

## ***INTERDEPENDENCE AND PRODUCTIVITY***

by

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***“Dependent people need others to get what they want. Independent people can get what they want through their own efforts. Interdependent people combine their own efforts with the efforts of others to achieve their greatest success” - Stephen Covey***

Monday, Sep. 27/2004 - In my last column it was stated that ‘the knowledge-worker may well undertake manual work but the manual-worker is unlikely to make any significant contribution to knowledge industries. An important strategy, therefore, is to convert manual-workers to knowledge-workers through an aggressive educational process’.

Vincent Vanderpool-Wallace, Director General, Bahamas Ministry of Tourism in response to last week’s column, entitled ‘knowledge as an asset’, contributed to the discussion as follows: ‘Basil, I think the real problem is that there is no such thing as manual worker productivity and knowledge worker productivity. There is only productivity. Everywhere I see that the lines between the two have been blurred and we should continue to blur them because I believe that is in our long term interest.

It is in our long term interest because in the Caribbean we need to develop a mutual respect between those who work outside and those who work in air-conditioning. That is the crass differentiation that we make between manual labourers and knowledge labourers. We all have to be both to varying degrees and in varying combinations as we begin to rebuild our societies in the wake of storms. I promise you that those who break their backs to replace the physical order will soon become incensed by those who wear ties and work in air-conditioning all day. There is no better time than under these circumstances to effect the blurring of lines between these two groups and develop the necessary mutual respect. You may recall that not so long ago, the office typist was the office equivalent of a manual labourer and knowledge workers dictated work to them. Today, most executives have had to learn the manual task of typing in order to deliver their knowledge.

Here is more of what I mean. Is a surgeon a manual labourer or a knowledge worker? Is it not best that she is both? Does not the concrete mixer create a more weather resistant structure if he knew and measured the right combination of water and sand in the mix? Is it not better that he is both? We are setting up a web site here in The Bahamas to accumulate all of the local knowledge to enable us to be better prepared for hurricanes in future. There are already some brilliant low cost suggestions. But someone has to execute them either individually or nationally so knowledge and labour must merge again.

Doing the right thing should always precede how we do that thing so information and knowledge are always important components of all that we do. So I am not sure that I agree that ‘the manual-worker is unlikely to make any significant contribution to knowledge industries’. We need to establish ways to get more knowledge to manual-workers for at the end of the day, unless they are working with more knowledge they will always under perform.

So we need to ensure that manual labour productivity proceeds alongside knowledge labour productivity and that there is mutual respect for both. If Grenada is anything like The Bahamas, that will require a cultural change but if we start from that position, we will rebuild countries that far surpass anything we had or could have had before the storms’.

To continue the dialogue, I would like to say that optimal productivity may be aspired to by the careful integration of three components. One is associated with the human being and is a result of both the knowledge of that human being and the proficiency with which he applies that knowledge through manual work. The second component is process intensive where there is a heavy dependence on the optimal way of doing things. This is akin to design and hence I would think is primarily focused on knowledge. The third component is due to technology and the technology itself is certainly heavily dependent on knowledge.

Vincent did give several examples where the individual may exhibit manual and knowledge characteristics. Generally, almost by definition, the manual worker will have less knowledge than the knowledge worker. However, we are not faced with a static situation. In order to increase our overall productivity we must face the challenge of continually increasing the knowledge capacity of the manual worker towards its full potential. The knowledge worker will also have to engage in manual work to the extent that it is necessary to effect the transfer of his knowledge.

It seems to me that what the world needs is not so much more dependent or independent people, but more interdependent people working, in an enhanced process and technology environment, to induce synergy towards achieving their greatest collective success. The Utopian position would be the erosion of the distinction between the manual and knowledge worker. We can get closer to such an objective by focusing on the development of each individual and adapting to the balance of knowledge and manual work that emerges in the process.

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