

The priority tasks

From "A Century of Social Transformation" by Peter Drucker

1. Education

We will have to think through education -- its purpose, its values, its content.

We will have to learn to define the quality of education and the productivity of education, to measure both and to manage both.

2. Quality of knowledge and productivity of knowledge

We need systematic work on the quality of knowledge and the productivity of knowledge -- neither even defined so far.

On those two, the performance capacity, and perhaps even the survival, of any organization in the knowledge society, will increasingly come to depend. But so will also the performance capacity, and perhaps even the survival, of any individual in the knowledge society.

And what responsibility does knowledge have? What are the responsibilities of the knowledge individual, and especially of people of high -- and therefore highly specialized-knowledge?

3. Government and organizational policies shaped by the primacy of global competitive position

Increasingly, the policy of any country -- and especially of any developed country -- will have to give primacy to the country's competitive position in an increasingly competitive world economy. Any proposed domestic policy needs to be shaped so as to improve the country's competitive position in the world economy or, at the least, so as to minimize adverse impacts on it. The same holds true for policies and strategies of any institution within a nation, whether a local government, a business, a university, or a hospital.

4. Economic theory appropriate to the primacy of a knowledge-based world economy

We need to develop an economic theory appropriate to the primacy of a world economy in which knowledge has become the key economic resource and the dominant -- and perhaps even the only -- source of comparative advantage.

5. Balancing the contradictory requirements of organization: performance and social responsibility

We are beginning to understand the new integrating mechanism: organization.

But we still have to think through how to balance two apparently contradictory requirements.

Organizations must competently perform the one social function for the sake of which they exist -- the school to teach; the hospital to cure the sick; the business to produce goods; services and the capital to provide for the risks of the future. They can do so only if they single-mindedly concentrate on their own specialized mission.

But there is also the need of society for these organizations to take social responsibility, that is, to work on the problems and challenges of the community.

Together these organizations are the community.

The emergence of a strong, independent, performing social sector -- neither public sector, that is, government, nor private sector, that is, business -- is thus a central need of the society of organizations.

But by itself it is not enough: the organization of both the public and the private sector must share in the work.

6. Effective government

The function of government and its functioning will increasingly become central to political thought and political action.

The "megastate" in which this century indulged has not performed, either in its totalitarian or in its democratic version. It has not delivered on a single one of its promises.

And government by countervailing lobbyists is neither particularly effective -- in fact, it is paralysis -- nor particularly attractive.

Yet effective government has never been needed more than in this highly competitive and fast-changing world of ours in which the dangers created by the pollution of the physical environment are matched only by the dangers of worldwide armaments pollution.

And we do not have even the beginnings of political theory or the political institutions needed for effective government in the knowledge-based society of organizations.