

# **The Learning Support Model: Personnel Policy Beyond the Traditional Model**

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**Abstract:** There is increasing interest in achieving quality through effective management and use of human resources in public administration. What is the appropriate personnel policy that will assure this quality in government operations? This essay compares two human resource administration approaches and their quality potential. The first, characterized as the Traditional Model, is intensely bureaucratic and dominant in most public organizations. It is seen as antiquated, more suited for the mass production requirements of America's early industrialization period. The second, called the Learning Support Model, responds to the challenges of postindustrial workers by developing their problem-solving capacities. This essay focuses on the federal government and argues that the Traditional Model is giving way to the new design.

## **Introduction**

Productivity, once the holy grail of public and private management, is complemented by the pursuit of quality in goods and services. In 1989, when the United States established its first major award for economic excellence, it was for quality, not productivity (Segalla, 1989). A new set of competitive performance standards is arising in America's economy. These standards support quality through the effective management and use of human capital (Carnevale, A. P., 1990). This means that quality is significantly dependent upon the extent to which personnel systems attract, retain, and motivate skilled employees to deliver services through state-of-the-art processes. Workers in the private and public sector support quality. A 1983 survey (Yankelovitch & Immerwahr) showed, for example, that nearly two-thirds of employees preferred bosses who demanded high quality work. In a recent survey, large percentages of federal workers reported that the quality of their work could be improved to a "very great" or "considerable" extent without additional staff (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, June 1990). How is such quality achieved?

This essay, concentrating on the United States civil service, compares two types of human resource management models and their quality-enhancing potential. The first is the Traditional Model, intensely bureaucratic and domi-

nant in most public organizations (Nigro, 1990). The second is the Learning Support Model. It emphasizes innovation and flexible work practices, depends upon the skills of employees, and upgrades the problem-solving capacities of organizations (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**Alternative Paradigms for Public**

	<b>Personnel Practice</b>	
	<i>Traditional Model</i>	<i>Learning Support Model</i>
<i>Characteristics:</i>		
Organizational Arrangement:	Centralized	Decentralized
Performance Standards:	Quantity	Quality
Primary Role:	Monitoring/Compliance	Consulting/Advising
Knowledge About Work:	Outside In	Inside Out
Job Design:	Narrow/Impoverished	Broad/Enriched
Reward Base:	Individual	Knowledge/Group
Decision Style:	Directive	Participative
Training & Development Attitude:	Low Priority	High Priority
Type of Learning Valued:	Single-Loop	Double-Loop
Trust:	Degenerative	Regenerative
Empowerment:	Up-the-Line	Down-the-Line
Innovation Potential:	Limited	Unlimited

The administrative doctrines in these two personnel ideals long have been in conflict with each other. What brings their struggle to a head now is changed management operations practices responding to (1) the growing demand of consumers for better, not just more, services, (2) the scarcity of program resources, and (3) the labor shortage. To produce quality work in face of these obstacles, government must liberate, not constrain, the potential of its human capital.

Human capital is a strategic resource consisting of employees knowledge, skills, and abilities (e.g., McGregor, 1988). Defining a quality federal work force has received much attention in recent years (e.g., United States General Accounting Office, 1988, 1989). A quality work force, no matter how it is ultimately defined, is not an asset if inhibited by an antiquated personnel system. The challenge is straightforward. High quality public goods and services cannot be produced unless there is a high quality work force using high quality work processes (Smith, Sainfort, Sainfort, & Fung, 1989). To achieve these results we must shift our thinking about how personnel operations should support learning at work, hence the concept of the Learning Support Model. Learning relies on improving actions, which results in greater knowledge and understanding that improves the quality of work.

Sectors of the future work world show production and service to be much different from the type that flourished in the smokestack and assembly-line age (Toffler, 1990; Zuboff, 1988). Large segments of today's workplace are modeled after the system of manufacturing pioneered during the early 1900s. One estimate is that 95 percent of American companies cling to old forms of work organization (National Center on Education and the Economy, 1990). In these cases, a white-collar elite does the thinking, develops strategy, and motivates and controls large numbers of front-line workers. In this age of complex technologies, organizations give front-line workers more responsibility to address quality (Hirshorn, 1984; National Center on Education and the Economy, 1990). Structures and human resource practices designed to support production trends in the early part of this century clearly are not suitable for the future. A more flexible practice is necessary to cope with the new realities.

The 1960s were known as the "decade of the public employee," which corresponded with explosive growth in public employee unions. During that period attention focused on new labor relations patterns, especially collective bargaining. With the passage of the Equal Opportunity Act of 1972, the 1970s saw a dramatic rise in concern for individual rights, social equity and representativeness in the bureaucracy. This era had considerable influence on public personnel administration. The defining personnel problem of the 1980s was comparable worth and fair employment practices. During each of these intervals, the core of personnel practice adjusted to accommodate new demands from outside the bureaucracy. The 1990s, represented by the Learning Support Model, will be the decade of human resource development (HRD) or the education, training, and development of employees. It, too, will have significant effect on the focus of public personnel administration.

## **The New Imperatives**

The Traditional Model was responsive to the requirements of America's early industrialization, when the goal was to provide high volumes of standardized goods and services at low cost. This was achieved through closely supervising low-skilled workers in narrowly specialized jobs. Decision-making was top down, and predictability through control was the key. Productivity equalled efficiency and economy alone in this simplified "volume up, costs down" approach.

In the public sector, the objective was to provide access and coverage to mass-produced services through essentially the same design. The early ambition, for example, was to ensure that all Americans had access to public education. Now, however, availability, access, and coverage are not the only issues. There are new performance expectations. Citizens demand quality education. They define quality as schools that are responsive and accountable to local needs. Most of all, people want schools that produce graduates who can read, write, and solve problems at levels that will ensure success on the job. They insist upon custom services for their special requirements, conveniently delivered through state-of-the-art processes. Finally, they want their

money's worth and are willing to experiment with choice and privatization to improve education and other services.

If the government cannot deliver quality, it will lose the battle with the private sector. Even in areas where competition with the business sector is not an issue, government services must be first-rate. Government is a regulator and complementary asset in our economy. It must be able to do its job well. Public employees contribute to wealth and GNP through the creation and maintenance of a stable infrastructure that allows a private economy (Levine & Kleeman, 1986). Government also deals with the messy problems that the private sector cannot or will not (Milward & Rainey, 1983). In these circumstances, the nation can ill afford a public service encumbered by out-moded human resource policies.

### **The Traditional Model**

The Traditional Model is all too familiar to line managers and employees in government. It features large-scale hierarchy and standardized work operations. This bureaucratic paradigm is rule-driven, individual-based, and preoccupied with measurable outcomes. It attempts to understand work from the *outside in*. It has a one-size-fits-all mentality and demonstrates limited capacity for innovation. The metaphor is that of the machine, where rationality reigns and intangibles are suspect. It cannot produce quality because it was not designed to achieve it. It was engineered to assure equitable treatment of citizens, avoid corruption, and maximize the bureaucratic values of regularity, predictability, and impersonality.

The Traditional Model of personnel management emerged at the turn of this century, and its initial features were influenced by: (1) the Pendleton Act, enacted to correct the worst abuses of spoils by introducing a merit system administered by an independent civil service commission; (2) the politics-administration dichotomy, which encouraged the idea that administration should be buffered from politics; (3) the scientific management movement and its underlying premise that it could find one best way to perform work; and (4) the closed system of the principles school of public administration, which argued that one could learn and apply rules of management notwithstanding the contingencies of an organization's internal and external environment. The conflux of these beliefs generally conformed to the precepts that were known later as Max Weber's ideal type bureaucracy.

In general, the resulting personnel paradigm was moralistic and suspicious of politics. It viewed human nature negatively and was enamored of the dominant business values of industry, i.e., efficiency and economy. Personnel systems that arose from these origins exhibited an excessive policing mentality, compelled managers to find ways to get the work done in spite of the established personnel rules, made it difficult to reward performance, protected the incompetent, was unresponsive to executive leadership, excluded women and minorities from meaningful participation in the bureaucracy, and fostered paternalism during a period when public employee collective bargaining was coming of age. Finally, underwritten by the privilege doctrine, the system was unilateral and sometimes arbitrary with respect to individual employee rights.<sup>1</sup>

Widely shared perceptions that the system was a failure caused what was thought to be major reform of the Traditional Model in 1978. This reform proved to be disappointing, and public service continues to be in crisis (Levine, 1986; Levine & Kleeman, 1986). What we must do now is examine the system's fundamental assumptions and significantly overhaul its parameters. This does not mean that the public service should abandon its merit principles, which were restated and codified in 1978. Merit **principles** enjoy the widespread support of federal workers and the general public. The **system** that implements them does not. In fact, the procedural thicket that constricts these principles has overwhelmed program managers. A recent study summarized the current state of affairs:

Merit cannot mean, as one would assume from examining the system, excessive constraint and blind obedience to a nearly unintelligible maze of procedure. No manager or personnel director can work consistently or effectively in a system defined by over 6,000 pages of rules and regulations. One hundred years of accumulated rules and regulations are the baggage of merit. They do not clarify and define; they obscure. The current system essentially assumes that public managers must be coerced into meritorious behavior; there is no presumption that, left to their own skills and conscience, members of the federal service will nonetheless pursue quality and effective service (Ingraham & Rosenbloom, 1990, p. 40).

What we need is a form of human resource administration that responds to the performance requirements of postindustrial work, protects merit principles, and liberates line managers from the constraints of the present system.

### The Learning Support Model

The Learning Support Model responds to the challenges of postindustrial society. Quality as a dominant performance standard, for example, is a feature of such a society. Quality presumes products and services have attributes other than their gross number. Other standards beyond efficiency, economy, and productivity are variety, customization, convenience, and timeliness (Carnevale, 1990). These precepts do not operate in isolation. They are part of whole and require broader and deeper employee skills. Processes must permit workers flexibility to fully apply their skills on the job. Personnel systems must encourage learning and flexibility between government programs and their clients. Knowledge, the signature of the emerging workplace, requires a shift from human resource practices characteristic of bureaucracies to more collegial systems driven by knowledge (Cleveland, 1985; Kanter, 1989; Zuboff, 1988).

The Learning Support Model responds to knowledge-driven organizations. It understands work from the *inside out* and encourages employee participation. It respects hands-on knowledge and emphasizes learning. It eschews narrowly defined jobs and rewards group performance as well as individual work knowledge. It compensates workers for what they know whether or not they use all of this knowledge. The primary goal of the

personnel department within this model is to empower employees who work on the front lines in public agencies. In other words, the Learning Support Model places a premium on participation and employee development. Further, it does not view government as a single operation but as a federation of several "industries" with various operations that demand flexible and tailored human resources strategies. It envisions personnel departments as R&D enterprises, which house consultants "on tap" to support agency initiatives to produce quality work. The model gives agencies latitude to design personnel systems that address their legitimate needs. The conviction is that, in most cases, federal managers would uphold merit if left more on their own. There is no presumption that they cannot be trusted.

### **The Alternatives Counterpoised: Moving toward the New Paradigm**

The following is a comparison of the Traditional and Learning Support models. Note that the features of each are presented in stark contrast to one another, which belies the complexities of real-world practice. A freeze-frame snapshot of personnel practice and its neat bifurcation do not necessarily reflect actual practice. We recognize that personnel practice is dynamic. The federal personnel system, as the following discussion shows, is moving aggressively toward the Learning Support design and is seen in transition somewhere in between the alternative frameworks.

1. *Preferred Organizational Arrangement and Method of Control.* There are two basic approaches for organizing personnel in government. The first, the commission format, is administered by an independent civil service commission. Second, the executive personnel system model, places control of personnel administration largely in the hands of the chief executive of the government (Hays & Reeves, 1984). Our national system moved toward the executive model with the abolition of the Civil Service Commission and the creation of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) following the passage of the Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) of 1978. This reform increased the responsiveness of human resources administration to executive leadership. As a result, personnel was less isolated from the day-to-day work of government.

A related structural issue is the degree to which line agencies are allowed to control their own personnel operations. Historically, centralization has been favored in the governance of the federal personnel system. In the government's mass production hierarchy, agency autonomy was sacrificed for an integrated merit system that relied upon uniform rules and procedures created and closely monitored by central personnel officials. Government was viewed as a single industry; its major goal was symmetry in personnel practice among the various agencies. This view dominated despite the fact that national public employment is really a composite of several "industries," such as education, social services, transportation, public safety, environment, and housing. The strategy of institutionalizing an across-the-board personnel system ignored human resources needs in unique operating domains.

Another result of the CSRA, therefore, was delegating more authority to agencies for personnel activities. Some of the specific activities delegated

were: (1) greater direct hiring authority, (2) some ability to modify or waive qualification standards for in-service placements, (3) authority to pay higher rates to certain occupations in certain areas without prior OPM approval, and (4) allowing managers to participate more in the classification process. Most federal departments were and still are pleased with these and other initiatives granting them greater independence (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, October 1989). Still, in 1988, eight federal agencies were not satisfied with the extent of operating flexibility and sought legislation that would allow them to escape centralized personnel and compensation rules (Havemann, 1988).

More troublesome, perhaps, are the results of a recent study by the Merit Systems Protection Board (November 1989, p. 10), which indicate whereas "83% of respondents believe that delegation of authorities from OPM to agency personnel offices can lead to improved personnel management, only 60% believe the same is true when it comes to delegating authority from agency personnel offices to line managers." Ingraham and Rosenbloom (1990, p. 39) consider this "inability—or unwillingness—of central personnel to trust and train other personnel in their own agencies is damning evidence of the problems with merit today." It is clear that the traditional value of centralized control still persists in a relatively large number of agencies.

The Learning Support personnel design demands the devolution of as much personnel authority as possible away from central departments into the hands of line managers. It is the *personnel by managers* model (Nigro, 1990). Stated in more familiar terms, it is the let-managers-manage standard. After all, managers and their subordinates are ultimately responsible for putting out the work. It is they who have the most to gain from innovations that spark quality and they who are evaluated for the system outputs and outcomes in terms of what they deliver to customers. They require room to act, to experiment, and to innovate.

2. *Role.* Personnel administration performs a number of rules in organizations. They are: (1) policy initiation, i.e., proposing new policies or revising existing policies to deal with recurring problems; (2) advice, e.g., advising line managers with employee relations or work-design questions; (3) service, e.g., recruiting, training, assisting in the administration of labor contracts; and (4) control, i.e., making sure that line departments conform with established personnel rules and regulations (Bohlander, White, & Wolfe, 1983). In the Federal government, personnel specialists spend far too much of their time with the procedures of the system, and minimal time in research and development. They rely heavily on control through standardized procedures. All of this is done without sufficient input from agency managers (National Academy of Public Administration, 1983).

As the center of gravity in human resource administration shifts downward from central personnel agencies, a new conceptual framework will permit personnel departments to emphasize their advising and service roles when requested by the agencies or line managers. Their policy role will continue, but it will be more collaborative. Ideas on how to improve system operations will be bottom up rather than top down, as white collar, technical personnel acquire respect for the hands-on work knowledge of line managers and their subordinates. Stated another way, the role of the personnel administrator will change

from ensuring compliance with work rules to consultation with those who actually do the work (Nalbandian, 1981).

3. *Knowledge About Work.* The traditional personnel paradigm promotes knowledge about work from the outside in, where outside observers make judgments on tasks or how, ideally, a job should be done. The most familiar example is job analysis and classification that rationalizes work and underpins several personnel practices, e.g., recruitment, testing, performance appraisal, and training. As practiced in support of the Traditional Model, it has claimed scientific status based on its ability to *know* about work by focusing on those aspects of it that can be observed or gauged. It quite simply tends to trust what it can see or measure. Through its techniques, labor “yields up its secrets”; it is quantified, if possible, and systematized (Zuboff, 1988, pp. 41-42).

This approach to job analysis has been called pseudo-science (Elliott, 1985). At the very least, it is fair to say that this tack has its limits. One thing learned in the study of organizations, and especially personnel, is that strict rationality misses a lot. For example, the value of job functions can be subjective, influenced by gender bias, as exemplified by the comparable worth question. The idea that jobs in complex organizations can be understood from the outside, standardized, and reduced to a series of simple, somewhat rigid tasks is misplaced. Attempts to draw more exact distinctions among jobs have led to endless problems. Modern work rapidly is becoming knowledge or smart work. It does not hold its shape for long. Moreover, knowledge of a job rests on the judgment of the person(s) actually doing it. That is what is meant by the term *inside out*. Even then, there are limits to the extent to which the essence of work can be translated into technical terms of the sort sought by job analysts (Hummel, 1986, 1987). These realities necessitate adjustments in patterns of job analysis and design away from narrow, rigid classification schemes to broader, more flexible systems. At the heart of the change is greater respect given to the job knowledge of those who actually do the work.

Jobs are becoming more dynamic, and the range of knowledge and abilities necessary for successful performance has broadened considerably. Several work redesign initiatives that recognize these changes gained strength during the 1980s. These are forerunners of more permanent change. They are: (1) the growth of work teams; (2) the reduction in the number of job classifications and a movement to *pay banding*, where the number of grades is reduced and merged into categories reflecting experience levels; and (3) the integration of responsibility for quality control into operational jobs (Kochan, Cutcher-Gershenfeld, & MacDuffie, 1989). Taken together, these trends envision broadly defined occupations in which multi-skilled workers have real authority to deal with problems. The operating realities of today's organizations demand flexibility in the organization of work, which increases the scope, autonomy, and responsibility of jobs (Deckop & Mahoney, 1989).

The Office of Personnel Management understands the need to adjust its approach to classification and has attempted to reform the present system. George P. Steinhauer, OPM assistant director for classification, stated:

Managers and supervisors perceive that the system, while producing technically precise results, can be overly complicated, time consuming and difficult to work with for the very people who carry out the



work of the government. Time and effort is wasted as classifiers work with managers insisting on arcane and overly fine distinctions on judgments which, in the final analysis, managers are best prepared to make (Standards for setting pay, 1989, p. 7).

OPM has been willing to experiment with new approaches. For example, the Naval Laboratories Demonstration Project (Nigro & Clayton, 1984) involved managers directly in creating and managing a simplified personnel classification scheme. In the end, supervisors were more satisfied with the new structure and procedures (U.S. Office of Personnel Management and Research Demonstration Branch, 1984). Further efforts presently under consideration to improve the classification system support the idea of generic, broad-based standards. The National Academy of Public Administration received funding to investigate how public and private employers grade and classify positions. Also, the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) plans to explore whether the current system discriminates against women and minorities. The OPM classification staff is conducting its own review. The present system is obsolete, and change is possibly on the horizon (Changes in job classification, 1990).

4. *Pay and Benefits.* Comparing federal pay and benefits with private and other public employers has been a continuing problem. The integrity of the pay-setting process has been abysmal. The current view is that federal compensation, directly and indirectly, is not adequate to recruit, retain, and motivate employees (e.g., National Commission on the Public Service, 1989). The Merit Systems Protection Board (May 1990) validated this perspective in a study that found that compensation and advancement were the most important reasons employees gave for leaving government service.

The recent passage of the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act of 1990 has made progress in reforming federal compensation practices. Creating workable pay-for-performance systems, expanding locality pay, ensuring comparable worth, and improving health care benefits, among other things, remain to be addressed. In addition to these formidable tasks, which deal with the equity and sufficiency of compensation practices, we must explore alternatives to traditional approaches. Foremost among these are pay-for-knowledge, which is linked to the Learning Support Model, and new methods of job design that focus on employee growth, development, and potential contribution (Schuster, 1989).

Pay-for-knowledge is different from traditional pay systems. In traditional systems, salary is related to the specific job that an employee fills. In a pay-for-knowledge system, employees are compensated for the "number, kind, and depth of skills they develop" (Lawler & Ledford, 1984, p. 6). According to Walton (1985), traditional pay systems are appropriate for high control mass production, whereas pay-for-knowledge is fitting for less control oriented organizations where the number of skills and competencies a person possesses is crucial. This innovation promotes quality but cannot be realized without a substantial investment in human resources development.<sup>2</sup>

5. *Training and Development.* The buyer's market for skilled labor is ending. The labor pool is shrinking, and the majority of new work force entrants will be women, minorities, and immigrants (Johnston & Packer, 1987).

Many of these workers have been disadvantaged by the American education system and are seen as lacking certain skills at a time when knowledge requirements at work are increasing (Carnevale & Gainer, 1989). In addition, the work force is aging. The United States civil service is already older than the rest of the labor force and faces skills obsolescence unless it retrains employees to keep pace with technology and other performance requirements. These facts concern federal officials because government work has always been knowledge-intensive and is expected to become more so in the future (Hudson Institute, 1988; National Commission on the Public Service, 1989).

The primary method for creating and maintaining competent human capital is training and development. Training is the process by which employees are given the skills and competencies necessary to perform their jobs. Development takes the long view and fosters growth and professionalism by preparing employees for future responsibilities (Hays & Reeves, 1984; Moore, 1985). Few governments, at the federal, state, or local level, have the vision to comprehensively evaluate their work-force training and development needs. Fewer still invest much in human resources development despite the fact that the business sector is engrossed in this question. In fact, government helps the corporate sector address its human capital needs while largely ignoring its own (Katz, 1990; McGregor, 1988).

Federal training and development activities under the Traditional Model have not been a priority. Recently published data estimate that the federal government spends about 0.8% of total payroll on training as compared to progressive firms, which may spend 5-10% of payroll on their human resources. Further, in addition to extremely low expenditures, federal training efforts are short-term in focus, duration, and effects, and many agencies lack strategic plans for employee development (National Commission on the Public Service, 1989).

When operations require only standardized simple jobs to achieve productivity, training and development not a high priority, especially when there are plenty of people with the needed skills waiting for a job. Further, in traditional hierarchy, innovation and learning come from the outside in or top down in organizations, with few systematic attempts to capture new learning with the client or customer (Carnevale, A. P., 1990).

The workplace is now properly seen as a learning environment, and quality depends upon everyone's being involved. Two types of learning are required. The first is representative of the Traditional Model and is lower level, training that merely repeats behaviors and restricts itself to correcting errors within a given system of rules. The second is associated with the Learning Support Model and is higher level. It entails the development of understanding when central norms, frames of reference, and assumptions need to be changed (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). It is the difference between *single-loop* and *double-loop* learning (Argyris & Schon, 1978). In other words, people need ability *and* authority to question fundamentals and to bring the full range of their skills to bear on a problem when programmed decisions are inadequate. We seek organizations that permit "reflection-in-action" (Schon, 1983), where "the practitioner draws on his or her experience to understand the situation,

attempt[s] to frame the problem, suggest[s] action, and then re-interpret[s] the situation in light of the consequences of action" (Marsick, 1988, pp. 192-193). The role of managers in such an environment is not to give orders and rely on rigid work rules but to manage learning. More than anything else, the distinction between personnel management in the Traditional and Learning Support models is how the latter encourages strong, healthy learning environments that enlarge the scope of action for line workers (Carnevale, A. P., 1990). Indeed, organizations can be designed to foster reflection by moving away from mechanistic organizational structures (Morgan & Ramirez, 1983). The Learning Model is a blueprint that empowers smart workers to use their intelligence to produce quality work.<sup>3</sup>

OPM is improving its training and development practices. It is attempting to restructure and pull together the federal government's disparate training efforts (*Federal Times*, July 1990). Based on a report of a task force on executive and management development (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1990), reform of the government's entire learning enterprise has begun. The need for an overhaul of the federal government's philosophy and methods in educative work environments is immediate and key to achieving quality work in the future.

6. *Trust*. Trust is instrumental in organizations. It is a highly differentiated attitude. For example, employees may trust co-workers but not supervisors. Or, they may have confidence in upper management but not in laterally situated work groups. Individuals within organizations determine whether they can expect fair, ethical, and non-threatening behavior from others. If they can, they are more willing to risk vulnerability, to take the chance that they will not be exploited, to be less defensive, and to be more effective in problem-solving (Carnevale & Wechsler, 1991). In other words, trust is the lubrication that makes it possible for organizations to run (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Groups with high levels of trust are more effective in addressing organizational problems (Zand, 1972). Trust facilitates effective performance because it encourages the exchange of information and determines whether team members are willing to allow others to influence their decisions and actions (Boss, 1978). In short, trust is essential for group accomplishment (Friedlander, 1970). Of particular importance here is that trust has profound effects on learning and development in individuals and organizations (Golembiewski & McConkie, 1975).

Golembiewski (1984) provides two useful idealized relationships in organizations, *regenerative* and *degenerative*, which are particularly helpful in exposing another fundamental difference between the Traditional and Learning Support models of personnel. The degenerative relationship is characterized by low trust, a depressed sense of personal efficacy, defensiveness, and a do-not-rock-the-boat mentality among members. These inhibit learning and the necessary confidence to tackle problems. The regenerative system encourages high-trust attitudes and behaviors, e.g., risk-taking, openness, and confidence in facing and solving problems. Degrees of trust are implicitly represented in an organization's designation of work rules, roles, and relations (Fox, 1974). The national government's human resources management ap-

proach has been decidedly low in trust, with stultifying effect on achieving high quality (Thayer, 1978).

The key to improving trust in organizations is the primary role of the supervisor (Carnevale & Wechsler, 1991). Supervisors are face-to-face representatives of organizations and are greatly responsible for most employees' everyday work. It is the supervisor who permits individual workers to exert control, discretion, and judgment in carrying out tasks. In other words, it is the supervisor who provides the room for learning to occur.

A recent survey of the federal work force shows that the majority of respondents gives supervisors good marks on a number of factors including trust. Fifty-seven percent indicate that they trust their supervisors, which is up a percentage point from results in a similar 1986 survey. Still, that leaves a significant number of workers who indicate low confidence in supervision and see a need for improvement (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, June 1990).<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

It is evident from the changes initiated by the United States Office of Personnel Management that several of the underlying premises of the Learning Support Model are in good currency within the national government these days. There is movement away from the parameters of the Traditional Model toward those of the Learning Support Model. However, we should not underestimate the staying power of the Traditional Model. One reason is that the Traditional Model embodies well-understood personnel techniques (Nigro, 1990). In short, we know how to do it. We increasingly recognize, however, that the Learning Support Model comes with a technology as well (e.g., Golembiewski, 1985). We know how to do it, too. The ideas underlying the Learning Support Model have received increasing attention in public administration literature for a number of years. The question is whether reform of the traditional system will move far and fast enough from theory into practice.

There are encouraging signs that the Learning Support Model is being implemented. For example, the philosophy of Total Quality Management (TQM) has been instituted in the federal service on an increasingly broad scale. TQM is premised on the idea that those who actually do the work are the key to improving work processes. Employees are encouraged to think in terms of internal and external customers and how best to meet their needs (Milakovich, 1990). A Federal Quality Institute (FQI), modeled after the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award competition in the private sector, is already recognizing federal agencies that achieve operations quality (Newman, 1990). The FQI works with the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Personnel Management, and the President's Council on Management Improvement in transforming work processes to greater levels of accomplishment. At the heart of these efforts is improved use of human capital through new management methods that support the development and liberation of the knowledge of employees down the line.

Times are changing. The metaphors of the past were the pyramid and the machine. The images of the future are the circle and the brain (Hummel, 1990).

An innovation and quality imperative is emerging that rests upon diseconomies of scale and delivers knowledge-based services where quality is built-in by smart workers in non-bureaucratic environments. There is promising evidence that the transition to the Learning Support Model of personnel administration, which supports these values, is already taking hold in the federal government.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The personnel literature concerning these outcomes of personnel administration is vast, and a few prominent examples should satisfy. See Klingner and Nalbandian (1978); Shafritz, (1974); Vaughn, (1972); Sayre, (1948); Rosenbloom (1971, 1983); and any number of personnel texts or readers, e.g., Hays and Reeves, (1984); Klingner and Nalbandian (1985); Elliott, (1985); Sylvia, (1989).

<sup>2</sup>In addition to pay-for-knowledge, there are other compensation innovations that are relevant to quality. Among these are: (1) gainsharing, (2) Scanlon Plans, or (3) productivity bargaining i.e., any program that financially rewards work teams for improving quality. Factors influencing quality improvement must be integrated into an organization's performance appraisal system and incentive and reward structure. Strategies that reward team successes in addition to individual accomplishment are crucial.

<sup>3</sup>We cannot underestimate the importance of the relationship of education and training to quality. For example, criteria outlined in the application guidelines for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1991, p. 11) list the following: (1) how the company assesses needs for the types and amounts of quality education and training received by all categories of employees, (2) methods for the delivery of quality education and training, and (3) how the company ensures on-the-job reinforcement of knowledge and skills. The Federal Quality Institute's (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, November, 1990, p. 10) guidelines for the President's Award for Quality and Productivity Improvement list, among others, the following: (1) describe the organization's strategy for education and training for quality improvement, (2) how this strategy relates to operational plans, (3) how the organization provides each employee with sufficient training in awareness, techniques, and job skills to support the Total Quality Management process.

<sup>4</sup>One element of the trust climate in organizations that influences quality is the nature of employer-employee relations, especially the tone of the collective bargaining relationship. A key aspect of quality improvement is the extent of employee involvement. Collective bargaining is one, and certainly not the only, form of employee participation at work. The process has potential for facilitating or inhibiting quality efforts. This topic deserves considerably more attention than can be given here. Suffice it to note that it is important and, in the federal government, is currently problematic and needs improving.

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