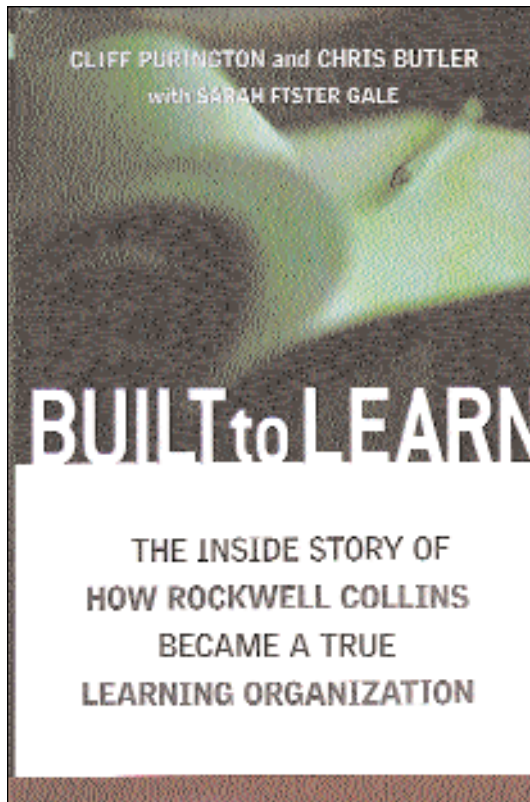


# BOOKS




## Built to Learn: The Inside Story of How Rockwell Collins Became a True Learning Organization

By Cliff Purington and Chris Butler  
Reviewed by Dee Anne Bonebright

As training professionals, we're aware of the importance of the learning organization. More than a decade ago, Peter Senge's book, *The Fifth Discipline*, made a compelling case that linked an organization's survival to its ability to learn and adapt. He describes a true learning organization as one that can develop not only new capacities, but also fundamental shifts of mind. It's that shift, he says, that enables significant, enduring change.

The developments of the past 10 years have strengthened Senge's case. High-profile consultants, such as Chris Argyris, routinely talk about knowledge as the key to organizational change. My

quick library search resulted in more than 80 books on the topic of knowledge management  "KM Today" (July T+D)—all published since 1997.

In *Built to Learn: The Inside Story of How Rockwell Collins Became a True Learning Organization*, Cliff Purington, director of learning and development at Rockwell Collins, and Chris Butler, president of the Performance Engineering Group, have written an accessible and practical account of their experience in dealing with KM issues. They provide answers to questions about making an organizational shift to a learning-based culture, and about the difference be-

# ON THE NIGHT STAND

By Mary Buchel




My husband jokes that I look like I'm reading the stack of books next to my bed but that I cheat because I don't read every word. I confess, I do skip and skim. But the books

I'm sharing are worth reading—every word.

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins presents his study of commonalities among 11 high-performing organizations. His most encouraging finding is that CEOs of successful companies often are quietly dynamic people who combine humility with unwavering resolve. Slash-and-burn management doesn't necessarily correlate with high performance.

Another well-researched, well-written book is *Hidden Value* by Charles A. O'Reilly III and Jeffrey Pfeffer. In a compelling narrative, they describe how eight organizations hire, train, support, and inspire their employees to realize their full potential.

A workshop on HeartMath intrigued me, so I bought *The HeartMath Solution*  "Put Your HeartMath Into It" (Feb. 2002 T+D). Authors Doc Childre and Howard Martin reveal what happens to the heart when it's under stress compared to a state of appreciation. I plan to use their approach for centering the next time I teach presentation skills or mediate a conflict.

I'm still deciding what I want to be when I grow up, so I'm working my way through Mark Bryan's book, *The Artist's Way at Work: Riding the Dragon*. It's full of provocative self-reflection, journal-writing, quotes, and inspirational messages.

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tween a deep culture shift and trendy learning initiative.

In 1998, Purington and Butler began a process of organizational change at Rockwell Collins, an aviation electronics company with approximately 17,000 employees worldwide. The company had an established culture that paid lip service, at best, to the value of learning. Training was based on a model of classroom courses with little connection to strategic goals. Managers offered or withheld training as a motivation strategy, but gave it low priority when allocating time and resources. Workshops were conducted at Iowa headquarters even though 60 percent of employees worked outside the area.

During the next three years, the authors implemented a strategic plan for change tied directly to the organization's business goals. They greatly expanded learning activities, while increasing perceived quality and dramatically reducing costs. As a result, training offerings expanded by 400 percent and were available around the clock to a global audience. Training and development expenses decreased by US\$23 million.

*Built to Learn* describes the 10-step process used to achieve those results. Each step is clearly described, with helpful hints and examples, and framed around strategies for creating organizational change from within rather than from the top down. The book is written for trainers and learning directors—people who are committed to learning but may not have the authority to make it happen. The book includes strategic advice, communication tips, and concise checklists.

It's clear that the changes at Rockwell Collins are technologically driven, but this isn't a book about initiating a successful e-learning strategy. The authors are quick to point out that technology provides the opportunity for learning, but it can't drive the culture. Many companies mistakenly assume that e-learning is the catalyst for change rather than a tool to meet goals. As

many organizations have discovered, just building an e-learning initiative doesn't ensure that anyone will buy in.

But I question whether the techniques presented can be generalized as broadly as the authors claim. They say that by following the 10 steps, "you will be able to make the same profound changes in your organization that we accomplished at Rockwell Collins." It could be true that others will have the same spectacular success, but some environmental factors at Rockwell Collins might have contributed to what happened there. Additionally, the process Purington and Butler describe takes a great deal of time and energy. Some organizations aren't in a position to make that kind of commitment, such as those in survival mode due to budget cuts or major leadership changes.

If I were building a library and could have only one book on learning organizations, this wouldn't be it. On the other hand, I would recommend *Built to Learn* to any trainer who's developing new learning strategies, especially involving e-learning technology. The book portrays an encouraging example of the kind of change journey that's possible, and it gives clear and practical steps for getting there. The authors have done a good job of sharing what they've learned to help the rest of us along the way.

*Built to Learn: The Inside Story of How Rockwell Collins Became a True Learning Organization*, by Cliff Purington and Chris Butler. New York: AMACOM. 248 pp. US\$27.95

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