

## IN DENIAL OR IN SYNC?

**H**ave you ever pondered why it is that some people can breeze right into a job and immediately pick up the pace, while others struggle to adapt? The annual WorkStyle Patterns Audit from The McFletcher Corp. offers an explanation.

When it comes to our professional lives, we each have a distinctive "WorkStyle" approach, or simply put, a preferred way of working, which doesn't always gel with the organization's modus operandi, explains Donna McIntosh-Fletcher, a consultant with The McFletcher Corp., Scottsdale, Ariz. "The twin ailments of workplace decline—low morale and low productivity—often have their roots in a misalignment between how people prefer to do their work and how the company structures and requires the work to be done."

The McFletcher Corp. measures the alignment of organizations and people through an annual audit of thousands of employees in North American and European companies, simultaneously measuring both the work and the workforce.

The audit results suggest that workplace alignment is more than a marginal problem. For example, overall, 24 percent of the surveyed workforce prefers an "independent worker" WorkStyle to manage and perform tasks, whereas only 6 to 8 percent of the work is actually designed to be conducted in this manner. Among 18- to 32-year-olds in high tech environments, there is a greater disconnect: 32 percent preference against 9 percent actual. And electrical engineers, with a 43 percent

preference for working independently, appear even more disconnected: only 12 percent of their work is designed this way.

"Firms don't always see the disconnect between those doing the work and how it needs to be done," says

McIntosh-Fletcher, who points to the differing rate of change between people and organizations as a prime reason for workplace misalignment. "The movement of the workforce changes quicker than organizations change," she says. "Just as organizations have worked out the needs of the current generation, a new generation comes into the workforce, and they have to begin the process all over again. That's why many organizations can be as much as five to 10 years off the pace." And considering the emerging Gen-X and Gen-Y gene pool, the prognosis for workplace alignment doesn't look good.

Today's young workers, says McIntosh-Fletcher, are more selective and want to be involved in deciding not only what they are hired to do, but also how the work should be done. "Most companies understand what has to be done and are pretty good at putting competency models around the 'what,'" she says. "But even though firms may say 'this is what, and I don't care how,' a whole raft of unspoken rules often comes into play that end up dictating the 'how,' and this can cause a disconnect."

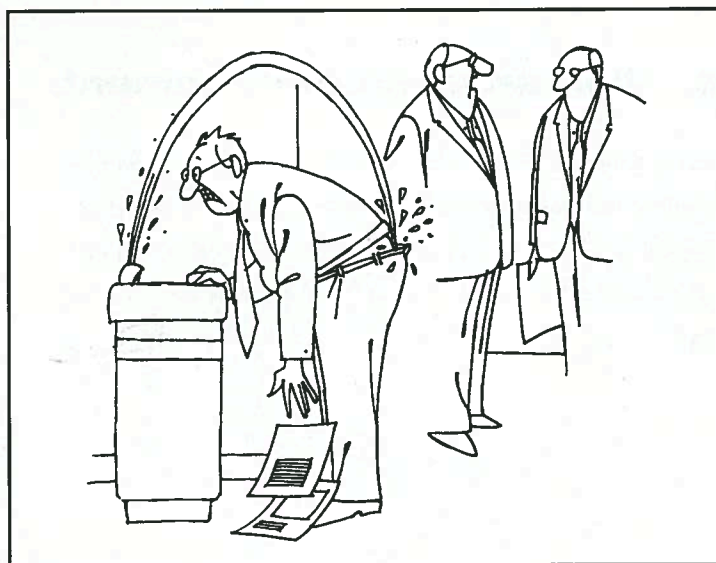
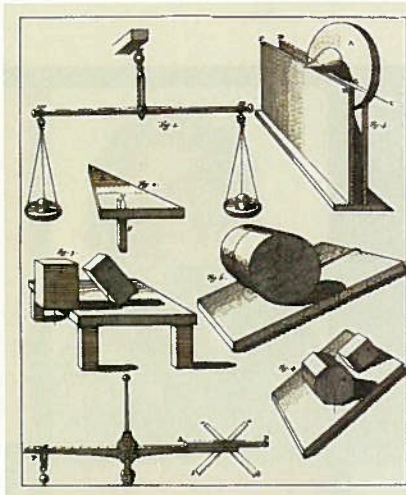
The signs of a disconnected workforce may be as obvious as high turnover or reduced performance, but the absence of these traits doesn't always signal a healthy

and aligned work environment, explains McIntosh-Fletcher. "Most of us will honor work processes, even outdated ones, despite having a preference for doing things differently," she says.

Others, particularly high-flyers, adopt futurist Clifford Pinchot's maxim, "It's easier to gain forgiveness than seek permission," to break ranks and bend the rules.

"High-performers tend to cut through the way things were and subconsciously do the work the way it needs to be done to get results regardless of what people tell them they should do," says McIntosh-Fletcher. "And because they're high-performing they aren't challenged."

Even with this "get it done regardless" mentality, high-performers won't sacrifice their preferred WorkStyle indefinitely, warns McIntosh-Fletcher, and unless the organization comes out of denial, and does something to realign work patterns, the better-performing people will eventually move on. —M.D.



"I wish his unerring ability to surprise himself translated to his job performance."