

News You Can Use

by Haidee Allerton

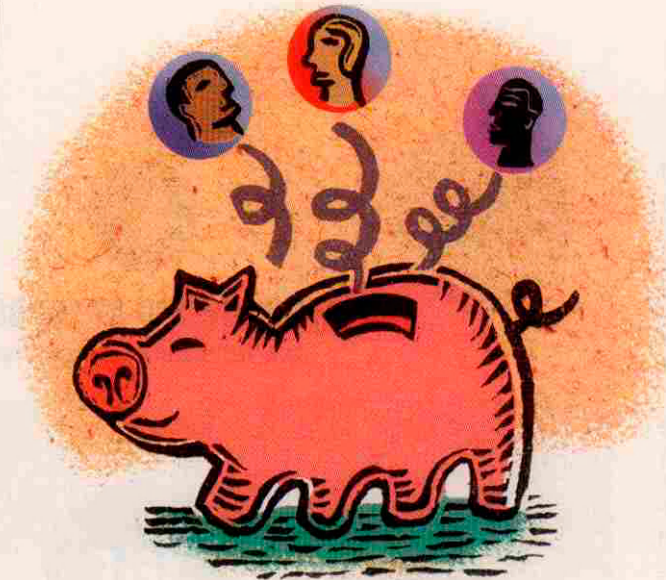
A DIFFERENT SORT OF CORPORATE MERGER

THE E-MAIL on *Fortune's* QuickMail bulletin board typically begins with the inquiry: Does anyone know—? *Fortune* editor Thomas A. Stewart says that it's just part of a general, and significant, management trend to accumulate the knowledge of individual employees into an organizational asset. But unlike accounting records and policy handbooks, such knowledge is dispersed over a company and hard to locate.

So, corporations are trying to map their human capital by creating knowledge databases—such as, Arthur Andersen's Knowledge Xchange, Price Waterhouse's Knowledge View, and Booz Allen & Hamilton's Knowledge On-Line.

KOL, for example, is intended to save "Boozers" hours repeating each other's work; they just tap into internal experts' ideas. A consultant in Asia can copy notes via laptop and phone line from a consultant in New York.

Of course, not everyone wants to share. And many companies are finding out that knowledge databases



must be supported by a team environment and must be managed to keep them relevant and unchaotic. It's also difficult to pinpoint the benefits; most of the evidence is anecdotal. Says Charles Allen, Booz Allen's chief knowledge officer, "I can't prove it, but we do better work."

TREND WATCH

IT'S A BIRD, it's a plane—no, it's a trend! Here are some trends just coming into recognizable view:

▶ To maintain marketability, contract-service firms must continually update

their technical skills. To do so, they are providing training in new technologies for the contract professionals who work for them. (*The Washington Post*)

▶ By 1998, 25 percent of firms plan to outsource all or part of their human resource activities. ("New Directions in Finance: Strategic Outsourcing," a study by Arthur Andersen and the Economist Intelligence Unit)

▶ Outsourcing extends to recruitment as the current marketplace requires companies to qualify applicants within 24 hours of receiving their resumes. (Media Relations, Minneapolis, Minnesota)

▶ As companies scramble to retain qualified employees, they're making counteroffers that average 15 to 20 percent greater than the employees' outside offers. (The Cambridge Group, Westport, Connecticut)

▶ Fewer than half of HR professionals say that their organizations are effective in linking human resource strategies to business re-

sults; more than half doubt that they have the right people to achieve their business goals. Overall, HR practitioners say that connecting day-to-day activities with strategic business goals is one of their biggest challenges. (American Management Association, New York, New York)

SURVEY SAYS

HERE ARE SOME interesting results from a survey sent by the Nabisco Biscuit Company of East Hanover, New Jersey, to 142 companies that are members of the Training and Development Dialogue Group and the Professional Society for Sales and Marketing Training.

The questionnaire was designed by Robert H. Klein, sales education manager of Nabisco, and Dan Twomey, director of the Center for HR Management at Fairleigh Dickinson University. The results were subjected to a statistical analysis.

▶ There is a significant correlation between the importance that top management gives to sales-and-marketing training and the business-result variable, increased sales.

▶ There is a significant correlation between the importance a company places on employee training and employee morale.

▶ There is a significant correlation between employee morale and increases in the following business results: productivity, customer satisfaction, market share, sales, and competitive advantage.



QUICK TIP

WHEN YOU want to drive home a message, point with two fingers—the index and middle fingers kept adjacent, suggests *Incentive*. Flight attendants use this technique in pointing out safety features.

COMPUTER SKILLS OVERRIDE DISABILITIES

COMPUTER SKILLS can enhance job opportunities for people with spinal cord injuries, according to the study "Disability, Employment, and Earning in the Dawn of the Computer Age," conducted by economists Douglas Kruse of Rutgers University and Alan Krueger of Princeton in collaboration with Susan Drastal of the Kessler Rehabilitation Institute in West Orange, New Jersey.

The researchers found that people who already had computer skills when they were injured returned to work more quickly than those without such skills, all other factors being equal—such as, education, age, other demographics, and injury characteristics. What's more, people with spinal cord injuries who use computers in their work earn just as much money as workers without disabilities who use computers.

"People with spinal cord injuries have a low employment rate," says Krueger. "Computer training is one way to overcome the labor-market disadvantages."

About 200,000 Americans—including one-fourth of all wheelchair users under age 65—have spinal cord injuries.

BULLETIN BOARDS: THE CORK KIND

NOW, MANY OF US think of electronic postings when someone refers to a bulletin board. But the old-fashioned ones are still an effective way to communicate training information, says John Konselman of

Current Inc., Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Here are some tips for making a training bulletin board informative and entertaining:

- ▶ Place the bulletin board in an open, well-traveled area where people can browse without creating a traffic problem.
- ▶ Title the board so that employees know its purpose.
- ▶ Change the theme at least once a month but not more than twice a month.
- ▶ Make small changes weekly, such as adding an item or rotating a regular feature.
- ▶ Give required (and often dry) company communications a fun title—such as, "Stuff We Have To Post or We Get Into Trouble."
- ▶ Vary themes including the seasons, holidays, movies, or historical events.
- ▶ Use pictures with familiar faces; everyone likes to see him- or herself in print.
- ▶ Keep things simple; too much information can be overwhelming.

THE LUDDITES LIVE

"IS IT BETTER than a pencil?"

That's a question you should ask before purchasing new software, recommends *Success*. In other words, will the new technology really make your work easier and faster?



@work

HERE ARE SOME RECENT SIGHTING OF SITES ON THE NET.

- ▶ The Internet Speakers' Directory provides "sound-enabled" listings to hear speakers before hiring them. The address is <http://www.newmarket-forum.com/speakers/>. Your PC must have a sound card and RealAudio software, which you can download free while online.
- ▶ Get some tips for your next job interview by accessing Terry's Tips at <http://www.cmi-lmi.com>. Each week, Terry Devlin, career counselor with Career Management International, addresses such job-interview issues as how to assess and communicate your strengths, how to dress, and how to follow up.
- ▶ Here's a consultant-finding resource for the human resources field—the Consultant's Mall, created by the Consultants' Network, New York, New York. The online address is <http://www.consultants-mall.com>.
- ▶ Get hip to the real Chairman of the Board on the Frank Sinatra Web site at <http://www.io.org/~buff/sinatra.htm>.
Ring-a-ding-ding.

REALITY CHECK

IS YOUR BOSS developing you? If not, you're in trouble, says management psychologist Harry Levinson in the *Levinson Letter*. "Unless he or she is actively preparing you to move up or become marketable outside of the company," says Levinson, "you're in danger as the one-company career becomes more rare."

Levinson recommends that every manager ask whether his or her boss is providing the following:

- ▶ criticism. Without feedback, you're impaired in your efforts to improve.
- ▶ how-to. Your boss should be showing you results and decisions, as well as the processes by which he or she reached them, including wrong turns.
- ▶ a track record. Your boss should be giving you a variety of tasks so that you're not "typecast." He or she should also be mak-

ing your accomplishments known to others.

▶ explicit career guidance. Periodically, your boss should tell you how he or she views your potential and the ways you might achieve it.

On your end, you should push for experiences that are likely to teach you the most:

- ▶ Improve a group with low productivity or morale.
- ▶ Bring a new unit or operation into existence.
- ▶ Move from a line to staff position.
- ▶ Take a role that requires you to work with the public or government.
- ▶ Lead a project that involves people from several departments over whom you have no direct supervision.

Send items of interest to "News You Can Use," 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.