

**GDI Consulting & Training Company**  
*Friends-of-the-Firm Mini-Briefing*

**A Strange New Phenomenon**

By  
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Have you noticed that more people are "visually glued" to more computer terminals than ever before? Perhaps you have also noticed that many manufacturing company personnel would rather spend their day dealing with a computer than with others in their company. This strange new phenomenon of actively and aggressively using computer systems in daily job activities might have some negative side effects which we are all missing.

During a recent consulting assignment in a sizable manufacturing company, I noticed dozens of planners, schedulers and buyers who spent their entire day hunched over computer terminals performing a variety of applications.

Rarely did these individuals leave their cubicles to discuss business activities with any other person. Virtually all of them communicated to others in the organization via the electronic mail or terminal communication apparatus.

Though use of this technology is exciting, there may be some potential and serious dangers. After watching for several days my client's personnel interacting with virtually no other personnel and almost entirely with computers, several questions came to mind.

- ✓ If a person replaces human communication with computer communication, will the individual lose human management skills?
- ✓ Though electronic mail provides some rapid communication capabilities, can it effectively provide the vehicle for all forms of communications, i.e. written, oral, non-verbal, etc.?
- ✓ Is it possible that the computer is becoming less of a tool and more of a non-personal object in which to hide so one doesn't have to deal with tough issues or perhaps co-workers altogether?

My observations suggest that computer terminal use in an integrated environment is exciting and informative. However, I have also observed that the better the system, the more people will use it. The more people use their systems, the less they communicate directly with their co-workers.

The less they deal with their co-workers the more pronounced serious interpersonal problems become and the more people avoid them by burying themselves in their computers.

I think there is a very serious danger in teaching people to interact with others with an electronic device. I say this not because they necessarily lose their interpersonal skills. Ongoing training can help to solve this. I voice this concern because burying oneself in a computer application while never coming up for air provides an easy vehicle for ignoring the need to make tough decisions and discuss issues with co-workers. The well run interactive systems environment might just be teaching our people to avoid decision-making.