

In Practice

A Team-Building Holiday

Wixon/Fontarome, a spice and seasonings company in St. Francis, Wisconsin, rewarded its 152 employees for jobs well done by sending everyone to Disney World in Orlando, Florida, for a four-day "team-building holiday."

"We have been beating sales projections for years," says company president J.H. (Bud) Morgan. "We just felt there had to be a better way to reward good work than a paycheck. Disney World will provide the perfect backdrop for a meeting on quality training. Our people will get a chance to experience Disney's quality firsthand."

Wixon/Fontarome also paid for each employee to bring a spouse or a friend and gave each employee \$300 spending money as well as Disney World passes. Employees could take advantage of special rates if they wanted to bring their children along.

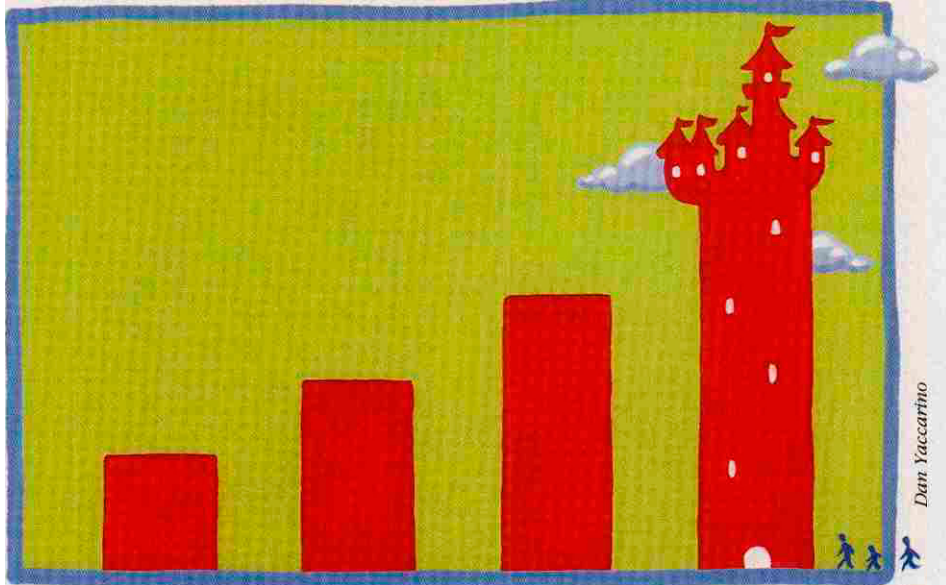
Asians in United States Encounter Job Mismatch

By Rebecca Thomas, a free-lance writer based in Alexandria, Virginia.

Many Asians emigrate to the United States with college degrees already in hand. But even college-educated Asians who are fluent in English often land in jobs for which they are overeducated.

Gordon DeJong, a sociology professor at Pennsylvania State University, describes this phenomenon as job "mismatch." He recently compared rates of job mismatch among Asians with rates of job mismatch among non-Hispanic whites.

DeJong's data indicate that for Asians in the United States, the proportion of job mismatch is higher



Dan Yaccarino

than for non-Hispanic whites.

Immigrants in general are more subject to job mismatch than is the native-born population in the United States, says DeJong. The shrinking pool of entry-level jobs contributes to job mismatch for immigrants. So does a growing trend for employers in the service and retail industries to fill low-level positions with workers who have more than high-school diplomas.

For Asians in the United States, the typical disadvantages of immigrant status combine with their high educational levels to increase their overall probability for job mismatch, DeJong says.

Preventing Violence at Work

Workplace murders make headlines, but employees are more likely to experience less dramatic acts of aggression on the job, such as arguments, harassment, and vandalism.

Employers can take steps to minimize the risk of violence occurring on

When a small Wisconsin company beat its sales projections, what did it do next? It went to Disney World.

the job, says Jack Jones, an industrial psychologist and vice-president of research for London House of Rosemont, Illinois. He offers the following advice:

Establish and enforce anti-harassment policies. "Employers should promote a culture in which there is zero tolerance for any form of violence," says Jones.

Train managers to recognize high-risk employees. All managers should understand the psychology of aggression and recognize warning signs in employees, says Jones. Managers with strong listening and conflict-resolution skills also are better prepared to calm disgruntled employees before they lash out at co-workers or customers.

Establish a "threat-and-incident" management team. Jones suggests that companies create an interdepartmental team of human resource, security, and safety experts to develop a plan for handling threats and incidents of violence.

Concludes Jones, "Employees spend the better part of their days at work. They need to feel a sense of security and that their employers are concerned about their well-being."

Jones discussed workplace violence in the winter issue of *Management Journal*, published by London House. For more information, call London House, 708/292-3301.

Good Guilt

"Many managers feel less guilt about firing people, now that they've had so much practice," says management psychologist Harry Levinson in the February 15 issue of the *Levinson Letter*.

Many managers feel terrible about the human cost of downsizing and restructuring, but a growing minority feels increasingly comfortable, he says. "I've even heard a few managers brag about the high numbers [of people] they've laid off—as though [the number] were a badge of their toughness."

Along with practice, changing values have caused managers to feel less guilty about layoffs, Levinson contends.

"Companies have increasingly taken the position that people must manage their own careers, that it's not the company's responsibility." Also, as

the ranks of part-time, temporary, and contract employees grow, the bonds between employers and employees are loosening.

Levinson cautions companies against the erosion of managerial guilt.

"Good guilt is the conscious guilt that arises from violating one's own reasonable moral standards," he says. When people learn not to feel guilty, they probably have lowered their ethical standards, to the company's ultimate detriment.

Trainers at the VERY Top

"At Home Depot, founders Bernard Marcus, CEO, and Arthur Blank, president, continue to lead training sessions even though the company now has 70,000 employees. Says Marcus, 'Nobody else does training this way. It's time-consuming; it's hard work.' The CEO as chief training officer? Get used to it. How else do you instill the right culture in a company?"

—from *Fortune*, March 6, 1995

Business Priorities

When consulting firm Towers Perrin surveyed 300 senior executives in large and mid-size companies, nine out of 10 respondents cited people as a firm's most important resource, and 98 percent said that improved employee performance would benefit the bottom line.

The same executives ranked the strategies that would help their firms succeed—and customer satisfaction, financial performance, and product and service quality claimed the top spots on their lists. Investments in training and employee performance sank to the bottom.

"They almost universally said people are the most important thing," said Patricia Milligan, a managing principal at Towers Perrin in Stamford, Connecticut. But when asked how employees fit into the firms' strategic plans, "they looked at me like I was from another planet."

Milligan said there is a "disconnect" between executives' belief in the gospel of customer satisfaction and their understanding of how im-

portant employees are to its realization."

Barbara Presley Noble reported on the survey in the February 19 *New York Times*.

Getting to Your Goals

Goals serve as guideposts to getting what you want out of life, says Susan B. Wilson, owner of Executive Strategies, a management consulting firm in Newton, Iowa.

"You may be working very hard at what you do, but without setting goals you'll find that your hard work doesn't yield meaningful results," Wilson says.

In *Goal Setting* (American Management Association, 1994), Wilson offers the following guidelines for effectively setting goals:

- ▶ Write down your goals. "Once a dream is committed to paper, it becomes concrete."
- ▶ Use specific, measurable terms. You must be able to mark your progress toward your goals and pinpoint when you have achieved them.
- ▶ Visualize your goals. "Much of our energy for reaching goals comes from a desire to attain them."
- ▶ Set goals that you can reasonably expect to achieve. "Goals need to challenge your skills and abilities without discouraging your effort and performance." Break large goals into series of less intimidating smaller goals.
- ▶ Set realistic deadlines. "Schedule enough time to reach the goal, but not so much time that you lose interest in it."
- ▶ Analyze potential problems in reaching your goals. If from the start you think about what might go wrong, you can take steps to resolve or minimize problems before they occur.
- ▶ Regularly review your progress. Periodically, evaluate your goals to ensure that they remain realistic, timely, and relevant.
- ▶ Focus on goals that yield rewards you value. As you establish each goal, identify a reward you will give yourself for achieving it. Rewards motivate you to accomplish your goals.

Successful goal-setting is one reason that high achievers accomplish as much as they do, says Wilson. With-

out goals, she says, you wind up like Alice in Wonderland, who stopped at a crossroads and asked the Cheshire Cat which road to take.

The cat asked Alice where she wanted to go, Wilson recounts. When Alice told him she didn't "much care where," the cat replied, "Then it doesn't much matter which way you go."

Space: The Overlooked Frontier

In the quest to create high-performance workplaces, many organizations overlook the actual workplace itself—the buildings, offices, meeting rooms, furniture, and other elements that define the space in which people work.

But space is the second-most-expensive resource on which organizations spend their money, note Franklin Becker and Fritz Steele in *Workplace by Design*.

Becker, director of the International Workplace Studies Program at Cornell University, and Steele, a principal and founder of Portsmouth Consulting Group, specialize in organizational ecology, a cross-discipline that examines both the physical settings in which work takes place and the social processes that plan and manage the settings over time.

"In short, organizational ecology is about how an organization's leaders choose to convene their employees in space and time in pursuit of a competitive edge," the authors write.

Organizations can shape workplaces in ways that support modern business processes, say Becker and Steele. To create high-performance workplaces that foster communication, teamwork, and creativity, keep the following rules of thumb in mind, they advise.

Create attractive "magnet spots" that draw people together. If you provide a coffee or food center, offer high-quality items. If you provide a seating area, make it comfortable and interesting.

Put magnet spots in the right locations. Usually this means in central locations that are visible and accessible and on the way to other places, not in inconvenient leftover locations that happen to be available and cheap.

Carefully design places where people collect information. For instance, don't put displays and information boards in a narrow hallway where people who stop to read, watch, and chat will block others trying to use the hallway.

Don't make too many communal spots. For instance, offering many beverage areas is convenient, but it reduces the likelihood that people will meet each other while getting something to drink. A few good magnet spots will increase the average density of use and therefore the probability of accidental meetings.

Encourage people to use the common facilities. Organizational leaders need to encourage people and set a personal example by using magnet spots, informal areas, and other common areas so that employees won't feel that they will pay a price for talking to others during work hours. Help them feel that interacting with each other is a part of the job.

"Physical design, by itself, will not change behavior patterns and guarantee teamwork," Becker and Steele caution. "It can make some activities more likely than others, and when it is in tune with the [organization's] social system, it can create the kind of lively, interactive setting that supports teamwork and collaboration."

Adapted with permission from Workplace By Design: Mapping the High-Performance Workscape, by Franklin Becker and Fritz Steele. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco, CA 94104; 415/433-1767.

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Creating Inside the Box

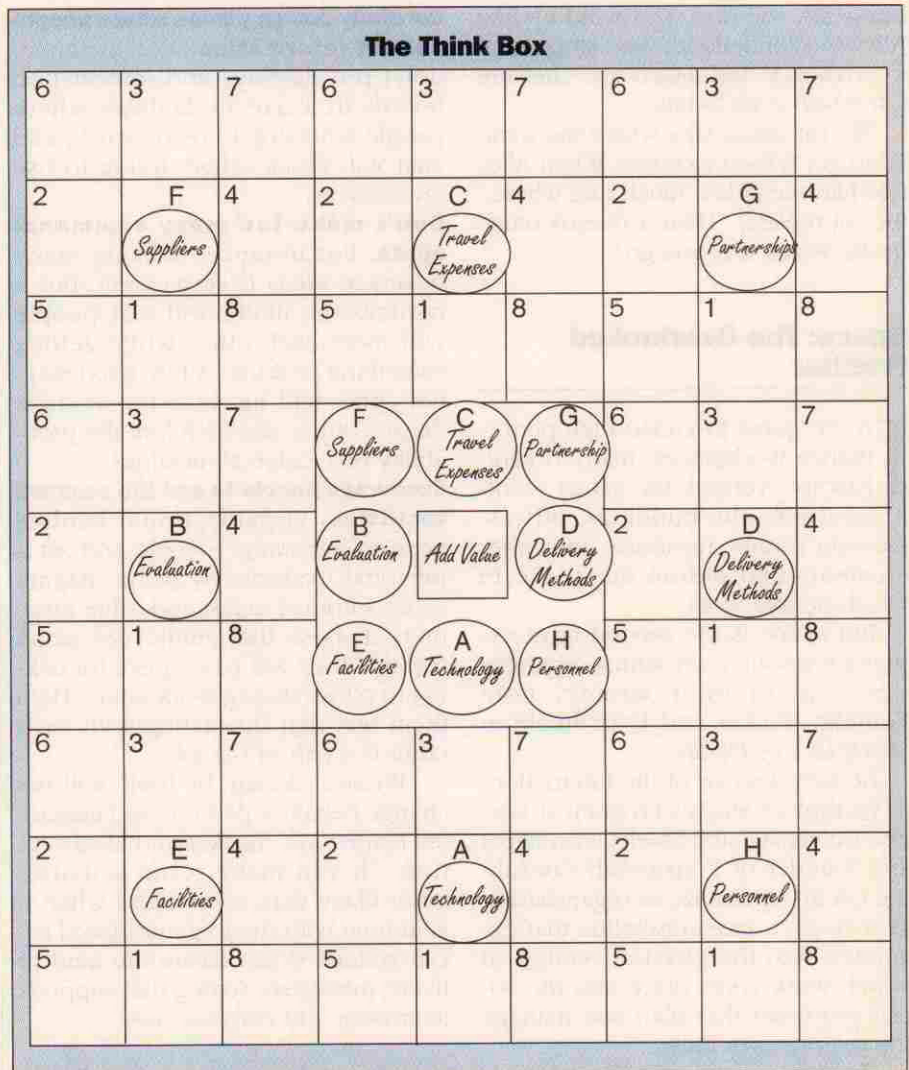
By Michael R. Michalko, a creativity expert who runs workshops on creative thinking. Michalko is the author of *Thinkertoys: A Handbook of Business Creativity for the 90s*. Reach him at 165 Percy Road, Churchville, NY 14428; 716/293-2957.

How do you add value to your training programs? One way is by increasing your productivity. Another way is by decreasing costs. You can take either tack using existing resources—people, equipment, technology, and know-how.

The "Think Box" idea expander is a tool to help you add value to your programs by capturing specific ideas and expanding on them.

Here's how to use the tool:

- ▶ Copy the diagram on this page onto a large piece of paper. Include the letter and number labels, but not the words.
- ▶ Write "add value" in the center box.
- ▶ Identify every area in which you might add value by increasing productivity or decreasing expenses. List these areas on a separate piece of paper. Areas might include administration, personnel, training design, facilities, equipment, course materials, travel, and evaluation.
- ▶ Evaluate your list and pick the eight areas you think offer your best chance for adding value.
- ▶ Write the eight most significant areas on the diagram in the circles la-



beled A to H that surround your central box (one area to a circle). Also write the same significant areas in the circles with the corresponding letters spread around the diagram.

- ▶ Each area now represents a main theme that ties together the surrounding boxes. For instance, in the sample diagram, the word *technology* in the circle labeled A serves as the theme for the lower middle group of boxes.
- ▶ For each theme, try to think of eight ways to add value. Phrase your ideas as questions, such as "How can we use technology to reduce development costs?" Write the questions in the boxes labeled one through eight surrounding each theme.
- ▶ When you finish the diagram, you'll have 64 new ideas to investigate about ways to increase productivity or decrease expenses for your organization.

The Effects of Restructuring

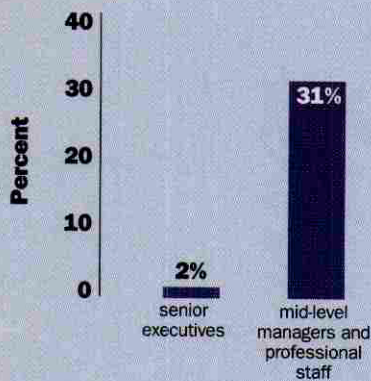
Senior executives and employees in the United States tell very different tales about the effects of restructuring, according to two surveys released by Brouillard Communications, based in New York City.

More than 80 percent of senior executives who responded to the survey said that restructuring made their companies more productive. In addition, 80 percent said restructuring made their firms more profitable, and 74 percent said the effort enhanced customer satisfaction.

Sixty-three percent of senior executives said restructuring strengthened employee involvement, and 62 percent said the effort helped empower employees.

Lower-level managers and professional staff responding to a similar

Does Restructuring Hurt Morale?



Source: Brouillard Communications

survey were less upbeat. Fewer than half (48 percent) thought that restructuring improved their firms' profitability, and only 47 percent reported a positive link between employee involvement and restructuring.

Senior executives and employees disagreed most on the effects of restructuring on employee morale (see the figure) and on the way their firms informed employees about changes. Only 2 percent of senior executives said that restructuring hurt employee morale, and 78 percent said internal communications before or during a restructuring project were handled properly.

In contrast, almost one-third of other employees (31 percent) said that restructuring hurt morale. And while 59 percent of mid- and lower-level employees gave their firms good marks for communicating about restructuring, 69 percent said they often did not receive advance information about restructuring plans.

Nonetheless, large majorities of both senior managers (93 percent) and other employees (83 percent) said that restructuring positioned their firms to compete more effectively.

For more information, contact Peter Harris, Brouillard Communications, 212/210-8985.

"In Practice" is edited and written by **Erica Gordon Sorohan**. Send items of interest to "In Practice," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.

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