

MONEY MATTERS

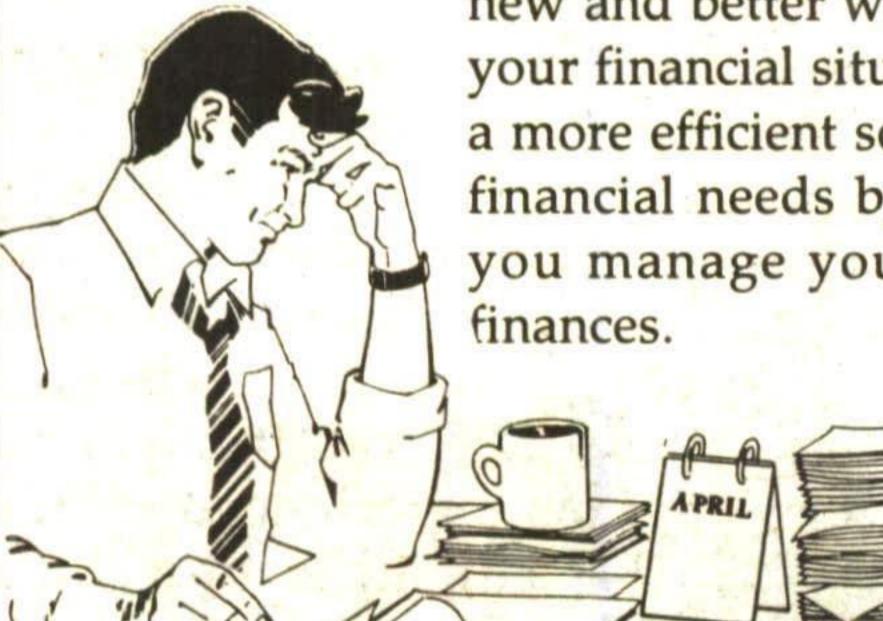
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Surviving tough economic times

Companies must recognize innovation as important skill

Companies that recognize the importance of innovation — one of the most difficult skills to attain — are likely to survive and succeed tough economic times, says University of Guelph sociologist Fred Evers.

Innovation is one of four areas of skill competence uncovered in a long-term study to match corporate employment needs with university graduate skills, recently completed by Evers and business professor James Rush of the University of Western Ontario.

The four components are:

 mobilizing innovation and change, which involves conceptualizing and setting in motion ways of initiating and managing change that depart from the current mode;
 managing people and tasks,

 managing people and tasks, accomplished by planning, organizing and coordinating resources and people;

 communicating effectively with a variety of people to gather, integrate and convey information in many forms; and

 managing self by developing practices and internalizing routines for maximizing one's ability to deal with the uncertainty of an everchanging environment.

"A lot of what graduates do in corporate work has to be self-directed," Evers says. "They need the ability to manage themselves and be innovative. They have to be more independent than they expected."

The study by Evers and Rush, called "Making the Match," investigated the skill development process of university students and graduates at crucial points in their career development. The study began in 1984, when the Corporate-Higher Education Forum, a group of university presidents and corporate chief executive officers, commissioned a Phase 1 report on the adequacy of university education for corporate employment.

In Phase 2, the researchers looked at five different groups of students and graduates over a three-year period — early university, pre-graduate, job entry, job change (after five years of working experience) and stabilized (after 10 years in the workforce). They also looked at gender and program differences and at assessments by corporate management.

In terms of gender, the study found that women perceive themselves to be better — and are rated higher — at communicating than men. Men perceive themselves to be better — and are rated higher — at innovation. No perceptible gender difference exist for the skills of managing self and managing people and tasks. Innovation was the skill most lacking in both sexes.

"The major skill people can learn that affects everything else is written communication. Writing represents clear thinking and the ability to work through a problem. There is nothing more revealing to employers than sloppy memos and

rambling reports."

The report recommends that:

• workshops be provided to faculty on how to recognize skill development and, where appropriate, include it in the evaluation of stu-

employees be given self-management skill training so they can take more responsibility for their own performance and their personal and career development; and

• students be made aware of these skills and their importance in career development through academic orientation programs.

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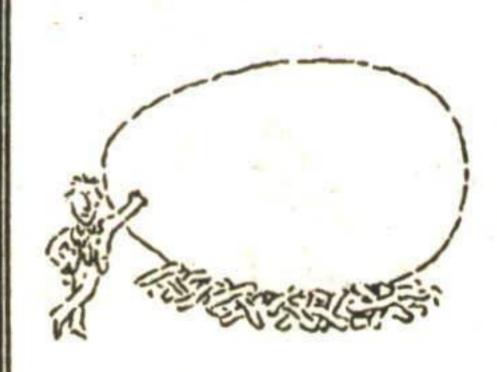


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