There are So Many More than Three Barriers

Rick Krueger
JLT Group, USA

BARRIERS

One major barrier is that educators often view themselves as “people persons” and not “technology persons,” which ends up being an excuse for not familiarizing themselves with new tools. Ironically, the actual research in other industries related to people who employ a high level of information technology in their jobs is that the technology liberates them to be more interactive with other people, not machines.

The financial disaster “wolf” has never really been at the door of most school districts. By almost any measure, schools have for decades received funding that outpaces inflation. (That is why proponents for increased school funding have “cloaked” their requests in other measures such as percentage of the state budget or to equal expenditures in other states.) Conversely, many of the companies that have “reengineered” themselves have done so at the threat of going out of business. Some of these companies have seen declines in revenues over a short period of time of 50% or more. This has forced them to make really difficult decisions in order to increase productivity. They have often had to substantially reallocate priorities and resources in order to survive.

Consider that in almost any industry, the number of transactions or interactions has dramatically increased per employee as a result of embracing information technology. The capacity to contribute and be productive has grown steadily. Education is still clinging to the notion that staff time is “free” because it is an embedded cost, and that the obvious answer to meeting almost any new responsibility is a cry for more staff, rather than finding alternative ways of doing things through information technology. A couple of years ago, I learned of a school district in which the computerized scheduling system crashed. The district basically required all faculty and available staff to reenter the data rather than hiring a data recovery company. The relative cost had to be disproportionately high if the true cost of all the salaries of all the people entering data was calculated into the equation—not to mention the loss of productivity in areas of normal responsibility.

Taxpayers exercise ambivalence related to the issue of increasing the amount of information technology available in the classroom. Those who are most knowledgeable as to the benefits of infusing information technology often times have it at home available to their own children. This creates a situation where the opportunity for a phenomenal disparity between technology “haves” and “have-nots” exists. Not addressing this “digital divide” will ultimately translate into large percentages of the population being left behind. Those left behind will not only not have an equal opportunity for success in American society, they will not have an opportunity to contribute to the progress and general welfare of that society.

To date, the need for accelerating the infusion of technology into schools has not captured the imagination of the voting public. This is not an issue that has much, if any, political currency. Voters seem to be more engaged on issues of class size, transportation, discipline, textbooks, and even athletic budgets, than whether or not students are learning in an environment and with tools that will be directly relevant to future careers. We seem capable of passing bond issue referendums for magnificent buildings, but often neglect the information infrastructure that will connect students to the world and to relevant information for true learning. Too often I have toured schools where the principal brags about a “state-of-the-art” computer lab. Regrettably, principals rarely boast about the number of computers in classrooms—and sometimes even give the impression that computer labs are an adequate substitute for an immersive environment of information technology throughout the school.

The amount of teacher and administrator training is woefully inadequate to the task of lifting their knowledge to the point where they understand both the necessity and potential power of learning enabled through new information technologies. Schools do not devote enough attention to preparing educational personnel, who in most cases did not have any ex-