HOW IMPORTANT IS JOB EXPERIENCE ?
NOT THAT MUCH, ANY MORE, CHUM !

In last week's TARGET Intelligence Report (Volume IV, Number 78), the lead article focused on the Internet and its potential role as a purveyor of motor cars to Mr Private Citizen of the Western World.

TARGET's conclusion was that the Internet is unlikely to be successful in the short term and the intermediate term.

In today's TARGET, this medium focuses on the information-technology age, today and tomorrow, and how the guidelines of yesteryear, in respect of the hiring of new staff, have changed, dramatically.

Job experience in the workplace is rapidly losing its importance in the rapidly changing environment of the hi-tech, information age.

Outside of selling vegetables at a market garden, or selling sofas in a furniture shop, and the like, job experience can, today, be supplemented with on-the-job training, provided that he or she has the aptitude to learn and is sufficiently compliant and elastic to meet the demands of the 21st Century.

Modern employees have to learn to cope with the ever-changing demands of the workplace, changes that are taking place, daily.

It is estimated that the share of non-skilled jobs in total employment will decline by about 25 percent in the next 8 years.

The intensity of knowledge in the world's economies of today rises in line with the intra-sectoral trend, but it, also, rises with structural changes towards the knowledge-intensive services sector.

The half-life of knowledge is declining.

Knowledge, today, has a shorter and shorter 'shelf' life, and yesterday's knowledge can often hamstring a knowledge-based employee unless he is sufficiently complaint with the requirements – of tomorrow.

Today's technological innovations are becoming old hat, almost as soon as they are introduced and accepted.

For computer-based professionals, it is currently estimated that their half-life of knowledge is about 4 years, at the most.

Qualifications in the workplace are changing rapidly, too.

The technological revolution of this century has triggered the need for continued training, and retraining.

The expert, fresh out of school, unless he continues with his education, away from academia, he will fall by the wayside as he is overtaken by those individuals who are more intuitive with regard to today's requirements in the workplace, be it a virtual workplace or the traditional office environment.

As medical practitioners must keep apace of new discoveries and techniques, so the requirements of the modern world demand that knowledge-based employees keep abreast, and ahead, of the latest innovations.

Strangely, while the world reels under the weight of unemployment, in the service sector, in most Western countries, there is a terrible shortage of qualified personnel.

Owing to the shortage of qualified labour in the services sector and in industry, it is said that, in the European Union (EU), 25 percent of all vacancies in the workplace went unfilled in the past few years.

And that was in spite of rising unemployment in the EU.

The Centre for European Economic Research has calculated that, in the research-intensive services sector, every second vacancy in the technological/scientific segment remains unfilled.

And that applies to today, too.

It is said that the shortage of workers in the **I**nformation and **C**ommunication **T**echnology (ICT) sector is most striking.

In the year 2000, vacancies in ICT in the EU were about 90,000 positions – and they could not be filled.

In all sectors of the EU, other than in ICT, there were more than half a million positions in the year 2000 that could not be filled due to the lack of qualified personnel.

The scarcity of qualified staff is strangling industry, which must expand in order to stay competitive in the rapidly changing world.

In today's knowledge-based society, there may well be no shortage of information and knowledge, but the putting of that knowledge to practical use is the key to harnessing it.

Electricity was known to exist for thousands of years by various names, but it was not until it could be harnessed with ease in 1882, with the establishment of a large-scale central electric power station, that it started to come into its own with the illumination of New York City, the first city in the world to reap the benefits of the invention of Mr Thomas Edison, who, also, invented the light bulb, the benefits of which are still being felt today, more than a century down the line.

Implicit Knowledge Versus Explicit Knowledge

In today's world, as in yesterday's world, there are 2 kinds of knowledge: Explicit and implicit.

Implicit knowledge is that knowledge, known to an individual, only, who is able to digest present and past experiences and learning, to integrate these with new knowledge, and, then, to interpolate and extrapolate new ideas from that mental bank.

Explicit knowledge, on the other hand, is available to all, thanks to the advent of ICT because, whereas, in the past, libraries were the storehouses of knowledge, available in many cases to the elite, only, today, knowledge is available to anybody with a little knowledge of how to use the Internet.

Information is no longer sacrosanct.

Technological progress has put an end to historical and traditional restrictions on knowledge, in the same way that the invention of printing press stole the power of the clergy and allowed all men to learn how to read.

It led to knowledge, proliferating the globe, much to the consternation of the Catholic Church.

If the Catholic Church of the 15th Century had had its way, it would have had Johannes Gutenberg, the man, who is credited with the invention of the printing press, murdered in order to retain the power of the Church over the laity.

At that time, it was forbidden for the laity even to own a Bible because it was held that only the Church knew how to interpret the Holy Scriptures.

If the laity read the Bible, the Vatican claimed at that time, it could well lead to misunderstanding that which is written, the interpretation of which is vested in the Holy Father, in accordance with tradition and custom.

Today, such pages of history are considered grotesque, but it was not that long ago that the Inquisition, a judicial institution, was established to seek out, to try, and to sentence persons guilty of heresy – which, usually, meant death for the poor unfortunate, if he had not, by that time, been maimed for life, during the draconian interrogation by the merciless Holy Fathers.

The Italian astronomer and physicist, Galileo Galilei, was the first person to use a telescope in order to study the stars, and, because he was an outspoken advocate of Copernicus's theory, that the sun forms the centre of the universe, it led to his persecution and imprisonment by the Inquisition.

That took place in 1633.

It was not until 1975, 342 years later, that the Vatican admitted that it had made a small mistake.

The days of the Catholic Church, having a monopoly on information, are long gone, of course, but, as the world has seen, lately, in certain countries of the Middle East, there are still some places in the world where such power is still in the hands of the privileged few.

The information revolution will change all that in the fullness of time, without question.

Modern concepts of knowledge and knowledge management, personalisation and codification, are aimed at the better use of information and knowledge.

Personalisation will foster a higher degree of information between parties in order to promote the impartial exchange of ideas.

It is well accepted that the impartial exchange of ideas is a precursor to friendship, of individuals and of countries.

Codification, on the other hand, will document and systemise knowledge, electronically, for present use and future use.

In the world of today, the Internet is by far the most-important, single technological change; it is fast becoming the driving force of societal and economic transformation.

It is the platform for innovation, discovery, and rediscovery.

Goods and services of a digital bent have taken centre stage.

In most Western countries, about 40 percent of all employees has access to, or regularly use, a computer.

In many occupations, half of the day is spent, peering into visual display terminals.

Highly qualified jobs in the information society of today are the driving force for economic prosperity, with technological innovation, being the hand-maiden to economic growth.

In Switzerland, just a few decades ago, imported labour from Italy fed the traditional watch-and-clock industry.

Such demographic requirements, which were the fuel of growth for Switzerland, today are an obstacle to progress – paradoxically.

The trend, today, is for a diminished supply of labour of younger workers and a sustained rise in the average age of the workforce.

At the current rate of change, there will be further unemployment unless labour is sufficiently resilient and pliable.

The EU estimates that the supply of labour will decline by about 250,000 workers per year until at least the year 2010.

Over the next 40 years, the Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Aging suggests a 15-percent decline in employment in the EU's largest single economy.

Dynamic macroeconomic growth is only possible if productivity rises.

That means, in the case of Germany, that the productivity of the average worker will have to rise by about 17 percent by the middle of this Century.

And that would only lead to an economic marking of time.

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