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978-1-107-02700-8 - The Business of Corporate Learning: Insights from Practice

Shlomo Ben-Hur

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The Business of Corporate Learning

Corporate learning functions are now an established part of many of the world's leading multinational firms. In this book, Shlomo Ben-Hur demonstrates how corporate learning can and should have an integral, strategic, role in a company. Based on first-hand experience, Ben-Hur provides a practical guide to setting up or restructuring a corporate learning function within a company, covering its seven key activities. He identifies and elucidates the key decision points in this process. But *The Business of Corporate Learning* is much more than a 'how-to' guide. For the first time, this book sheds light on the reasons for success or failure in the strategic deployment of corporate learning. Real-world case studies are used to illustrate the potential pitfalls, and demonstrate how – when successfully integrated into the company's strategic management system – corporate learning is able to deliver tangible business results.

SHLOMO BEN-HUR is an organisational psychologist and a professor of leadership and organisational behaviour at IMD business school in Lausanne, Switzerland. His areas of focus are the psychological and cultural aspects of leadership and the strategic and operational elements of corporate learning. Prior to joining IMD, Shlomo spent twenty years in the corporate world in high level corporate learning positions, for companies such as the BP Group and DaimlerChrysler Services AG.

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‘This book is an insightful master class in how to approach the complex realities of running corporate learning as a business that adds value to an organisation – from strategy to all aspects of execution. Shlomo Ben-Hur deals honestly with the politics that so often surround corporate learning. This book is a plea for change; it challenges the profession to rise above the frequent trinity of crisis, complacency and confusion to deliver the fundamental behavioural and performance shifts that organisations need. It provides the map – the question is, does the profession have the skill and will to navigate it?’

Stephanie Bird,
Director HR Capability,
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

‘This is a long overdue and refreshing read! Shlomo Ben-Hur bravely calls into question the traditional, academic-based methods corporate learning organisations have been using for decades—methods that research shows are plainly not working. The thought-provoking questions that he poses throughout the book are designed to jolt learning leaders into looking at their organisations with fresh eyes.’

Urbain Bruyere,
Vice President,
Culture, Competency and Capability, BP

‘Here’s a book that will cause deep unease among the corporate learning community. Shlomo Ben-Hur holds up an unflattering mirror to the general state of our learning profession, the orthodoxies we hold to be true and, most critically, the impact we have on business performance. Mercifully the book also offers hope and a path to redemption – using practical language to convey important and relevant ideas that will appeal to learning professionals and business leaders alike.’

Paddy Coyne,
VP Enterprise Learning, Shell International BV

‘Shlomo Ben-Hur takes us on a thoughtful journey through the critical strategic and operational elements of an impactful corporate learning function. Benefiting from the author’s rich experience as a practitioner

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in global corporations, the book is an indispensable compass for any organization that wants to make learning matter.'

Roland Deiser,

Founder and Chairman, European Corporate Learning Forum;
author of *Designing the Smart Organization*

'If you have ever been challenged on the value of corporate learning to your company, then buy this excellent book by Shlomo Ben-Hur. It examines, with no complacency, the shifts that corporate learning urgently needs to make in order to deliver more relevant business value. It proposes a very insightful framework for any CLO to meet that challenge and bring his/her function to the next level. You will learn to ask yourself the right questions in order to build a strategically aligned, impactful, well-staffed, properly branded and ultimately well-recognised learning function in today's challenging context.

This work is a great addition to the field of organisational learning, which frames the future of our function, gives hope to all who believe in the power of corporate learning to support and accelerate organisational development – and equips us as learning leaders to make a true difference. We have been waiting for it for quite some time.'

Anne-Juliette Hermant,

Group Head of Learning & Development, AXA

'Shlomo Ben-Hur's book on corporate learning is a highly useful and pragmatic guide for learning professionals and business leaders alike. It is a must-read for anyone aspiring to drive organisational development and enhance performance through the use of effective learning interventions.'

Mads Ingholt,

Head of Leadership Development, A.P. Moller-Maersk A/S

'This book is refreshingly balanced in its assessment of what drives successful learning agendas, from two complementary yet rarely connected entry points. Through the eyes of the learning professional, Professor Ben-Hur cuts through the extensive research to identify and isolate the key macro shifts that will significantly impact how we should think about learning and pedagogy in the future workplace.

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The book also recognizes that the business of learning is becoming more like, well, a business. Professor Ben-Hur hits the nail on the head in identifying the key levers to influence and the choices needed to build a world-class learning organisation. It's not a prescriptive "one size fits all" approach; instead, he advocates key principles that will likely increase success, while informing and advising on key options and consequences.

This book is an essential read for any line or learning executive tasked with enabling or creating a learning environment that drives company performance.'

Andrew Kilshaw,
Chief Learning Officer, Nike Inc.

'This book is essential reading for anybody either reviewing or building up a corporate learning function. It highlights the common pitfalls for organisations and learning executives on this journey and shows what it takes for your organisation to learn faster than your competitors. Finally, it calls for all parties to see learning as a business and identifies the essential building blocks.'

Ulrike Schlosser,
Head of Lufthansa School of Business, Lufthansa

'At a time when the corporate learning function is being called to prove its impact on the business, business leaders and chief learning officers alike need to ask themselves some challenging questions. This book provides an excellent framework to examine the strategic positioning and effectiveness of the corporate learning function. It will also get you thinking and inspire you to take action.'

Eivind Slaaen,
Head of People & Culture, Hilti Corporation

'Shlomo Ben-Hur's book brings value by making explicit a model of excellence that CLOs can apply irrespective of industry or company. It brings the model to life with examples and case studies from learning leaders and provokes us with relevant questions to help ensure we are focusing on the essentials of being outstanding learning professionals.'

Steven Smith,
Chief Learning Officer, Capgemini

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‘In this must-read book, Shlomo Ben-Hur launches a broad-based call to action to the learning function and to senior line management. Learning at the speed of change has become a question of survival. As both a practitioner, who was a co-creator of the CLIP accreditation process for corporate universities, and a leading academic, Shlomo has a unique profile from which he derives the authority to show ways out of the crisis in corporate learning.’

Richard Straub,
Director of Corporate Services,
European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD)

‘Drawing on his experience as former Vice President of Leadership Development and Learning for the BP Group, as well as on his close work at IMD with Fortune 500 companies, Professor Ben-Hur suggests seven key activities to help your company transform corporate learning into stronger business results. It is a must-read for all learning professionals, as well as business leaders who are interested in turning learning into a sustainable competitive advantage.’

Dominique Turpin,
President, IMD

‘Most corporations have recognised the central role that learning can play in their success, but neither the market nor researchers offer clear guidance on how best to proceed. Shlomo Ben-Hur’s book provides a welcome alternative to what’s available in the learning space. He clarifies the central role of learning, articulates the central decisions that leaders must make, and lays out possible pathways to success. The book rests on solid research foundations, but it applies them to business cases in ways that will be useful to practitioners and informative for researchers.’

Stanton E.F. Wortham,
Judy & Howard Berkowitz Professor and Associate Dean, Penn GSE;
Academic Director, Penn Chief Learning Officer Doctoral Program

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IMD, Switzerland



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DEDICATION

To my parents, Moshe and Clair, who instilled in me a true passion for learning which continues to be a guiding force in my life.

And to my treasured family, who fill my learning journey with inspiration and love: my wife Robin and our children Daniel and Arielle.

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Acknowledgements

The seeds of this book began germinating during my corporate career, as I was enchanted by my successes and humbled by my failures in trying to help organisations to learn. However, it was only after I joined the faculty of IMD business school in Switzerland that I started believing in the value of sharing these lessons with IMD's corporate partners, many of whom are wrestling with similar dilemmas. Through IMD's Corporate Learning Discovery Events and the Chief Learning Officer Roundtable, which I chair, I have had the distinct privilege of not only sharing my insights but also clarifying my thinking and furthering my understanding of the issues in this book.

To fully acknowledge all of those who have contributed to this book by shaping my experience, I would have to write a detailed autobiography, which is not possible here. However, I would like to mention a number of people without whom this book would not have come to life.

I am deeply grateful to my colleague Gordon Shenton, whose thoughtful ideas and wisdom are behind Chapter 2 of this book. I met Gordon eight years ago at the European Foundation for Management Development in Brussels. He brought a group of chief learning officers from a number of European multinational corporations together there to develop the CLIP accreditation scheme for corporate universities, which has since become an established quality label on the global corporate learning scene. Gordon and I have spent many days over the last two years discussing this book and its various chapters, and I will always be indebted to him for his inspiration, illumination and encouragement of my nascent ideas.

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Most significantly, my appreciation of my colleague and friend Nik Kinley is immeasurable. I originally met Nik on the BP team, and he has supported my work on this book in inestimable ways, including critically reading and editing the manuscript, challenging my thinking, and forcing me to solidify my opinions. I could not have written this book without him.

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