

Network

IT'S TIME THAT VALUES OF COMMAND AND CONTROL GAVE WAY TO VALUES THAT ENABLE US TO COOPERATE, SAYS **DAVID LOADER**.

It's not just what you know but who you know that matters. My father believed otherwise. Personal discipline, obedience and manners, he insisted, were the fundamental values you needed for a good future. Such feudal values of command and control, adapted during the Industrial Revolution to meet the needs of hierarchical organisations, still hold sway, even though they make us ponderously slow in responding to new situations.

Fortunately, the world is changing and so are the ways in which we work. Fewer people are employed in industry in routine roles, where following orders is critical, and hierarchical organisations want employees who can respond directly to new situations, not seek direction from a remote authority. Today a more intelligent, educated and responsive employee is required.

In 1990, Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, and others advocated an updated version of my father's insistence on the importance of personal mastery. Senge wanted people to gain new knowledge and skills appropriate to their challenges, and advocated continuous learning that would empower individuals so that they could respond appropriately to new situations in a changing society. Along with this commitment to learning came an emphasis on mentoring and business coaching.

Today, there's a new shift from the individual to the collective. It's not sufficient to have a high level of personal mastery, important though that is. Individuals need to be able to work cooperatively, in many teams. We need connections with other people to source knowledge and skills. Who we know matters if we are to be successful.

A study of white collar workers revealed that more than half of them obtained their jobs because of a personal connection.

These people were known to the employer, but not in any deep way. This is the strength of weak ties.

As it turns out, close friends are great for road trips, say, or intimate dinners, but not for job leads or blind dates. Why? According to David Hames, author of *The Five Literacies of Global Leadership*, it's because our close friends know the same people as we do.

Creating social networks is critical to one's success. We need to be nurturing relationships, especially weak ties. It's from the people in our social networks that we obtain links to new people, ideas and knowledge. The addition of one person to our network is in reality the addition of a new network of people to the team.

Using networks, a dispersed group of people can achieve goals that they could never achieve individually, especially with the aid of smart technologies, the internet and one of the most powerful new collaborative approaches – open source. The open source approach, which is used in new software development, involves freely sharing source code among interested people who then build on this to develop new and better products.

If you think this has no relevance to schools, think again. If schools were to open their curriculum, pedagogy and systems, and invite others to further develop what they're doing, the result would be a move forward to new thinking and programs, from best practices to next practices. Schools could cooperate with each other rather than compete as they wrestle with some of the intractable problems of our time. Instead of introducing boundaries, they could encourage innovation and adaptation from within and outside. Instead of command and control from central authori-

ties, we need encouragement and support for new initiatives at the local level.

The web of interconnected relationships that exists in and between schools is a strength. What may begin as gossip could provide the answer to someone's question. Spur-of-the-moment reactions to unfolding events, when communicated, stimulate reflection in others. It's through social webs that information is passed, intelligence gathered, collaboration supported and energy focused. These webs need spaces and reasons for people to gather, and they need technology to communicate. Central authorities could create opportunities for social interaction among school leaders and teachers by setting up teacher cafes, staff plazas and leadership centres as well as supporting these with appropriate technology.

Schools need to liberate the community in each person and enable each person to extend their community through networking. This, and an emphasis on continuous learning for all, will lead to better outcomes for students and schools. If that doesn't happen, I might get as mad as hell, but I'm not going to take it anymore: it's time to network. **T**

David Loader is an education consultant and Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne. His latest book is Jousting for the New Generation: Challenges to contemporary schooling, published by ACER Press. Email davidloader@bigpond.com

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