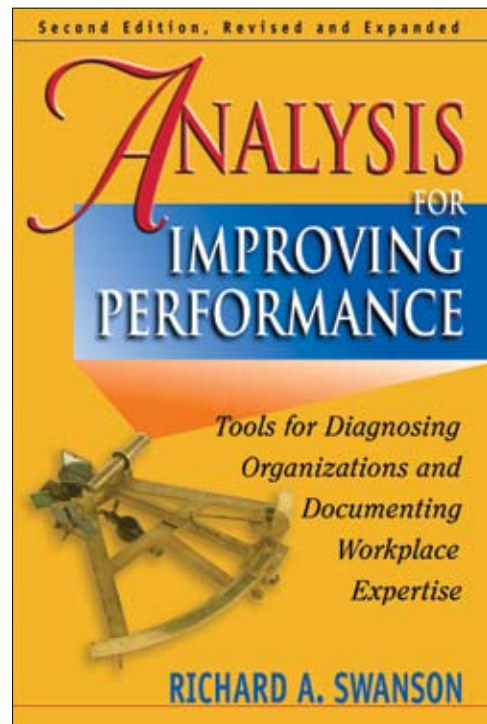


THOROUGH REVISION HITS THE MARK

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 Analysis for Improving Performance: Tools for
 Diagnosing Organizations and Documenting
 Workplace Expertise

By Richard A. Swanson
 (Berrett-Koehler, 317 pp., \$34.95 paperback, second edition)

Reviewed by Paul Flynn



If you have a television and suffer from insomnia from time to time, you know there are many products out there to help you get rich quick, lose weight, heal yourself naturally, or get six-pack abs. Whatever the merits of these products, many of us think, “snake oil!” Wouldn’t you like someone—anyone—to admit that there are no shortcuts; that life is about doing things well and completely?

Enter Richard Swanson with his revised second edition of *Analysis for Improving Performance*. Amid the dazzling array of books on change management, team building retreats, and the like, Swanson offers a no-nonsense approach to analyzing and diagnosing business problems. It’s not flashy, but it is sound thinking.

The first edition of this book was an award winner. It was named “Book of the Year” by both the Society for Human Resource Management and the International Society for Performance Improvement. But that was 1994. What does the new edition have to say to the 2007 performance improvement community? Plenty.

This book isn’t a light read—at least it wasn’t for me. It demands attention and reflection. Swanson is nothing if not thorough. Deliberate in his presentation, he begins by exposing the softer side of performance improvement. He pulls no punches in revealing the folly of improvement efforts that do not fully analyze a business problem from all perspectives. He calls for thorough diagnosis of the organizational performance, not just of the process, team, and workers. Acknowledging that performance improvement is still an emerging field, Swanson demands that practitioners be rigorous in their craft and stick to sound principles of analysis and diagnosis. The analysis phase, he

writes, defines and drives the entire improvement effort. Without such broad investigation, and without the critical documentation that it produces, Swanson argues that efforts run the risk of being merely “a series of activities taking place within the organization” with little or no real chance of effecting lasting improvement.

Swanson’s updated case studies are wonderfully apt and clearly reveal his points. They provide a rich array of common business challenges and appropriate responses for analysis. The book includes a great appendix of useful tools and forms for diagnosis and documentation, and the case studies demonstrate how to apply those tools.

In an interesting second chapter, Swanson differentiates theory from model and introduces various examples of both to provide a theoretical foundation of performance improvement.


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Some of these examples are updated and expanded versions of the original edition. They include succinct explanations of topics such as chaos theory, Gestalt psychology, and cognitive psychology. Their relationships with one another and how they form a theoretical foundation for the improvement process are not intuitive. Even less so is how readers can apply this knowledge


to the business cultures in which they are struggling to complete a performance diagnosis. But Swanson ably uses the components to build what he calls a “Performance Improvement Theory Stool.” Standing on this stool gives a view of the whole and helps readers better understand and analyze systems and organizations.

If you want shortcuts to success, *Analysis for Improving Performance* isn’t for you. But if you are looking for a seasoned professional to sit you down on the front veranda and tell you the facts of life in the world of performance analysis, Swanson is your man. I give the book four full cups of coffee.

Paul Flynn is senior manager of performance improvement for BBDO Detroit; paul.flynn@bbdodetroit.com.



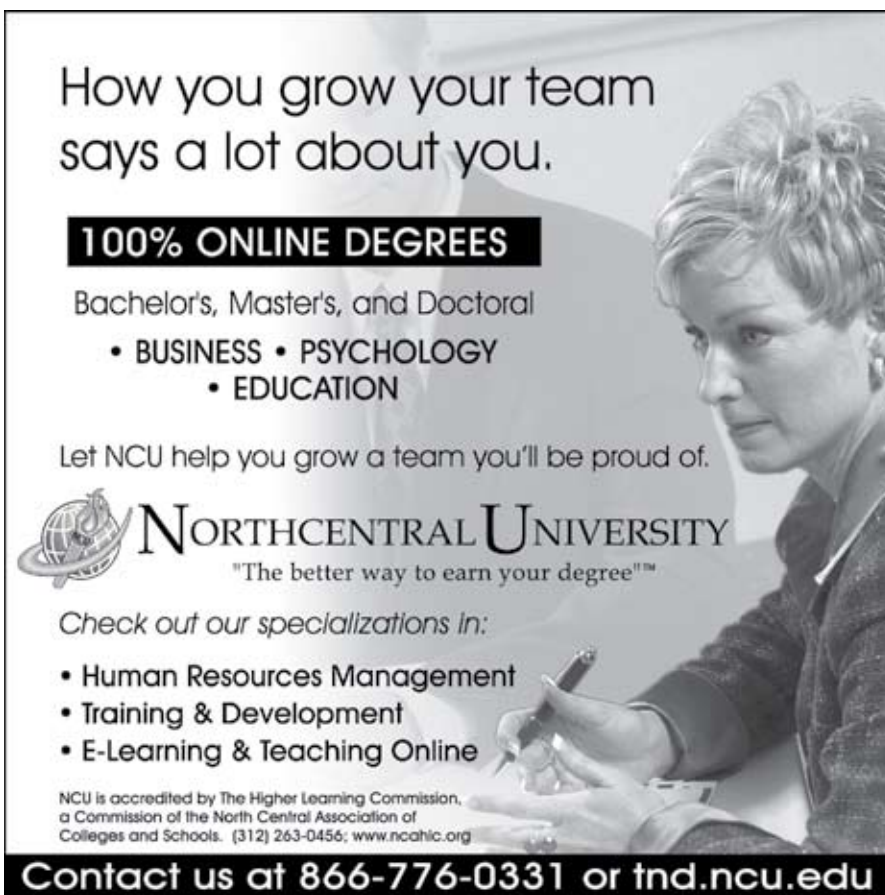
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BOOKS //

Wait! There's more ...

**T+D EDITORS EXAMINE THREE NEW BOOKS ON
MANAGING, TEAM BUILDING, AND COACHING.**

X-Teams: How to Build Teams That Lead, Innovate, and Succeed

By **Deborah Ancona and Henrik Bresman**
(Harvard Business School Press, 256 pp., \$29.95)

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All too often, teams made up of talented and committed individuals fail miserably. Ostensibly, they do all the right things: They focus on the team's own process, the problem at hand, and each other as team members.

The problem, according to the authors, is that this tried-and-true model does not work anymore. The world has changed, and fierce innovation-driven competition has forced dramatic transformations in organizational life. In this new world, leadership needs to be distributed throughout the organization and shared with teams. The authors call for the creation of "X-teams"—externally oriented groups with members who work inside and outside of group boundaries.



Using their experiences with organizations such as Merrill Lynch, Microsoft, BP, and NewsCorp, the authors examine why bad things happen to good teams, what building blocks are needed to prepare teams for a complex web of internal and external activities, and how managers can make the X-team model work for them. For those responsible for team training and for the teams in the trenches, the book offers heaps of food for thought on how to create innovation and change in a new organizational environment.

Jenni Jarventaus

Your Executive Coaching Solution: Getting Maximum Benefit from the Coaching Experience

By **Joan Kofodimos**
(Davies-Black Publishing, 137 pp., \$22.95)

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Designed for the participant, rather than the coach, this concise and easily accessible guidebook explores how coaching can address performance issues, develop high-potential leaders, build teams, and support leaders who drive change. It provides specific information and concrete, actionable steps on how to get the most from the coaching experience.



Dozens of checklists, samples, and life-inspired case studies take readers through each and every step of a successful coaching process to benefit participants, coaching sponsors, and the organization's return-on-investment.

The book is organized into three parts. Part I examines the potential value of coaching, and Part II provides ideas and tools to help readers determine if they will benefit from coaching. The final section focuses on key steps of the coaching process and what should occur in each.

Paula Ketter

It's Okay to Be the Boss: The Step-by-Step Guide to Becoming the Manager Your Employees Need

By Bruce Tulgan

(Collins, 196 pp., \$23.95)

Workplace analysts are quick to look for symptoms that contribute to dysfunctional management, such as the impatience of Generation X and Y workers, the command-and-control habits of baby boomers, and the free agent nature of the labor force.

Instead of trying to detect a personality flaw or diagnose a lack of training, Tulgan focuses on the "mundane but crucial" aspects of management that are strangely absent, such as providing direction, holding staff accountable, dealing with failure, and rewarding

success. The book suggests that the same problems that paralyze managers reappear with each generational shift. Managers still avoid conflict, and many do not receive adequate training about how to provide proper supervision. Managers,

like their employees, too often are left to figure out tasks on their own.

Any consultant worth his salt will have plenty of anecdotes gathered from client work. Tulgan uses them judiciously. In contrast with some of his peers, his anecdotes are vivid and provide clear direction about what the manager should do to correct an employee's performance. Managers may complain about intractable employees but often are unwilling to help correct poor performance. Sometimes, simple instruction combined with regular review is all that is needed to change course.



Michael Laff



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