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0521537177 - Creating a Learning Culture: Strategy, Technology, and Practice - Edited by Marcia L. Conner and James G. Clawson

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Creating a Learning Culture

Strategy, Technology, and Practice

Creating a Learning Culture features insightful essays from industry observers and revealing case studies of prominent corporations. Each chapter revolves around creating an environment where learning takes place each day, all day, fundamentally changing the way we think about how, what, and when we learn, and how we can apply learning to practice. Three sections address key aspects of a learning culture: the modern business context and the importance of learning at every juncture; the organic and adaptive approaches organizational leaders can take to design enduring success; and the expanding role of individuals within organizations and the implications for business leaders, educators, technologists, and learners. Identifying the steps companies must take to remain competitive for years to come, this book explains how learning strategies applied to all aspects of every job can provide swift returns and lasting results.

Marcia L. Conner is Managing Director of Ageless Learner, a think-tank and advisory services practice, and a Fellow of the Batten Institute, Darden Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Virginia. She is the author of *Learn More Now: 10 Simple Steps to Learning Better, Smarter, and Faster*.

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“Quite simply the best book I have read on all that matters for getting better at getting better . . . Should be mandatory reading for educators and organization leaders everywhere. A superb synthesis of perspectives and intelligence from individuals who have demonstrated an extraordinary understanding of what matters most in learning and excelling. Read it to learn how to create excellence and success around you.”

Kantha Shelke, scientist, and founder of Corvus Blue LLC

“As organizations take learning to the next phase, to meet the learning challenge at the global level, they will benefit from the insights and lessons presented in this excellent book. *Creating a Learning Culture* will help them cost-effectively provide learning resources and interactive learning environments to employees anywhere in the world.”

Eilif Trondsen, Director, Learning on Demand,
SRI Consulting Business Intelligence

“Organizations that excel at learning will be the only ones that survive in the 21st century. This book points the way for those who realize that this is not just another ‘management fad.’ Continuous, accelerated organizational learning represents the key discriminator between ‘winners’ and ‘losers.’ I strongly recommend this book to those who want to be counted amongst the ‘winners!’”

Richard Bozoian, Director of Learning and
Organizational Development, BAE Systems

“You will want to have *Creating a Learning Culture* within your grasp at all times. One of the great things about this collection is that you can spend a second flipping open to almost any page, or take a whole sabbatical to really absorb it all, and in either case your time will be amply rewarded with new insights, inspiration, and ideas.”

Wayne Hodgins, Strategic Futurist, Director of Worldwide Learning
Strategies, Director of Strategic Executive Services, Autodesk Inc.

“*Creating a Learning Culture* takes a deep dive into a topic that no business leader can afford to ignore – or delegate to HR. We’ve all been told that learning is *the* source of competitive advantage – but how do we get there? . . . From technology to metrics, from trust to tools – it’s all here, with frameworks, philosophies, *and* plenty of real life stories. There’s something of interest for anyone ready to take learning from talk to action.”

Jeanne Liedtka, former Chief Learning Officer,
United Technologies Corporation

“I would suggest the traffic warning ‘Read Slowly: Curve Ahead.’ Each essay develops learning culture from a different perspective. In the world’s current change-acceleration mode, we had better learn about learning from all angles.”

John Sall, Co-founder and
Executive Vice President, SAS Institute

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the topic, including *Situated Learning* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), and *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (Harvard Business School Press, 2002). Wenger's work is influencing a growing number of organizations in the private and public sectors. He is co-founder of CPsquare, a cross-organizational, cross-sector community of practice on communities of practice. He holds a PhD from the University of California at Irvine.

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Foreword

Welcome!

You have opened a wonderful collection of essays. So, let me congratulate you. You must be a learner!

I hope you do not feel alone and scared. I hope you are not sneaking into some janitorial closet for a furtive glimpse at the wisdom and insight of some of the world's most thoughtful learners and learning advisers. I hope you do not feel like a criminal or a thief, stealing company time for learning.

I hope, instead, you have this book open at your desk – for all the world to see that you are a learner and that you know learning matters to your organization as much as it does to yourself.

Sometimes, I know, taking time at work to learn can feel odd. It can feel somehow taboo – an activity that must be justified by more than its own rewards. Sometimes it feels that our lives in organizations do not quite make sense. We know in our hearts and souls, and, increasingly, from our experience, that our work is impossible without learning. We know that any number of critical, recurring challenges – from customer service and quality to innovation, technology, and values – cannot be met without learning. But, still, we act as if learning is something to be done in private time instead of organizational time, and with strict, clear, complete, and overwhelming justification by the bottom line.

Somehow we act as if learning is a fad, some new-fangled form of empowerment and feel-good human relations management that is nice to have as long as it does not bust any budgets. Somehow we have not quite come clean that learning and work are actually two peas in the same pod.

Somehow we act as if we actually know CEOs, presidents, division heads, functional heads, middle managers, or others who scream at the top of their voices: “Stop learning! Learners are not welcome. Anyone caught learning will immediately be shown the door. There is no place or time in this company for learning.”

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After a quarter-century of leading and consulting to organizations, and writing about organizational change and performance, I have yet to meet such people. I have never – *never* – heard any executive wholly and witheringly denounce learning and take action to stamp out and eradicate learning of any sort.

Yes, I have witnessed plenty of people *behave* in ways that discouraged learning or ignored the inevitable, inescapable links among learning, work, and performance. I have seen, as have you, leaders who demand demonstrable results from learning or who question the resources dedicated to it. But however difficult and challenging, those behaviors are not the same as declarations against learning itself.

Such behaviors, however, do need to change. People like you – people who are learners, workers, and organizational performers – must address the contribution learning makes to organizations and those who participate in them. You must work hard and learn much to match the best possible combination of understanding about learning to the purposes and people of organizations.

Learners never stop learning. Learners never stop performing. Learners about learning cultures never stop rising to threats and opportunities. People like you care about individual learning because you are learners. And you care about organizational learning because you care about your organization.

You care about learning more about how learning happens among people and in organizations; how learning cultures might best be understood, designed, and implemented; how various tools (technological or otherwise) contribute to learning; how leaders are responsible for learning; and what the case is for more or better learning.

This book is a treasure for learners like you, a feast of offerings on these and other topics. As you continue to learn from it, I have only one suggestion: Don't box with shadows that are not there; don't fear a leadership that is anti-learning – because no such leadership exists. Yes, respect the complex, messy, and very human challenges of leadership and learning inside organizations. But remember this: human beings cannot be “against” learning.

The days are long gone when learning was solely a form of leisure, and leisure was traded off against labor. That kind of either/or no longer makes much sense. Perhaps it did in the gritty world of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industrialization, the movement that so often seemed bent on converting men into machines and women into

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housewives. In that world, perhaps, learning was a hobby for the very rich, the very bored, and the very disengaged.

But you do not live in that world. It is unlikely that you work in brutal coal mines or slavish cotton fields, or on mindless automobile assembly lines. You may work in industries having to do with coal, cotton, or cars, but you do not have jobs that divide thinking from doing or learning from working.

Today, you cannot avoid human questions like these: What must I learn next? What do I need to be learning in order to be more productive? What does my organization need to be learning in order to compete more effectively? How can we learn best? How can we learn how to retain what we learn so we do not have to learn it again? What are we doing *now* that enhances our personal and organizational learning?

Don't ignore these questions. Embrace them.

So, welcome again. As you learn more about learning, share your wisdom with others. Bring them into the party. Quit acting as though the nineteenth century is not long gone. Stop assuming that learning is more about leisure than labor. And stay out of janitors' closets – especially those of your own making.

Douglas K. Smith