

CHAPTER 12: WESTERN CULTURE

Russell Ackoff, an organization performance and systems genius, in his audiotape presentation, *From Mechanistic to Social Systemic Thinking*, tells us that Western culture has experienced several significant and distinct ages. It is important to reflect on these ages as the thinking in each age dominates the day-to-day actions of persons living during that time period. As you will see, the dominant thinking during an age has everything to do with a leader's ability to successfully impact individual and organization performance.

The first age we will review is reflected in the period of time prior to the Renaissance, the period some call *the Dark Ages*. The collective thinking during the Dark Ages reinforced the idea that people were placed on earth with enough knowledge to function in the world, but the great mysteries of life would always remain hidden and unobtainable. How did this common level of thinking impact everyday life in the Dark Ages?

PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE: Since everyone understood and accepted these limitations, learning was stagnated. Nothing much happened. Life was barely tolerable, and it remained that way for a long time. Thus, the term, *Dark Ages*.

The Renaissance was brought about by the thinking of a group of philosophers beginning in the early 1600s. This group included Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, and Isaac Newton.

PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE: They believed the mysteries of the world and universe were completely knowable. People needed only to make the required effort in order to learn everything. To know everything was to control everything. This was an irresistible promise. Their thinking influenced others including Adam Smith, Fredrick Taylor, Louis Pasteur, B.F. Skinner, Abraham Maslow, and many other scientific discoverers.

The idea of a universe willing to share all its mysteries became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Every discipline was impacted. Enormous gains in knowledge were achieved. This explosion continues today with new discoveries becoming a daily event. Almost everything we consider “modern” can be directly related to the change in thinking initiated during the Renaissance. This new age has been called the *Modern* or *Mechanical Age*.

PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE: The fruits of the Mechanical Age included the knowable universe, the scientific method, cause and effect, analytical thinking, mechanical application, assembly line, mass production, fragmentation, work elements, allopathic medicine, dependence, command and control structures, capitalism, and materialism.

As with any more capable model of thinking, Modern Age thinking comes with expanded opportunities and new performance limits.

NATURAL LAW: Finite limits are always a part of the new thinking at any level of sophistication.

Although we are in transition to a new age, we are all still dominated by our history with Mechanical Age thinking. I will be reflecting on how the products of the Mechanical Age that directly improved student achievement in the past and are still being applied in the present have stagnated student achievement today.

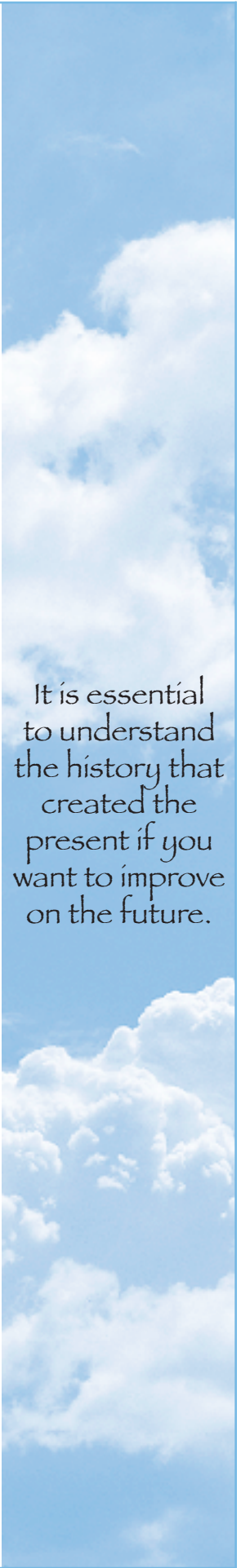
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What's the Point?

It is essential to understand the history that created the present if you want to improve on the future.

I believe it is a major error to tear off into the future ignorant of the key elements that have contributed to the creation of the present. Awareness of where you are and how you got here are the first steps in the journey to improvement.

There is something magical that happens when you look at your present with a deep understanding of the past that created you or your school. An improvement effort built on a thorough awareness of the process that created your present gives the leader tremendous leverage to improve. I suggest that the future leader become aware of this history prior to trying to improve student achievement.



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Think and Reflect

The reader will be enabled to

Reflect on the importance of increasing understanding and appreciation for the influences and dominance of thinking that produced the present. Understand that we are all controlled by the thinking of our age (Mechanical Age thinking) and the levels of effectiveness and efficiency embedded in them. Discuss the potential in transitioning to the Rethinking Age and how leaders can potentially seek out and employ tools that leverage their thinking process and brainpower. Learn that the key to improving performance is to constantly replace ineffective thinking models with more effective thinking models.