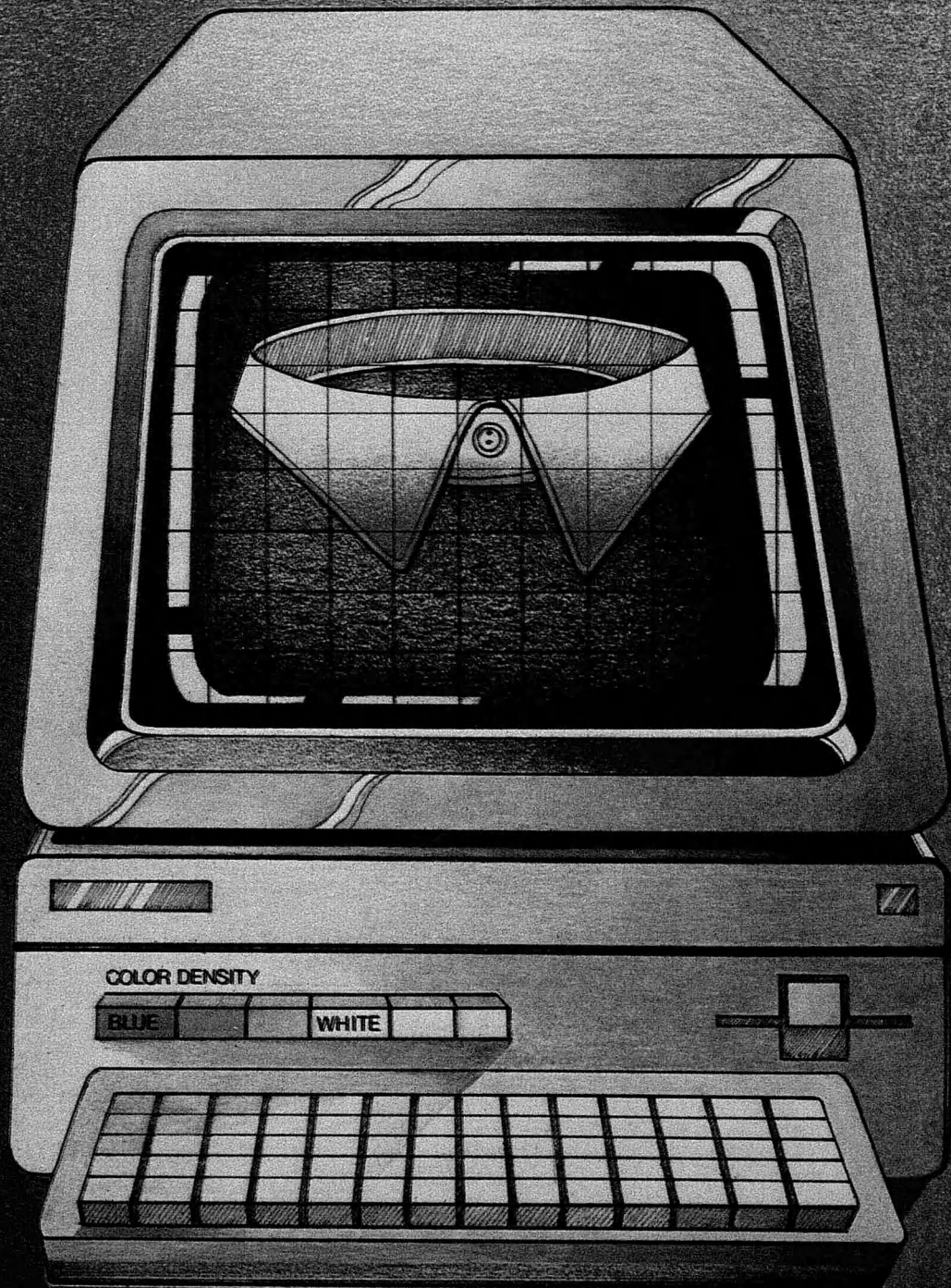


Skills Training Comes of Age

By HERMAN BIRNBAUER



Human resource development is coming of age. The "sleeping giant" is being accepted, in fact, welcomed! The time we have been anticipating has arrived, and with it comes responsibility and accountability. Are we ready?

For the past decade, our rates of investment in human resources have exceeded those in capital goods. Recently, the total value of our human resources surpassed the value of our existing industrial structures.

The future implications of these long-term trends merit our careful attention. As our economy shifts toward professional, technical work, and as the cost of information and communications labor continues to drop, human resources—a healthy, intelligent, well trained community of workers—will become the dominant resource of our economy. Further, the effective, efficient development and use of that resource must be our most important economic goal and our most critical managerial responsibility. Skills training has an important role to play in that process.

In his book *Megatrends*, John Naisbitt suggests that we have already changed from an industrial society to an economy based on the creation and distribution of information. A generation ago (1950), blue-collar workers made up 50 percent of

our work force. Today, they number less than 33 percent, while more than 50 percent are now professional, technical workers whose work generates 55 percent of our gross national product. This growth includes many areas—education, management, administration, research and development.

The significance of this fundamental shift from menial to mental work cannot be overemphasized. An economy based

bulence into opportunities. The emerging electronic information and communication technology could hardly have become available at a better time. We will no doubt experience rapid, unusual adoption of these technologies. An important article by W.J. Mallory (page 24), describes such an adoption.

As people shift from one work task to another, they experience change. Alvin Toffler, in his book *The Third Wave*, said, "Of


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primarily on professional work clearly requires a more highly trained work force. We find that blue-collar workers are migrating to the high-growth, high-technology industries which demand workers with a higher skill and knowledge level. This process is exemplified in the article by B. Pasha and J. Turner (see page 14) about unskilled workers being trained to operate a highly sophisticated, high-technology paper machine.

Many have noted the importance of the movement back to basics. The article on page 20 by J. Vandergrift addresses the basics of applied skills training.

Whenever we move from the old to the new, we get caught in turbulence. Peter Drucker recommends that these times require strategies to anticipate where the greatest changes are likely to occur and what they are likely to be—strategies that enable a profession to take advantage of new realities and to convert tur-

course they recognize that things are changing. But they assume today's changes will somehow pass them by and that nothing will shake the familiar framework and political structure. They confidently expect the future to continue as the present. We will be well advised to prepare people for change in a way that will cause them to look forward to it and welcome it."

When people become aware that someone is dedicated to their success, change occurs more easily. The article on coaching (page 30) can help this process. We in skills training have long awaited this era, and we are armed with our needs analyses, task analyses, task performance guides, evaluations and validation techniques. We are ready to accept the challenge. 

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