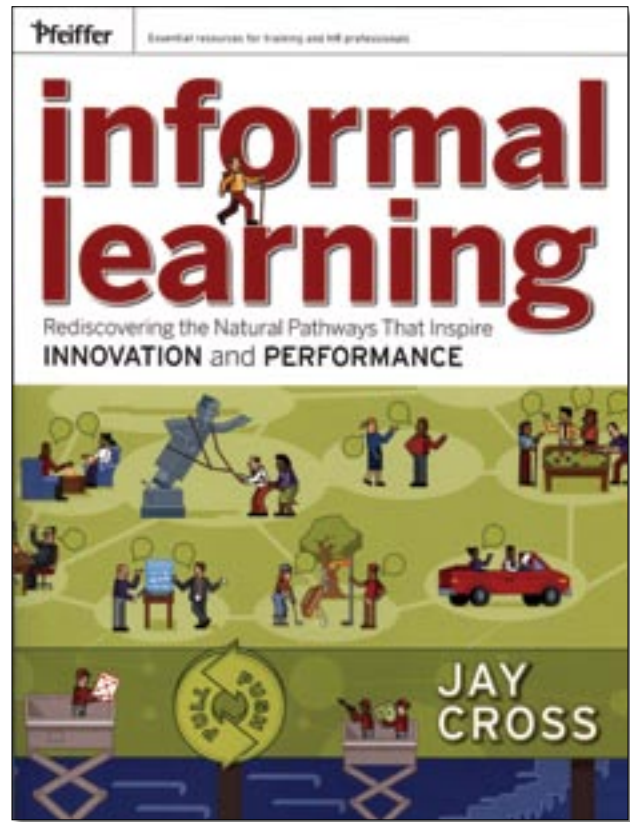


SKEPTIC: I'M SOLD

Informal Learning: Rediscovering the Natural Pathways that Inspire Innovation and Performance

BY JAY CROSS
(Pfeiffer, 320 pp., \$50)



As someone who makes a living out of designing formal learning systems for large corporations, I was an unlikely candidate to buy into Jay Cross's theory that formal learning is largely ineffective. But my curiosity got the better of me, and I found myself totally engrossed in his out-of-the-ordinary thinking on learning.

As its title indicates, *Informal Learning* hinges on the premise that most learning on the job—about 80 percent—occurs informally. Ironically, however, most corporations overspend on formal training and ignore the simpler and more natural ways in which employees learn. The book is about leveraging this type of relaxed, impromptu learning instead of emphasizing the formal strategies that most corporations propagate.

The first chapter discusses our dramatically different and rapidly changing workplace. (In fact, Cross declares the book itself as the beta edition and actually suggests checking his website and blog for updates.) Cross writes that the value of time has changed: Not only is more activity packed into each minute, but the rate of change itself is increasing. He defines this acceleration as the hyperinflation of time—much more happens in a minute today than

one hundred years ago. He also explains how the vast array of digital learning tools that workers are now accessing via computers, personal digital assistants, and cell phones plays into the rapid workplace culture. Against this backdrop, he makes a case for knowledge workers to forget the traditional mind-sets about learning.

In the subsequent chapters, Cross demonstrates that informal learning is indeed a more natural way of acquiring knowledge in today's networked communities. He defines learning as "that which enables you to participate successfully in life, at work, and in the groups that matter to you," and makes an important distinction between mandatory training and learning by choice. "Training is something that is pushed on you," he writes. "Learning is something you choose to do, whether you're being trained or not."

In discussing meta-learning, which treats learning as a process, Cross distinguishes between three types of learners who possess three different styles of learning. Novice workers benefit from a directed method of learning; mature workers are self-directed; and senior workers learn by helping others. From a meta-learning standpoint, organizations gain when they serve mature workers—the often ignored segment—by investing more heavily in self-directed, informal learning. More specifically, Cross says that designers should focus on making it as easy as possible for these workers to "link with others, make discoveries, locate experts, and so forth."

The second half of the book contains specific suggestions for learning professionals who are interested in expanding informal learning opportunities in their organizations. He suggests a variety of ways to support the process, such as providing time for informal learning on the job, creating places for work-

ers to congregate and learn, and using technology to make collaboration and networking easier. Well-known software companies serve as his examples of progressive organizations that have successfully tapped into their employees' informal learning habits in the workplace.

Cross also suggests that corporate culture plays a role in the learning process. Executives want execution and performance, but most of them couldn't care less about the learning process of their employees. Yet, Cross says that informal learning can be a profit strategy they support because it promotes innovation, develops the working process, increases professionalism and morale, and drives other factors that enhance the bottom line. Remember, regardless

of how great your training program is, knowledge transfer that results in enhanced performance on the job is what ultimately matters.

Informal Learning is a highly engaging must-read whose main ideas are juxtaposed with clever visuals to enhance reader comprehension. It also is loaded with resources, including three appendices, a glossary of terms, and a list of additional resources.

If you are still skeptical about the value of informal learning, I strongly recommend that you read it. Cross may just change your thinking on learning in the corporate context, like he did mine. I give the book four full cups of coffee.

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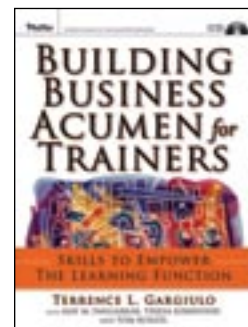
T+D EDITORS GIVE THEIR TAKES ON MORE PFEIFFER RELEASES.

Building Business Acumen for Trainers

By Terrence L. Gargiulo with Ajay M. Pangarkar, Teresa Kirkwood, and Tom Bunzel (Pfeiffer, 416 pp. (with CD), \$50)

Trainers know how to train staff, but in today's cross cultural environment, they better know a little about the balance sheet and customer relationship building as well.

While not comprehensive in any one area, Gargiulo's book can serve as the initial building block for trainers who



recognize the need to act as leaders of a business unit like the sales or finance department.

The book covers such a wide range of topics that it is difficult to summarize its content other than to call it an encyclopedic resource. One chapter offers a glossary of basic financial terms that could be obtained anywhere. Another chapter, which discusses return-on-investment, is probably the most valuable because it outlines the unrealistic expectations about training as it advises how to conduct an ROI evaluation.

As readers of development books have come to expect, the authors rely upon a fair amount of old and new acronyms. And most, if not all, of the anecdotes are fictional as is the dialogue ("I'm glad you brought that up, John"), so readers who crave real corporate examples will still be hungry.

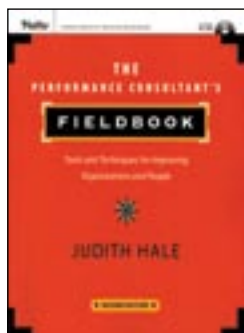
Michael Laff

The Performance Consultant's Fieldbook: Tools and Techniques for Improving Organizations and People

By Judith Hale
(Pfeiffer, 273 pp.(with CD), \$50)

Employees don't need to learn more; they need to perform better, claims veteran management consultant Judith Hale. In this second edition of her popular performance consulting handbook, Hale offers more practical advice, tools, examples, evaluation models, and real-world stories about the field of internal and external consulting.

With a sturdy hands-on approach, the book walks its reader through techniques for conducting performance interventions, analyzing organizational environments, and identifying barriers to performance.



The first section describes what it takes to become a performance improvement consultant and emphasizes how to operate more like a consultant than a training specialist. The second highlights the methods and tools of the trade. The book also includes a customizable collection of worksheets, flow charts, and planning guides, and an informative CD.

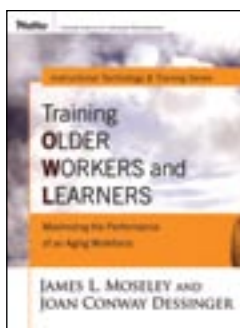
The book's step-by-step approach, accompanied by various charts and graphs, makes it a refreshingly lucid guide for practitioners and customers of performance improvement.

Jenni Jarventaus

Training Older Workers and Learners: Maximizing the Performance of an Aging Workforce

By James L. Moseley and Joan Conway Dessinger
(Pfeiffer, 424 pp., \$50)

Flocks of older workers are staying in the workforce or returning to it, and that trend is causing employers to closely examine the different learning styles being incorporated into their training programs. *Training Older Workers and Learners* examines ways to analyze, select, design and develop, implement, and evaluate training for the older worker. It focuses exclusively on the age 40 and older worker and offers practical tools designed to deliver effective training and retraining to the older worker.



This book is divided into three parts: a broad overview of older workers, the transition of older workers as they search for knowledge, and the array of training strategies to help older employees succeed in the workplace. It includes information about the workplace perceptions of older workers; the characteristics of older workers as workers, learners, and retirees; and the learning styles and challenges that affect performance. It also provides additional resources on potential training strategies and nontraditional interventions.

Paula Ketter



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