to production staff so that they can quickly move the most promising developments out of the laboratory and into trials with pharmaceutical firms. As such, the knowledge workers in the R&D department spend a great deal of time in ad hoc brainstorming sessions, where everyone associated with a project, in any department, comes up with as many unusual solutions as possible to move a product or process forward. However, because CGF's campus is spread out over six buildings and some of the pharmaceutical firm partners that are part of the community of practice are located in other cities, an unacceptably high overhead is associated with bringing the stakeholders together for regular meetings.

To facilitate the brainstorming sessions in a way that fits everyone's schedules, the chief knowledge officer (CKO) attends several of the meetings as an unobtrusive observer to determine the real needs of the

TIPS & TECHNIQUES

Suggest, Don't Tell

One of the basic principles of computer interface design is that the computer should be subservient to the human operator. When this principle is violated, operators, including highly educated knowledge workers, tend to be put off and, in some cases, threatened. The most successful decision-making programs respect human decision makers and merely suggest—don't tell—them what to do.

Perry Miller who developed the Critiquing system in the 1980s, was first to recognize the importance of allowing the human operator to feel in control of the decision-making process. The Critiquing system acts as a sounding board for organizing physicians' ideas, expressing agreement, or suggesting reasoned alternatives. This approach recognizes physicians' need to exercise control and places the computer in a subservient, nonthreatening role.