

Matt Ridenour

8504 Platform

There is a quiet nobility that accompanies work on the assembly line. Such work is the product of a very difficult task: submitting one's mind to the sovereignty of the job at hand. There is something noble, and perhaps even subversive, in that act. It demands a level of self-control and dedication that has been the source of great productivity in the modern era – a productivity that has shattered previously held assumptions about the pathways to efficiency. Additionally, it is on the back of this act of submission that many organizations have built their success – from large corporations to entire education systems. Unfortunately, the assembly line approach to organization has come at great cost – a cost that may prove to be unrecoverable.

In a culture so heavily influenced by the values of the industrial revolution, efficiency can quickly become an idol. And if efficiency is an idol, then the rational mind also becomes the object of worship, for it is rationality that is most often associated with methodical, mechanical operations. Yet seeing the employment of logic and reason as the chief function of the human mind is to risk trapping oneself in deeply destructive “patterns of mechanistic thinking” (Morgan, 1998, p.17). For example, if all progress is dependent on the employment of logic, then using the mind as an engine for creativity “risks sabotaging the economic and social progress we've made by applying the force of logic to our lives” (Pink, 2006, p.16). In this sense, the sort of progress that can be a bi-product of creative innovation is sacrificed on the altar of the consistency engendered by more rational and logical employments of the brain. Otherwise stated, some “consider the right-brain a savior; [others] consider it a saboteur” (Pink, p.15).

Such a view is pervasive not only in corporations but also in educational organizations. The school as a mechanized, efficient factory has long been a predominant organizational theory in the United States (Morgan, 1998). Such a model is even alive and well in Minnesota, where

some schools still view teachers as workers on an assembly line, encouraging and modeling a mechanistic teaching methodology in order to turn out a consistent, predictable product. In the same way that such an approach has produced negative consequences in the marketplace – “reducing many workers to automatons” (Morgan, 1998, p.28) – this approach has also significantly compromised the integrity of schools by producing significant deficiencies in the student population. Unfortunately, many schools (including private institutions who pride themselves on the freedom with which they operate, relative to curriculum and instruction) are manufacturing students who can flawlessly regurgitate course content, but are clueless when asked how to creatively and productively apply that content outside of a test-taking environment. For example, such students are capable of scoring extraordinarily high on SAT and ACT exams, yet unable to use their hands to craft something original or use their pens to create something imaginative. Rather than seeing creativity and out-of-the box thinking as an asset, such employments of the brain are stigmatized by schools as incorrect and error-ridden.

According to educational methodologist Howard Gardner, however, the future success of any individual or institution will be dependent on the encouragement of “productive mistakes” (Gardner, 2008, p.85), rather than limiting mistakes altogether, as the assembly line organizational theory seeks to accomplish. Educational organizations must, therefore, eschew the theory that the assembly line approach to education is engendering a consistent and competent student on whose backs a productive society can be built. Such an approach is merely creating a “mindless and unquestioning” (Morgan, 1998, p.32) proletariat that is unable to adapt to change and will, therefore, become irrelevant in an increasingly global educational economy. Organizations clinging to the notion that creativity is accompanied by unacceptable instability and unpredictability will someday collapse under the weight of their own hubris – an outcome in which quiet nobility is noticeably absent.

## References

Gardner, H. (2008). *Five minds for the future*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

Morgan, G. (1998). *Images of organization: The executive addition*. San Francisco, CA:  
Berrett-Koehler.

Pink, D. (2006). *A whole new mind*. New York: The Penguin Group.