



The Future of Work (or not)

By Marie Bjerede

There has been much made of the factory model of education and how it doesn't prepare students for the modern workplace. The education factory assembles compliant workers who have developed a tolerance for monotony and repetitive, boring tasks. These tasks do not prepare students for jobs that require critical thinking and creativity as so many of the jobs in the modern workforce do.

However, we should also consider the factory model of work. Even though science has shown that the kind of work that is required in modern work environments is creative, and even though CEO's bemoan the lack of employees who know how to collaborate, communicate, think creatively, and solve problems, much, indeed most, of work is still structured according to the factory model.

CEO's are responsible for everything in their companies and accountable to their boards. Since they cannot, obviously, do everything themselves they have to delegate. But before they delegate they need to figure out what needs to happen, then turn that vision into a set of steps that their subordinates can execute against. Each of those (high-level) subordinates then needs to do the same, and so on until the lowest level employees in the organization have clear tasks defined for them to perform. In order to ensure that those tasks are completed correctly and efficiently, employees are motivated with carrots (promotions, bonuses, salaries...) and sticks (demotions, loss of job, and so on.) All the devices that science has shown are counterproductive and reduce performance.

Because the workforce is still trapped in the 19th century, just as the education system is, and we all have the metaphor of a factory so deeply ingrained in our shared consciousness that our counterproductive structures just feel like common sense. Obviously you offer someone a reward if you want them to perform.

So if we are preparing students for a dysfunctional workplace, shouldn't we train them in a dysfunctional educational system with rewards and punishments as motivation?

Actually, not.

As Dan Pink popularized in his 2008 book, *Drive*, science shows that to maximize performance in employees (or students) we should ignite their intrinsic motivation by avoiding rewards and punishments and instead fostering autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Employees who are intrinsically motivated have an intangible force multiplier when it comes to their work and value to an organization, and even CEO's who can't see how their organizational structure is creating the opposite, value these employees above all others. In order for students to be competitive in traditional workplaces they need the edge of intrinsic motivation that separates them from their peers.

Further, traditionally managed companies won't in the long run, be able to compete with those that are now emerging that understand how to harness an intrinsically motivated employee base. These companies offer much much higher work satisfaction and therefore don't need carrots and sticks (bonuses and threats) in order to experience breakthrough performance. Students who are educated to be effective in the self-organizing environments offered by intrinsically motivated places of work and learning

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will have a significant advantage over those who are traditionally educated when it comes to securing these coveted jobs.

Finally, as is frequently argued, new jobs are being created all the time and old jobs are moving to a “gig” economy where an employee is only as good as his/her reputation - once again the intrinsically motivated hold the advantage.

Industry is slow to change. Education even more so. But where education creates the pockets of excellence that prepare intrinsically motivated students, those students are receiving the greatest gift that education has to offer.

