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0521830176 - 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*.

James G. Clawson is Professor of Business Administration, Area Coordinator for Leadership and Organizational Behavior, and Chair of the First Year MBA Program Committee at the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Virginia. He is also a consultant and the author of *Level Three Leadership: Getting Below the Surface* and co-author of *Self-Assessment and Career Development* and *An MBA's Guide to Self-Assessment and Career Development*.

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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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Lisa Abrams is a research consultant at IBM's Institute for Knowledge-Based Organizations in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Most of her projects have focused on social capital, knowledge-sharing, trust on the Internet, and the links between trust and project performance. She has spoken frequently on the topic of social capital and has written several articles, including "Translation Technology Considerations for Global Organizations" (KOPF White Paper Series, June 2003), "Best of Both Worlds: Combining Knowledge Management and Learning and Development" (KOPF White Paper Series, April 2003), "Trust and Knowledge Sharing: A Critical Combination" (IKM White Paper Series, June 2002), and "Why Should I Trust You? The Antecedents of Trust in a Knowledge Transfer Context" (IKM White Paper Series, March 2002). Abrams received an AB from Brown University, an MBA from MIT's Sloan School of Management, and an MPA from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

Laurie Bassi is the chief executive officer and a founding partner of McBassi & Company, Inc. She also serves as the chairwoman of the board of Knowledge Asset Management, Inc., an investment company that invests in companies that invest in their employees. From 1996 to 1999, she was vice-president for research at the American Society for Training and Development, and from 1982 to 1995 she was a tenured professor of economics and public policy at Georgetown University. Bassi has served as co-chair of the National Academy of Science's Board on Testing and Assessment, and chair of the human capital subcommittee of the Brookings Institution's taskforce on intangible assets. She has written more than fifty books and papers. Bassi holds a BS in mathematics from Illinois State University, an MS in industrial and labor relations from Cornell University, and a PhD in economics from Princeton University.

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John Seely Brown was chief scientist of Xerox and director of its Palo Alto Research Center (PARC), where he was responsible for guiding one of the most famous technology think-tanks in the world and leading one of the most celebrated and far-ranging corporate research efforts. His current areas of interest include growing up in the digital age, organizational learning, nurturing radical innovation, rich media and the gaming world, and the direction of information technology. Brown is co-author, with Paul Duguid, of *The Social Life of Information* (Harvard Business School Press, 2000) and editor of *Seeing Differently: Insights on Innovation* (Harvard Business School Press, 1997). He is a Batten Fellow at the University of Virginia's Darden Graduate School of Business Administration and a visiting scholar at the Annenberg Center and Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California. Brown has an AB from Brown University and a PhD in computer and communication sciences from the University of Michigan.

Gunnar Brückner is a coach, consultant, strategist, and expert in organizational learning and staff development. He is chief executive officer of coachingplatform Inc., a company specializing in providing a broad range of learning-related services, including a proprietary online collaboration software. Brückner is the former chief learning officer of the United Nations Development Programme, where he conceived and implemented innovative strategies for staff learning and development on a global scale. He has presented at numerous professional conferences and serves on several advisory boards. He holds an MA in sociology from the Free University in Berlin and a certificate in organizational development from New York University.

James G. Clawson is a professor at the University of Virginia's Darden Graduate School of Business Administration, where he has taught since 1981. He was a visiting professor at the International University of Japan in 1991 and taught at Harvard Business School before moving to Virginia. Clawson has consulted with corporations and organizations on issues of organizational design, management development, career management, change management, leadership development, and human resource management. He has designed and led or taught in a number of Darden School executive education programs, including "Power and Leadership." He has written hundreds of cases on management and career issues and several books, including *Level Three*

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Leadership (Prentice Hall, 1998). He received a bachelor's degree in Japanese language and literature from Stanford University, an MBA from Brigham Young University, and a DBA in organizational behavior from Harvard Business School.

Eileen Clegg is a senior consultant for Global Learning Resource, a research affiliate with the Institute for the Future (ITF), and associate of the group graphics firm The Grove. Her recent research at ITF has focused on K-12, university, and corporate education. She has also developed a graphic recording method for "public listening" and "visual speaking," which provides immediate synthesis of content and an alternative record of the event. Clegg was a newspaper journalist for twenty years, most of those at the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat*, where she developed several award-winning projects, including "What if It Happened Here," a look at oil spill clean-up infrastructure in California, which won a Scripps-Howard National Journalism Award (second place in the United States, 1990). Clegg has published three books and many articles. Her most recent book is *Claiming Your Creative Self* (New Harbinger Publications, 1999). She has a BA from the University of California at Berkeley.

Harlan Cleveland, political scientist and public executive, is president emeritus of the World Academy of Art and Science. He has served as a United Nations relief administrator in Italy and China, a Marshall Plan executive, a magazine editor and publisher, assistant secretary of state, and US ambassador to NATO. As an academic leader he has twice been an academic dean and once a university president (at the University of Hawaii). He has written hundreds of magazine and journal articles, and is author or co-author of twelve books on executive leadership and international affairs. His most recent book is *Nobody in Charge: Essays on the Future of Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 2002). He earned his bachelor's degree from Princeton University and was a Rhodes Scholar.

Wendy L. Coles is acting director of Alternatives For Girls, a not-for-profit organization in Detroit, Michigan, dedicated to helping at-risk girls and young women. As director of corporate strategy and knowledge development at General Motors, Coles was dedicated to transforming GM into a knowledge-based enterprise. Her twenty-four years with GM also included serving as director of organization and employee development within numerous units. She has done extensive

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work with W. Edwards Deming and Russell Ackoff, world leaders in quality and systems thinking. Her publications can be found in the *Knowledge Management Review*, the 1999 *Handbook of Business Strategy*, and the Michigan state publication *What's What in Jackson County*. Coles has a BA from the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, an MA from Central Michigan University, and a PhD in adult and continuing education from Michigan State University. She is also a graduate of Indiana University's Executive Development Program and MIT's Leading Learning Communities.

Marcia L. Conner is managing director of Ageless Learner, a think-tank and advisory services practice focused on learning and adapting across the life span, and co-founder of the Learnativity Alliance, bringing people together to work at the intersection of learning, productivity, activity, and creativity. She is a frequent keynote speaker and provocateur in adult education, human capital development, innovative leadership, organizational change, and learning culture. She serves as senior counsel and executive coach to leaders around the globe. She is a Fellow of the Batten Institute at the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of Virginia. She was vice-president of education and information futurist for PeopleSoft and senior manager of worldwide training at Microsoft. She has studied, lived, and worked on three continents. She has published many articles and has authored *Learn More Now: 10 Simple Steps to Learning Better, Smarter, and Faster* (John Wiley & Sons, 2004).

Rob Cross is an assistant professor of management at the University of Virginia's McIntire School of Commerce. He also directs the social network research program for IBM's Institute for Knowledge-Based Organizations in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he has worked with more than fifty well-known companies and government agencies in applying network concepts to critical business issues. His work on social networks has been published in *Harvard Business Review*, *Sloan Management Review*, *California Management Review*, *Organizational Dynamics*, and *Business Horizons*. He is also the author of two books, *Networks in the Knowledge Economy* (Oxford University Press, 2003) and *The Hidden Power of Social Networks: Understanding How Work Really Gets Done in Organizations* (Harvard Business School Press, 2004). Cross holds a BS and an MBA from the University of Virginia and a PhD from Boston University.

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Dori Digenti works with corporate, community, and academic groups to assist them in building collaborative networks to face complex challenges. She is currently senior research associate and director of the Community, Science & Environment Program at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. She is also founder of Learning Mastery, a consultancy, and the C3 LearnNet corporate learning network. Digenti has held positions as director of training and special executive programs at MIT, and as Far East regional manager for a high-tech firm. She is webmaster of www.edschein.com and www.communityscience.net. Her publications include *The Collaborative Learning Guidebook* (1999), *Creating Virtual Teams that Learn* (with Lisa Kimball, 2001), and articles in leading journals such as *Systems Thinker* and *Reflections: The SoL Journal*. Digenti has a BA from Cornell University and an MS in organization development from American University.

Cliff Figallo is an independent consultant and expert in the field of online community, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing. He is a founding veteran of The Farm, the largest intentional self-sustaining community established during the 1970s, and was director of The WELL – called “the world’s most influential online community” by *Wired* magazine – during its early years. Figallo has continued to pioneer productive applications of group interaction through electronic networks. He has consulted for AOL, Genentech, IBM, and Cisco Systems, among many other organizations. He has authored *Hosting Web Communities* (John Wiley & Sons, 1998), co-authored, with Nancy Rhine, *Building the Knowledge Management Network* (John Wiley & Sons, 2002), and has written many articles for print and Internet publications. Figallo has a BA from the University of Maryland.

David Grebow consults on learning strategies and is an expert on emerging learning technologies. He was a director of e-learning strategy for IBM and co-founder of the IBM Institute of Advanced Learning (IAL) in Zurich. He also held executive positions at PeopleSoft, Global Knowledge, and Digital Equipment, developing corporate strategies and leading major programs focused on communications, learning, and technology. He was the creator and director of the worldwide EPSS program for Digital and researched the effects on learning of storytelling, simulation, and collaboration at IBM’s IAL. He has written, spoken, and been interviewed numerous times on the past, present, and

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future intersection of education and technology. Grebow holds an BS from Boston University.

Karen Kocher is vice-president of the CIGNA Technology Institute, where she is responsible for career management and employee development for the CIGNA systems community and for the company's technology-related education and technology-enabled learning. Before joining CIGNA, Kocher worked at IBM's Mindspan Solutions organization, where she defined e-learning strategies, solutions, and offerings. She was also the offering executive of advanced and emerging technologies education within IBM Learning Services. Before joining IBM, Kocher was a vice-president of education for IKON. She speaks regularly at major events on issues surrounding corporate learning and business management, and she is frequently recognized by the technology training industry. Kocher was presented with a *Service News* magazine award as one of the most innovative IT service leaders of the year, and she earned the Chartered Property Casualty Underwriter designation in 1995.

Brook Manville heads the Center for Community Leadership for the United Way of America, where he is responsible for organizational development, leadership, knowledge management, and learning across the organization. Prior to taking on this role, he was chief learning officer at Saba Software. He was a partner and member of the leadership team of the organizational practices at McKinsey & Company and served as McKinsey's first director of knowledge management. He has also been a professor of classics and history at Northwestern University. Manville has published widely on topics related to organization, knowledge management, and workplace learning in such venues as *Fast Company*, *Leader to Leader*, *Sloan Management Review*, and *Harvard Business Review*. Manville is co-author, with Josiah Ober, of *A Company of Citizens: What the World's First Democracy Can Teach Leaders About Building Great Organizations* (Harvard Business School Press, 2003). Manville received a BA from Yale University, an MA from Oxford University, and a PhD in history from Yale University.

Karen L. McGraw is a founding partner at McBassi & Company, Inc. She was a co-developer of the Human Capital Capability Scorecard

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and has been responsible for the implementation of the Scorecard in client organizations and for the continual refinement of the scorecard toolset. McGraw is also the president of Cognitive Technologies Group, a firm that specializes in improving workforce performance through the re-engineering of training delivery, the implementation of learning and knowledge management systems, and better job design. Previously, she served in leadership positions in the area of human performance engineering and improvement for firms including Saba, RWD, and Loral. She has been an adjunct research associate and professor at the University of Texas and the University of Maryland, and is the author of numerous texts and articles. McGraw received her PhD from Texas Tech University, where she specialized in the cognitive impact of instructional technology.

Dan McMurrer is the vice-president for research at McBassi & Company, Inc. He is also the chief research officer at Knowledge Asset Management, Inc., an investment firm that invests in companies that invest in their people. Much of his recent research has focused on the relationship between organizations' human capital investments and organizational results, such as financial and market performance. He is the author of numerous articles and two books, *Workplace Training for Low-Wage Workers* (with Amanda Ahlstrand and Laurie Bassi, Upjohn Institute Press, 2003) and *Getting Ahead: Economic and Social Mobility in America* (with Isabel Sawhill, Urban Institute Press, 1998). McMurrer holds a BA from Princeton University and an MPP from Georgetown University.

Andrew Parker is an independent consultant and researcher. He has employed social network analysis techniques to map important knowledge relationships between people and departments in more than fifty well-known organizations. Through his research, which examines the flow of knowledge within top-level executive teams, functional departments, communities of practice, and recently merged companies, organizations have gained insight into critical knowledge creation and sharing activities. Parker is a co-author of two books, *Networks in the Knowledge Economy* (Oxford University Press, 2003) and *The Adaptable Organization: Creating Networks for Strategic Success* (Harvard Business School Press, 2004), and more than ten articles and white papers. His articles have appeared in *Sloan Management Review*,

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Organizational Dynamics, and *California Management Review*. He holds a MSc from the London School of Economics and is currently studying for a PhD in sociology at Stanford University.

Clark N. Quinn is executive director of OtterSurf Laboratories, a cognitive design consultancy. In his work he applies what is known about how people think and learn to the design of systems. His achievements include innovative and award-winning interactive applications as well as publications and presentations on such topics as learning objects, game design, and meta- and mobile-learning. He led the design and development of an intelligently adaptive online learning system for Knowledge Universe/Knowledge Planet, designed and programmed educational computer games with DesignWare, and spent several years researching interaction and learning experience design at the University of New South Wales. He also assisted two Australian government-sponsored initiatives in online learning and new media. Quinn has a PhD from the University of California, San Diego.

Mitch Ratcliffe is president of Internet/Media Strategies Inc., a seven-year-old media consultancy. He is also editorial director for InnovationWORLD, a foreign direct investment research company, which he co-founded. Ratcliffe was editor and publisher of the newsletter *Digital Media* in the mid 1990s, has developed and run a number of websites for ZD Net, and was chief content officer at ON24, the first streaming media news network. He worked as an investment banker specializing in media and as a venture investor, representing Softbank Ventures on the board of dating service Match.com. He is also the co-founder of Correspondences.org, a civic journalism project and creator of several well-trafficked weblogs at www.ratcliffeblog.com. A widely published author and commentator, his books include *PowerBook: The Digital Nomad's Guide* (Random House, 1994) and *Newton Solutions: Taking the Apple PDA from Toy to Tool* (Academic Press, 1996). Ratcliffe holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Washington State University.

Garry O. Ridge is president and chief executive officer of the WD-40 Company in San Diego, California. He has been with WD-40 since 1987 and has worked with WD-40 in forty-eight countries, with a focus on the Pacific Rim and Asia. A native of Australia, Ridge has served as national vice-president of the Australian Marketing Institute and

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the Australian Automotive Aftermarket Association, which awarded him its Outstanding Service to Industry Award in 1999. He hosts a website focused on learning culture at www.thelearningmoment.net. Ridge received his diploma in retail/wholesale distribution from the Sydney Technical College and his MS in executive leadership from the University of San Diego.

Marc J. Rosenberg is an independent consultant, educator, and expert in training, organizational learning, e-learning, knowledge management, and performance improvement. He is the author of *E-Learning: Strategies for Delivering Knowledge in the Digital Age* (McGraw-Hill, 2001). He has spoken at the White House and at numerous professional and business conferences, and is a frequently quoted expert in business and trade publications. Rosenberg is a past president of the International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) and holds degrees in communications and marketing and a PhD in instructional design from Kent State University.

Edgar H. Schein has taught at the MIT Sloan School of Management since 1956 and was named the Sloan Fellows Professor of Management in 1978. He is currently professor emeritus and senior lecturer. He is the author of many articles and books, most recently *Process Consultation Revisited* (Addison-Wesley, 1998), *The Corporate Culture Survival Guide* (Jossey-Bass, 1999), and *DEC Is Dead, Long Live DEC* (Berrett-Koehler, 2003). He has consulted with many organizations in the United States and overseas on organizational culture, organization development, process consultation, and career dynamics. Schein has a master's degree in psychology from Stanford University and a PhD in social psychology from Harvard University.

Douglas K. Smith is a consultant, speaker, and executive concerned with performance, change, strategy, innovation, and ethics. He is named in *The Guru Guide* as one of the world's top hundred consultants and has worked for clients, large and small, across the private, nonprofit, and governmental sectors. In addition, he has taught high school, practiced law, and co-invented new technology in entertainment and education. He is the author of several articles and books, including the business classic *The Wisdom of Teams* (HarperCollins, 1994), and his newest book *On Value and Values: Thinking Differently About We in an Age of Me* (Prentice Hall, 2004).

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William M. Snyder is the founder of Social Capital Group, a research-consulting group that helps civic leaders organize community-based approaches to social and economic development. He is a co-founder, with Etienne Wenger, of CPsquare, a cross-organizational, cross-sector community of practice on communities of practice. He has consulted for twenty years on large-scale organizational change efforts in the private and public sectors, and worked at McKinsey & Company on strategic knowledge initiatives for the firm and its clients. His work focuses on community-of-practice applications in the civic domain – both within cities and across cities at national and international levels. His publications include “Communities of Practice: The Organizational Frontier” (*Harvard Business Review*, 2000), *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (Harvard Business School Press, 2002), and “Communities of Practice: A New Tool for Managers” (IBM Foundation for the Business of Government, 2003). Snyder holds AB and EdM degrees from Harvard and a PhD in business administration from the University of Southern California.

Estee Solomon Gray is founding partner of Congruity, where she focuses on the design and use of next-generation knowledge systems that capitalize on the emergent properties of work, organizations, and Internet technologies. She is a consultant and thought leader on cultivating corporate communities of practice and “social computing” approaches to human- and social-capital management. She has worked with *Fortune* 100 executive teams, start-up management teams, and nonprofit boards, and has held key positions in marketing, customer support, and product development, most recently as chief e-learning officer and vice-president of marketing for InterWise. Solomon Gray was a founding member of Regis McKenna’s technology marketing practice, and she has worked closely with top management teams at Xerox, HP, Silicon Graphics, National Semiconductor, Raychem, and others. Her work has been featured in *Fast Company*, *Release 1.0*, and in several books on knowledge management. She holds a BS in neurophysiology and biomechanics from Yale University and an MBA and an MSEE in computer architecture from Stanford University.

Etienne Wenger is an independent consultant and thought leader in the field of communities of practice. He was featured by *Training Magazine* in its series “A New Breed of Visionary.” A pioneer of community-of-practice research, he is the author and co-author of seminal books on

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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.

Brenda Wilkins is president of Big Sky Learning Institute and has been a leadership and organizational strategist for fifteen years. Wilkins is recognized as one of the seminal researchers in the area of executive coaching. She has consulted to a wide array of organizations, including Boeing, the Department of Public Health and Human Services for Montana, the community group Zonta International, the family business Galko Homes, and the small enterprise Don's Rubber Stamps. She also serves as the development director for Missoula Children's Theatre (MCT), the largest touring theatre company of its kind. Wilkins has an EdD in educational leadership and counseling from the University of Montana.

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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