



A. C. Macris Consultants

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Highlights

Did you know that the composition of today's households shows that only 69% of children under 18 years of age live with both parents, while in 1960 that figure was 88%?

Have you considered how America's schools have changed since the 50's, 60's and 70's?

Have you considered how teachers' roles and the expectations of them have changed in the past 50 years?

Do you realize the similarities between running a school system and running any large scale organization?

Superintendent Mike McKee of the Stonington, Connecticut School System is attempting to address these issues through his work with Peter Senge and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Mike and I have had a long and engaging professional association where we explore the relationships between my work with large corporations and his responsibilities as Superintendent of Schools.

We hope you enjoy this article and if you have any questions or wish to just talk about the issue please contact us.

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Schools as Organizations

by

Michael McKee, Superintendent Stonington, CT School System

Organizational theory applies to schools as well as it does to corporations. The most widely accepted theories (and indeed practices) about how an organization can best meet its mission through sustained change incorporate the following:

- Concepts of learning community,
- Increased capacity of all employees,
- Informed leadership operating within a shared vision,
- Application of focus to the work, identifying and using leverages,
- Systemic thinking.

The literature is replete with examples of how corporations have sustained incredible growth by paying close attention to these concepts.

The literature is also replete with examples about how public schools are failing and how they need to change drastically. I do not intend to defend the status of public education; in fact, I quite openly agree with the premise that schools need to be "reinvented." Harvard's Tony Wagner writes of the difference between reform and reinvention. He makes the point that even though schools have worked relatively well over the decades, the world now has changed to such a degree—especially socially and economically—that a mere reformation of the old ways of doing business will be unsuccessful in meeting the demands of today, let alone tomorrow. The schools, he writes, must be re-invented. Let's explore the drivers.

Bob Dylan back in the 60's sang "the times they are a' changing." I guess the song applies to every generation, and the sentiment certainly applies to today's world.

When exploring the schools of yesteryear, we usually draw on our own experiences. Parents, community members and corporate leaders recall schools from their attendance during the 50's, 60's and 70's. Most common descriptions of yesteryear's schools include the following:

- Teachers mainly lectured and students sat in rows, listen, and answered questions,
- Facts and formulae were stressed and assessed,
- Students were well-behaved and complied with institutional expectations,
- There was little diversity among students.

When the family of yesteryear is examined, people think back to their childhood and seem to enjoy sharing their remembrances. Most describe the family of yesteryear as being one with two parents and only the father working outside the home, with meals and much leisure time spent together, with grandparents and cousins nearby. School and homework were valued. Fear from violence and depravity was not an issue. The teaching of virtues and religion was a major component of family life.

The workplace of yesteryear was vastly different, too. During the industrial era, most people were blue-collar employees working on assembly lines in the coal, steel, oil, and the automotive industries. In the 50's and 60's about 30% of the workforce worked in industry. Today that percent is at 13 while the information and service industries employ 85% of the workforce. Skills needed to become successful at work in the past included being physically fit, understanding and following instructions, and being loyal, punctual, and able to maintain repetitive tasks. A high school education was sufficient to be successful at a job, earn a good salary, and provide for a family.

Let's compare yesteryear with today. The workplace today is vastly different. We are now in the information era featuring computers, semi-conductors, and fiber optics. Seventy-two percent of the women in America are in the workforce as compared to 47% just twenty years ago. In 1970 less than 1% of the population was Hispanic; by 2020 it will be 17%. The percent of whites in the population will have slipped from 89% in 1970 to 64% twenty years from now. Employees must be much more able to problem solve, work in teams, use technology, and accept and cooperate with people different in looks, beliefs, and abilities.

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The composition of today's households shows that only 69% of children less than 18 years of age live with both parents, while in 1960 that figure was 88%. Technology plays a major role in all homes, especially

for entertainment and communication. Instant access to information and other people have increased the pace of the family and caused family members to see less of each other collectively. By 2007 the market for cable and satellite TV will pass the combined sales for movie theaters, home video, video and computer games, entertainment merchandise, and recorded music. Likewise, households with income less than

\$30,000 make up only 25% of PC-equipped households. However, they accounted for over 35% of all new PC purchases in 1998.

Research tells us that information is doubling every two years. About 90% of the information we will use in the year 2015 does not exist now. Only 10% of what we know today will be used in 20 years. Indeed, "times they are a' changing," but not only in the way Dylan was singing. The families and the workplace have changed dramatically since the 50's and 60's. Global markets and economies have replaced the traditional expectations of imports and exports. The advances of technology have increased the speed of communication and access to information. The workplace requires thinking rather than repetition.

How different do America's schools look from when today's adults were in the classroom? How different are roles of the vast majority of teachers and expectations for the vast majority of students today from yesteryear? The answer is, "fundamentally not much."

Schools and schooling must change just as the rest of the world has changed in order that today's youngsters will be successful as adults in their world of tomorrow.

But isn't "reinvention" just another expression for creating a plan to affect change, achieve the mission, and sustain success? I believe it is. If that is the case, then it follows that the theory (and practice) for

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successful organizational change to sustain growth should work for schools as well as it does for corporations.

Most of the organizational issues that affect business and industry also affect schools. Some of the key issues that affect both kinds of organizations are the following:

- Achieving goals through a shared vision,
- Providing enlightened leadership,
- Hiring and retaining quality employees,
- Training employees and enabling their understanding and acceptance of change,
- Sustaining adequate financing.

In a conference attended by business and educational leaders in my community, these and other issues were placed before breakout groups as questions. The groups, prearranged to include a mix of both business and educational representatives, quickly realized that the issues applied to both organizations. It was interesting to note that the participants started asking the others how they handled the issues in their organizations. A subsequent large group discussion revealed that both sets of leaders had gleaned new knowledge from their counterparts on how to deal with these issues within their own organizations.

The main difference between schools and the corporate organizations is that the product of schooling is an intangible thing called learning while industry's product is more tangible and has a monetary value. In education the bottom line cannot be measured in dollars, even if the market place controls the learning provider. The mission of schools, including those run for-profit, will always be teaching and learning. The final accounting for schools is how well teachers teach so children learn as much as possible.

Isn't it surprising, then, that re-invention methods (or even reform methods) don't seem to apply the widely successful model for organizational improvement that is used by the corporate world? School reform is usually associated with changing the structure of schools (schedules, time, building/grade configuration) or the

psychology and pedagogy associated with children and the classroom. Seldom does the school reform movement speak of reinventing schools by first leveraging the capacity building for the top leadership

who then become responsible for building the capacity for those adults whom they supervise. The corporate model dictates capacity building of leaders as essential for the organization's ability to become a learning community devoted to systemic change for sustained growth. It is time the same theory is applied to schools.

Jim Collins is quite clear in his book, *Good to Great*, that the

most successful corporations have leaders that first get the "right people on the bus in the right seats." The vision in these corporations is truly shared because the leaders described by Collins didn't define the organization's vision in a vacuum. The CEO and all those people on the bus worked together, argued, debated, and finally arrived at a vision for how to accomplish their mission. Focus toward the mission, the vision, and the goals followed. The result was amazing. Companies emerged that sustained growth over a twenty-year period and out-performed the market and their toughest competitors. The CEOs of these companies paid attention first to the other leaders in their organizations and next to the work. They did not devote energy and time to quick fixes, marginal issues, or convoluted schemes. They kept it simple; but they began with the leaders.

Because most people don't really consider education and corporate organizations as equal, school reform movements don't usually apply the corporate systemic model for improvement. When those who theorize and help corporate leaders improve their businesses and sustain growth begin to expand their market to education, even they seldom apply their own models to school improvement plans. More often than not, they direct their attention to the classroom toward curricular and pedagogical change—what and how to teach children differently. This approach is analogous to improving a manufacturing company toward better achieving its mission by reconfiguring the assembly

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line. Granted, in the corporate systemic plan such reconfiguration may be included, just as psychological and pedagogical changes probably will be included in a systemic improvement plan for schools. However, people who understand the vision and mission of the organization, as well as the focus of the work, must make such decisions as part of a larger discussion and a much more far-reaching plan.

It is not enough for organizational theorists and corporate leaders to call for school reform and reinvention. It is not enough for educators to tweak the status quo. It is essential that organizational theories already proven successful in the corporate world be applied to the school reinvention movement. Application can more quickly be achieved when educators look beyond their own training and expertise while designing plans to improve schools systemically and when organizational theorists and corporate leaders recognize the similarities among all kinds of organizations.

It is a pleasure to have Superintendent Mike McKee author this issue of UPDATE. We heartily believe in the integration of Community, Business and Schools. In the business community one can find many articles and gurus purporting to know the best way to run a company. In the primary school system, however, the process is often taken for granted, yet the need is most acute and the consequences so far reaching. Consider the amount of resources spent each year on corporate professional development programs and leadership training. Now consider the benefit of establishing the environment and programs that better prepare students at much younger ages for the real world of today. The traditional paradigm of public schools has failed to keep pace with the needs of the community and business. Lessons taught at young ages tend to stick as habits and examples that students can emulate. In our Spring 2001 UPDATE the featured article was "*Leadership in Band Class.*" Jim Hilbie, band teacher at the Mystic Middle School in the Stonington School System, authored that article and expressed the importance of leadership as a teacher. We were also able to draw correlations to the business community. This issue of UPDATE takes the relationship of Community, Business and School to the next level, and I thank Superintendent McKee for his thought-provoking article.



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