

# TOWARD A TOTAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

*an over-the-horizon  
look for management  
education professionals*

The current economic, social, political and spiritual state of American society is causing thoughtful questioning and evaluation of some traditional assumptions for American managerial\* manpower. This process of questioning, searching out new ways, and trying out changes is a learning process. America needs a total learning environment, an environment that will facilitate the urgently needed learning for coping with important change factors (such as the following)

- 1 Demographic studies indicate that American society will be youthful, well educated, and urban in character. By the end of this decade, well over half of all Americans will be under 30 years of age, and over one-third will be less than 20. The total population will have grown another 10% or so to about 230 million. The percentage of black people will increase overall from 12% to 13% in the 70's and we can look forward to a faster rate of growth in the level of education for black people as compared with white. America will be a "big" society: big metropolitan areas, big schools, big government, big businesses. These demographic realities will require increasingly greater investment in facilities, staff and program to aid these societal groups in their exploratory and productive learning.
- 2 The changes in personal values for Americans are derived from our contemplation of the question, "What do I want in my personal life *besides* a high standard of living measured economically?" The word *besides* is extremely important and is not to be confused with *instead*. Americans want both the high standard of living to which they have been

accustomed as well as additional satisfactions that may not be defined clearly in their minds. Individual Americans have the vague feeling that they are not producing anywhere near their full potential, they do not feel challenged. They feel a need for personal growth, more education and "relevance" in their work. They are becoming increasingly mobile as they perceive new paths for achieving their personal and family goals. These personal values can be harnessed as the motive force for increased and more effective learning.

- 3 The change factors that focus on societal values concern the "quality of life" in America. Our society is recognizing the complexity of its needs and wants, and that their achievement most frequently requires hard-to-make trade-offs. The legitimacy of the American dream is being questioned, not in the sense of its desirability, but rather in the sense that its achievement is a more lengthy and arduous task when one is working toward social changes and not primarily on the production and distribution of goods and services. An indication of America's new emphasis on societal values is contained in President Nixon's January, 1970, budget message, which for the first time in 20 years requested greater dollar authorizations for human resources than for defense programs. In his 1970 State of the Union message, he said

" that both our programs and our institutions in America need to be reformed. The moment has arrived to harness the vast energies and abundance of this land to the creation of a new American experience, an

LINDON E. SALINE  
Manager—Educational Services  
Corporate Education Services  
General Electric Company  
Ossining, New York

\*The term "managerial manpower" as used in this paper pertains only to the top 1% or so of the work force—specifically to those individuals who are the leaders of business, government, education, church or other major institutions.

Note: This paper is adapted from a presentation at the National Conference of British Institute of Management.

experience richer and deeper and more truly a reflection of the goodness and grace of the human spirit ”

Such new emphasis on societal values will require new learning approaches and efforts to “make a difference” in the environmental quality issues

- 4 Another important change factor in America is the new concept of “rights,” “privileges,” and “responsibilities ” These new concepts are being forged in what to many of us are unnecessarily unsophisticated and wasteful ways on college campuses, in the streets, in business, in government and in the churches. Protests, sit-ins, moratoriums, outright defiance of law, violence and threats are being used in ways that are repugnant to those who still hold the traditional managerial manpower assumptions. Members of societal groups such as youth, minority and females are seeking recognition as individuals in our society

In many actions the participants have forgotten that freedom without responsibility and respect for other individuals and their property and their rights is anarchy. “Rights,” “privileges,” “responsibilities” will continue to need examination and redefinition

Whatever new definitions evolve will, indeed, have major influence on the future American society. Thinking through and communicating the new definitions will be a major task in the re-education of our whole society

- 5 The fifth major change factor in American society is technology, particularly as it is used in communication, education, transportation, medicine, automation and energy production and distribution. Technology can be used by society for good or bad purposes. Technologists are among the

vanguard in questioning whether being able to do something is reason enough to do it. Hopefully a greater segment of our society will develop an appreciation for its ultimate potential, both good and bad, so that the society will collectively and responsibly apply its personal and societal value systems in coping with this powerful change factor. It is becoming evident that new learning and life styles will either harness this technology or become displaced by it.

Will our American society learn effectively as these five change factors operate on the traditional managerial manpower assumptions? Can our American society become a total learning environment and so be self-correcting and adaptive?

#### TRADITIONAL AMERICAN ASSUMPTIONS

Differences among various societies arise from the way that their basic values and beliefs affect their choice of goals, their approach to societal organization and their relative goal achievement. The many values and beliefs that have been regarded historically as important in the development of American society are important as a basis for better understanding American managerial manpower—where it is, the basis for its being, and where it is heading in the 70's

These values and beliefs that seem particularly relevant to American managerial manpower tend to be taken for granted by many Americans, they are not necessarily unique to America (in fact, they frequently have been borrowed from other cultures), they are not taught. Although these values and beliefs are in part figments of the imagination, they have, nevertheless, become traditional assumptions for the American managerial way of life and are summarized briefly as follows

#### 1 *A free society*

An individual (or organization) has the opportunity and the responsibility to stand on his own feet and to make his own choices. The marketplace is the judge of what products and services are really needed and wanted, the electorate judges the actions and conduct of elected government officials, people collectively judge an individual's choice of behavior. The individual has the right to disagree responsibly, or as is said today, “To do his own thing”, but the individual must then live with the legal, financial, or social consequences of the choice which is his to make. The notion of a free society implies that it is a self-correcting society, where the society itself is continually examining and modifying its concept of rightness

#### 2 *Change*

The operation of a self-correcting free society implies that the society must necessarily be flexible and foster change. Americans, however, regard change with ambivalence. On the one hand, materialistic change is sought by most of us. It is designed, it is promoted, it is rewarded. On the other hand, societal change—in the so-called “establishment”—is frequently opposed and viewed with deep concern

#### 3 *The American dream*

Change of any kind would, of course, never transpire if this traditional assumption was not legitimate. Americans both believe and act as if anything that can be described can be accomplished

#### 4 *Planning*

The American dream doesn't just happen. This assumption provides the basis for the idea that he who plans thoughtfully and carefully will win or accomplish most. While Americans have their eyes

on the stars, in theory, they have a foot on the hard rocks of reality. Americans believe that the future belongs to him who looks ahead.

#### 5 *Organization*

America is an organizing society. Our zeal for organizing springs from our feeling that teamwork is necessary to accomplish worthwhile goals and that scheduling activities and allocating resources guarantee efficiency (in the sense that greatest output will be achieved for a given input). Indeed, efficiency is regarded as a virtue in America. The notion of organization and teamwork assumes that the individual team members will have loyalty to the team, that is, to the organization.

#### 6 *Importance and dignity of the individual*

Individuals are said to be equals that all individuals have more or less a common starting point, that fair and equal treatment is the right of each person, that individuals choose personal goals, that opportunities to pursue personal goals are available equally to all, that success or achievement or promotion will be accorded on a merit basis.

#### 7. *Hard work*

Work hard and you will be rewarded is an expression of the Puritan or Protestant ethic which effectively implies that it is our responsibility to use God-given physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual capabilities to their highest degree.

#### 8 *Competition*

American society supposedly thrives on competition. In a sense, we purposely create or visualize or transpose most situations into the win-lose context where "win" refers to superior performance against an adversary, against goals or against past achievement. While

we are win-oriented, we do not believe in doing it at the sacrifice of fair play or good sportsmanship. We feel that the "good guy" will, or at least should, win. Guidelines for fair play and sportsmanship are defined by law, by traditions, such as gentlemen's agreements, and by the moral codes and behavior that stem largely from the Judean-Christian teachings.

These are the kinds of traditional assumptions that have significantly influenced the shaping of American managerial attitudes, skills and philosophy and hence, for better or for worse, have in turn influenced the shaping of other agencies the whole of our society.

### CURRENT STATE OF MANAGERIAL MANPOWER

Looking at American society economically, socially, politically and spiritually, therefore, will give us an idea about the past effectiveness of managerial manpower as well as some specific observations about its current state. A brief assessment of current American managerial manpower follows.

1 American managerial manpower has been primarily economically oriented and motivated. The traditional assumptions relating to free society, materialistic change, planning, organizing and competition have contributed to the development of a vigorous and effective system for producing goods and services. In addition, these same traditional assumptions have prompted American managerial manpower to develop an array of managerial practices, techniques and philosophy that are creative, widely taught, understood and accepted.

2 American managerial manpower is painfully aware that all is not uniformly as good as it could or should be economically and socially. Based on my reading corpo-

rate annual reports, studying speeches of societal leaders, and listening to discussions at professional and business meetings, I feel that American managerial manpower knows deep in its heart and mind that the technology and wealth exist to meet what to Americans are pressing social and economic wants and needs. It is troubled by the realization that some of the traditional assumptions relating to free society, societal change, American dream and the individual are being challenged. Even more troubling is the realization that to make a real difference, the 1% leadership group will have to change its attitudes, values, priorities and behavior.

3 American managerial manpower is groping for a new and deeper sense of purpose. Why in a land of economic abundance is law and order a critical problem? Why aren't well-paid workers happy with their lot? Why are children and parents from wealthy families seeking escape and satisfaction in unprecedented usage of drugs, alcohol, pre-marital and extramarital sex? The traditional assumptions relating to competition, hard work, the individual, free society and others highly oriented to satisfying the economic wants of people may no longer be sufficient. Recognizing that America now needs additional goals and higher level purposes is unsettling to many thoughtful leaders in business, education, the church and government because it is not clear what they should be or how to achieve them.

The above assessment provides some clues as to the needs and wants that will cause future movement of our society with corresponding challenges to the eight traditional assumptions for American managerial manpower. In a nutshell, I believe American society will respond, correct itself, and adapt by *accelerating*

its movement towards a "total learning environment" Furthermore, I believe that American managerial manpower will play a crucial role in facilitating that movement as the traditional assumptions are changing, being interpreted differently, finding new expression or demanding new societal and managerial approaches

### TOTAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

An ideal total learning environment is one that encourages and permits each individual to experience personal fulfillment while contributing to the achievement of the organizational objectives The "organization" in this sense can be looked upon as the whole American society, an educational institution, a business, a small government office or a single family, or perhaps new societal structures as yet not invented or defined *American society will move in the direction of a total learning environment because that is the kind of environment that will permit America to grow economically, socially, politically and spiritually under the pressures of the previously described change factors*

Lest I have misled you, the total learning environment that I have in mind is best suited for the active learner The physically lazy, the morally irresponsible, or the intellectually underdeveloped learner will receive less because he will give less to the process The total learning environment will demand the best that American leadership can contribute and it will in turn reward them and the American society with the full range of material, intellectual, emotional and spiritual rewards and satisfactions that most of us seek

The total learning environment has several distinct attributes that can be described briefly but in idealistic terms

1 In a total learning environment the process of doing (learning and trying) and the end result are more or less equally valued That is to say, the result does not of itself justify the means For the doer, satisfaction gained while doing would be valued even if

there were no or only limited economic or social value in the result

2 In a total learning environment individuals perceive themselves as being continually challenged, they feel they are growing intellectually, in their analytical, creative and productive skills, and in their capability to relate productively and enjoyably with other people even in conflict situations

3 In a total learning environment the concept of a life span being divided into three sequential periods of education, working and retirement is no longer appropriate Education is a lifelong, continuing activity Learning how to learn is one of the main education goals during the first 20 or so years

4 In a total learning environment rational failure is recognized as a valid learning experience That is not to say, failure is consistently or purposefully planned and pursued, but rather that failure will be tolerated and accepted The reward and punishment system will change to reflect the acceptance of rational failure

5 In a total learning situation conflict which exists among individuals and organizations is used as a constructive means for revealing and examining issues thoroughly Conflict is not swept under the rug or suppressed, but rather described in terms understandable to all for open and careful discussion, evaluation, judgment and implementation It is assumed that people will learn more from a proper handling of conflict than be hurt by it

6 In a total learning situation values are recognized for their personal judgmental and subjective qualities rather than as absolute (right-wrong) quantities There is increased seeking of genuine understanding about value differences

with consequent increased tolerance for varied approaches

7 In the total learning environment "work" and "leisure" become less distinguishable The differentiation between the nature of an individual's effort in "work," civic and church activities is also less distinguishable

Obviously, American society is not yet a total learning environment, nor is it likely to be that in 1980, 1990 or even when we welcome the 21st Century significance of these somewhat idealized attributes is that they indicate the direction of an American managerial trend that is already under way and is even now gaining momentum

### IMPLICATIONS

There is a broad implication which I regard as particularly significant, namely that in the total learning environment American business—epitomized by the largest corporations—will evolve towards becoming *both* socially and economically oriented rather than just *primarily* economically oriented institutions Business has for the most part been a responsible member of our American society Traditionally, it has made a profit for its owners by providing products, services and employment, all of which are essential economic contributions Secondly, business has helped define and implement solutions to social problems In the total learning environment American business will have leadership responsibility for defining and implementing socially, politically, spiritually and economically creative solutions to social problems, it will, of course, continue to provide products, services and employment in a *learning environment*, and it will, if successfully managed, provide a profit to the owners This change in priority and emphasis of corporate purpose to meet the higher needs of people (employees, customers, owners and others who collectively are the American society) is not to suggest that American corporations will become not-for-profit or philanthropic organizations Those busi-

nesses that set goals and employ operating practices to meet the needs and wants of our society in the context of a total learning environment will also grow in financial and manpower resources Those corporations that do not adapt will atrophy

As American business becomes increasingly socially oriented, its primary contribution to our total society will be its continuing self-renewal on a sound social, economic, spiritual and political basis That is the challenge of the 70's for American business management—to assure the survival of the corporation as a viable social institution and entity as all of our society moves towards a total learning environment Related challenges also face managerial manpower in the non-business sectors of society

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

To meet the broad challenges, opportunities and responsibilities for the total learning environment as typified by the movement of American business to more socially oriented purposes, managerial manpower will face four critical needs

- 1 Modification of management practices, techniques and philosophy to be in tune with new personal and societal values For example, the 1% leadership group will create and implement new measurement, control and reward systems that are capable of dealing with changing ideas about efficiency and about manpower as a corporate resource
- 2 Specification of selection criteria for managerial manpower to meet requirements for managing in the total learning environment rather than in the historic environment based on the eight traditional assumptions For example, the current 1% leadership group may not be appropriate models for leaders in the future total learning environment, just as the 1% leadership group of the 30's or 40's or

even 50's may not have been models for today's leaders

- 3 Development of relatively unused interpersonal skills to new levels of understanding, acceptance and application For example, the 1% leadership group will learn how to deal more competently and comfortably with conflict, widely diverse values and man-manager dialogs
- 4 Development of new leadership styles appropriate to the total learning environment For example, the 1% leadership group will necessarily be less directive in its management than now, more aware of social and political factors, more cognizant of the "new" and differing needs of employees

as "productive" learners, the users or customers as "served" learners, the shareowners or government as "investing" learners, and the public-at-large as "beneficiary" learners.

All levels of American manpower will respond to such inspired and competent leadership with new levels of personal effectiveness and will experience new levels of personal fulfillment It is imperative that management education professionals help prepare managerial manpower to provide the leadership under which American society will continue to develop and grow economically, socially, politically and spiritually as it copes with important change factors by moving towards the total learning environment

*You are cordially invited to attend*

### *ASTD's Recognition Luncheon* *(Membership Meeting)*

*Monday, May 24, 1971*

*12:30-2:30 p.m.*

*The New York Hilton*  
*New York City*

A highly visualized report on ASTD activities, special recognition of chapter and regional officers, awards and a luncheon will make the annual membership meeting a major event of the National Conference

The membership meeting is the one time during the year that ASTD members gather in full force to hear details concerning the Society's affairs President Alphonse A. Dobbs will report to the membership, emphasizing key developments