present during the core time. Usually, the worker need not make prior provision for this, but can opt for it on the spur of the moment. (How many times have you felt like just spending another hour in bed, and then you would be able to face the world?) The usual eight-hour day is adhered to, unless there are other provisions.

Obviously, this is not applicable to all situations but is spreading as it becomes evident that it is useful in more work situations than we


have previously recognized. Daily flexi-time will soon be generally accepted, if not generally applied.

More significant is flexi-time which goes to week, month, year. New patterns of work are emerging. Some of these have existed before, but are not being recognized. Among these are permanent part-time, job sharing, and worker sabbatical. It is predictable that even more variations will emerge.

• *Flexi-place*: How about not going to the office to work, but working at home? The technology already exists. Your telephone is actually a computer terminal. You can send pictures, drawings, etc. by means of electronic transfer. At present, these can be acquired for a rental of approximately \$30 per month, plus the cost of the telephone call during the 30-second-per-page transmission. Compared with the cost of gasoline, that is a real bargain!

Not all jobs can be done at home — but probably many more than are now considered in that cate-

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## IS EASY... AND CHALLENGING

- IT'S EASY TO APPLY AT ALL ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS
- IT'S EASY TO LEARN — AND TO TEACH
- IT'S EASY TO USE TO DEVELOP ENTHUSIASM AND PRODUCTIVITY


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"Let us face up to the reality of a different worker — and therefore a different learner.

The most obvious difference is that the learner will be older!"

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gory. It also means that we will have to start thinking of jobs in terms of work accomplished rather than hours at the desk. This may come very close to teaching productivity measures for non-manufacturing behavior.

An obvious block to this is the Internal Revenue Service. Working at home is not a deductible expense when the employer provides a place of work. (I am sure that tax accountants will allow this oversimplification for purposes of this article.) Will this change where certain equipment must be placed in the home? With large houses and fewer children might not an unused bedroom become a home office?

### Implications

By now, you have probably begun to draw many implications from the data and the trends. I would like to share some of mine. By no means are these all the implications and you are encouraged to explore many of your own.

It is apparent that there is an interaction among several of the items which have been discussed. The single parent would be very interested in working at home. This would reduce the need for a baby sitter or pre-school facility. The reduced anxiety on the part of the single parent could enhance the performance of such an employee.

Flexi-time means that the employee can have time during the regular work week for personal activities, rather than having to postpone off-the-job satisfaction to the weekend.

Career needs and disposable income will allow people to explore alternatives on their own rather than depend only on their employers. This can allow for much more individual exploration and many more differences than can or should be accommodated to by an employer. The result could be experimenting with different kinds of

economic activities (rather than traditional job) and even more experimentation with life styles.

#### • *Alternative Delivery Systems:*

We will have to explore other ways of making learning experiences available to employees. Where flexi-time is an accepted organization norm we cannot expect employees to be commanded to show up at a given time because that is when the HRD program is being offered.

Where flexi-place is a norm, why should the employee have to come to a particular place just for the HRD experience? This should not be read as being totally negative. People still need people, and perhaps this suggests that the "off-the-ranch" type of activity could be extended to other members of the work force beyond just the upper echelons.

We may have to explore more modular programs so as to allow for the individual differences of time, place, individual, goals, etc. Previously we have discussed modular programs to meet individual learning needs. Now, we might extend that exploration to include work and life style behaviors.

• *Alternative Forms of Organization:* It is obvious that what has been discussed earlier will put pressure on organizations to reassess how they are organized and what constitutes a job.

As other forms of organization emerge, we should remain sensitive to the directions and thrusts. Our HRD programs must be relevant not only to identified learning needs, but to varying forms of organizing. Some of the alternatives are probably going to present problems for the way we have done things in the past, and the way we are doing them today. Rather than fight to retain what has been successful for us, we should be sensitive to the changes which are occurring and are likely to occur, and be prepared to explore different ways of providing HRD for the newer organiza-

tional patterns.

• *The Learner:* The resounding theme which runs through most of what I have written is that we will have a different learner than we have known in the past. For younger people entering the HRD field, the differences will not be so pronounced, though they will still have a great deal to learn about a field which has emerged so rapidly.

For the "old-timers" in the field, there is some massive learning needed for the next decade. It will not be helpful to anybody to repeat the old cliches about "wait until they get to be my age," or "after the first recession they will be like the traditional work force," or similar bromides. Let us face up to the reality of a different worker — and therefore a different learner.

The most obvious difference is that the learner will be older! We know too little about how older people learn as contrasted with the school child and the young adult. Research and experimentation is necessary if we are to meet the needs of the older worker, at all levels of the organization.

### The Horizon

This decade of the '80s promises to be the most exciting in the whole history of HRD. There will be challenges we never knew before, and problems we cannot now possibly foresee. None of this should be seen as negative. If you are interested in using learning to help people, help organizations, improving the quality of life, and contribute to the general welfare, then be prepared for wonderful things to happen. — *Len Nadler*

Dr. Leonard Nadler is professor of Adult Education and Human Resource Development at The George Washington University, Washington, D.C. His extensive career in the HRD field includes working with a wide range of organizations in the U.S. and in many foreign countries. He is the author (or co-author) of four books and over 100 articles. He is currently ASTD national vice president for Professional Development.