

ADVANCED READING

PASSAGE 1

In an attempt to improve the overall performance of clerical workers, many companies have introduced computerized performance monitoring and control systems (CPMCS) that record and report a worker's computer-driven activities. However, at least one study has shown that such monitoring may not be having the desired effect. In the study, researchers asked monitored clerical workers and their supervisors how assessments of productivity affected supervisors' ratings of workers' performance. In contrast to unmonitored workers doing the same work, who without exception identified the most important element in their jobs as customer service, the monitored workers and their supervisors all responded that productivity was the critical factor in assigning ratings. This finding suggested that there should have been a strong correlation between a monitored worker's productivity and the overall rating the worker received. However, measures of the relationship between overall rating and individual elements of performance clearly supported the conclusion that supervisors gave considerable weight to criteria such as attendance, accuracy, and indications of customer satisfaction.

It is possible that productivity may be a "hygiene factor," that is, if it is too low, it will hurt the overall rating. But the evidence suggests that beyond the point at which productivity becomes "good enough," higher productivity per se is unlikely to improve a rating.

PASSAGE 2

Schools expect textbooks to be a valuable source of information for students. My research suggests, however, that textbooks that address the place of Native Americans within the history of the United States distort history to suit a particular cultural value system. In some textbooks, for example, settlers are pictured as more humane, complex, skillful, and wise than Native American. In essence, textbooks stereotype and deprecate the numerous Native American cultures while reinforcing the attitude that the European conquest of the New World denotes the superiority of European cultures. Although textbooks evaluate Native American architecture, political systems, and homemaking, I contend that they do it from an ethnocentric, European perspective without recognizing that other perspectives are possible.

One argument against my contention asserts that, by nature, textbooks are culturally biased and that I am simply underestimating children's ability to see through these biases. Some researchers even claim that by the time students are in high school, they know they cannot take textbooks literally. Yet substantial evidence exists to the contrary. Two researchers, for example, have conducted studies that suggest that children's attitudes about particular culture are strongly influenced by the textbooks used in schools. Given this, an ongoing, careful review of how school textbooks depict Native American is certainly warranted.

PASSAGE 3

Coral reefs are one of the most fragile, biologically complex, and diverse marine ecosystems on Earth. This ecosystem is one of the fascinating paradoxes of the biosphere: how do clear, and thus nutrient-poor, waters support such prolific and productive communities? Part of the answer lies within the tissues of the corals themselves. Symbiotic cells of algae known as zooxanthellae carry out photosynthesis using the metabolic wastes of the coral thereby producing food for themselves, for their corals, hosts, and even for other members of the reef community. This symbiotic process allows organisms in the reef community to use sparse nutrient resources efficiently.

Unfortunately for coral reefs, however, a variety of human activities are causing worldwide degradation of shallow marine habitats by adding nutrients to the water. Agriculture, slash-and-burn land clearing, sewage disposal and manufacturing that creates waste by-products all increase nutrient loads in these waters. Typical symptoms of reef decline are destabilized herbivore populations and an increasing abundance of algae and filter-feeding animals. Declines in reef communities are consistent with observations that nutrient input is increasing in direct proportion to growing human populations, thereby threatening reef communities sensitive to subtle changes in nutrient input to their waters.

PASSAGE 4

Two divergent definitions have dominated sociologists' discussions of the nature of ethnicity. The first emphasizes the primordial and unchanging character of ethnicity. In this view, people have an essential need for belonging that is satisfied by membership in groups based on shared ancestry and culture. A different conception of ethnicity de-emphasizes the cultural component and defines ethnic groups as interest groups. In this view, ethnicity serves as a way of mobilizing a certain population behind issues relating to its economic position. While both of these definitions are useful, neither fully captures the dynamic and changing aspects of ethnicity in the United States. Rather, ethnicity is more satisfactorily conceived of as a process in which preexisting communal bonds and common cultural attributes are adapted for instrumental purposes according to changing real-life situations.

One example of this process is the rise of participation by Native American people in the broader United States political system since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's. Besides leading Native Americans to participate more actively in politics (the number of Native American legislative officeholders more than doubled), this movement also evoked increased interest in tribal history and traditional culture. Cultural and instrumental components of ethnicity are not mutually exclusive, but rather reinforce one another.

The Civil Rights movement also brought changes in the uses to which ethnicity was put by Mexican American people. In the 1960's, Mexican Americans formed community-based political groups that emphasized ancestral heritage as a way of mobilizing constituents. Such emerging issues as immigration and voting rights gave Mexican American advocacy groups the means by which to promote ethnic solidarity. Like European ethnic groups in the nineteenth-century United States, late-twentieth-century Mexican American leaders combined ethnic with contemporary civic symbols. In 1968 Henry Cisneros, then mayor of San Antonio, Texas, cited Mexican leader Benito Juarez as a model for Mexican Americans in their fight for contemporary civil rights. And every year, Mexican Americans celebrate Cinco de Mayo as fervently as many Irish American people embrace St. Patrick's Day (both are major holidays in the countries of origin), with both holidays having been reinvented in the context of the United States and linked to ideals, symbols, and heroes of the United States.

PASSAGE 5

The fact that superior service can generate a competitive advantage for a company does not mean that every attempt at improving service will create such an advantage. Investments in service, like those in production and distribution, must be balanced against other types of investments on the basis of direct, tangible benefits such as cost reduction and increased revenues. If a company is already effectively on a par with its competitors because it provides service that avoids a damaging reputation and keeps customers from leaving at an unacceptable rate, then investment in higher service levels may be wasted, since service is a deciding factor for customers only in extreme situations.

This truth was not apparent to managers of one regional bank, which failed to improve its competitive position despite its investment in reducing the time a customer had to wait for a teller. The bank managers did not recognize the level of customer inertia in the consumer banking industry that arises from the inconvenience of switching banks. Nor did they analyze their service improvement to determine whether it would attract new customers by producing a new standard of service that would excite customers or by proving difficult for competitors to copy. The only merit of the improvement was that it could easily be described to customers.