

LEARNING

COMMON MODELS FOR LEARNING HAVE REMAINED STATIC FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY. BUT TO SURVIVE IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD, ORGANIZATIONS NEED A NEW PARADIGM FOR LEARNING. THIS SERIES OF ARTICLES, FROM THE ASTD COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS SYMPOSIUM ON LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE, LOOKS AT NEW LEARNING MODELS AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS ON THE EDGE OF LEARNING THEORY.



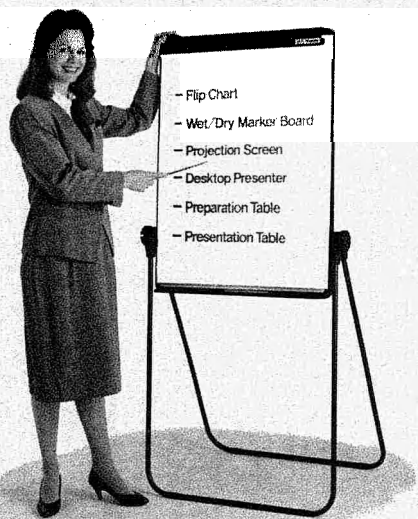
We live in an era whose hallmark is change. Particularly in our organizations, change has pushed us to the edges of what we already know. We have discovered that knowledge is a precious resource, but that unless it is developed, it quickly becomes useless.

The ability to learn purposefully from our work and the ability to foster others' learning have become critical new business skills. Building them has become a particular challenge for human resource professionals.

BY W. MATHEW JUECHTER

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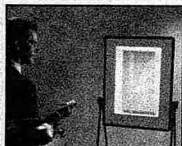
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All of this prompts many questions about learning itself. The need to learn has changed tremendously, but the model of learning has not changed much at all since the days of Horace Mann, the first U.S. Secretary of Education.

Here are some of the assumptions about classroom learning that we have held for more than 100 years.

- ▶ Everyone starts with the same base of knowledge about a particular subject.
- ▶ Everyone learns at the same pace.
- ▶ Everyone learns best from listening.
- ▶ Everyone will bridge naturally from theory to application.



LEARNING IS THE VERY ESSENCE OF TODAY'S ORGANIZATIONS

- ▶ Everyone should learn on his or her own rather than in collaboration.
- ▶ Learning is the transfer of knowledge from a teacher to a passive learner.

How valid are these assumptions about the actual mental model of learning that we use every day? Are they true in the work world? Do they account for learning from experience? Do they admit the possibility of learning from a coach instead of a teacher? Do they acknowledge the social context of many kinds of learning? Do they incorporate the technology-assisted options available now?

Clearly it's time to rethink old ideas about learning, in the light of new circumstances. For us, learning is not some rarified pastime, but the very essence of today's organizations. We can help make learning a dynamic, real-time tool for competitive advan-

tage—if we keep pushing out the edges of what we know about it.

This series of articles, from the ASTD Council of Governors Symposium on Learning in the Workplace, in April 1993, looks at some developments on the edge of learning theory.

Here you will read about a promising line of inquiry into how groups learn and how knowledge is acquired. Peter Henschel and Susan Stucky, from the Institute for Research on Learning, describe their research on communities of practice, their name for groups that gain tacit and explicit knowledge in the process of doing work together. They describe how such communities gain specialized knowledge applied to a task—a key skill in today's learning organizations.

Next, Roger Schank, director of the Institute for the Learning Sciences at Northwestern University, shares, in an interview, his provocative ideas about learning by doing, and about some software tools for learning that the institute has developed for its business clients.

A summary of recent cognitive research related to the workplace will bring you up-to-date on developments in individual, group, and organizational learning.

Finally, you will meet David Sibbet, an unusual process consultant who uses graphics to enhance group learning.

Our purpose in bringing these people and their ideas together is to expand our knowledge about learning—to share what's been learned about learning, if you will. We hope it will stimulate the application of new learning concepts in the workplace so our organizations become more effective in what they do. □

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