

iLearning: How to Create an Innovative Learning Organization

Mark Salisbury. San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2009. xxv + 251 pages. US\$55.00.

In *iLearning: How to Create an Innovative Learning Organization*, Mark Salisbury brings together common sense knowledge about knowledge and learning so that teams and organizations can work together more effectively. *iLearning*, short for innovative learning, “simply describes learning that is facilitated during collaborative work” to create new and unique solutions (p. xxii). Clearly, as economies move from a manufacturing-driven foundation to knowledge-based markets, managers are challenged to improve organizational behavior while still delivering enhanced learning for their workers.

This book is appropriate for knowledge workers and innovation managers to clarify company best

practices on learning and retrieving information for problem solving. Success in new product development (NPD) depends on capturing both tacit and explicit knowledge for application to next-generation problems. An extensive introduction in “*iLearning*” guides the reader to those sections most relevant to his or her role in today’s knowledge economy. These sections are: facilitating collaborative work; facilitating innovative learning; organizational intervention for effective learning; applying methods and technology to support *iLearning*; and impact of learning and innovation on education.

Knowledge workers and innovation or NPD managers may focus on Parts One through Three, while information technologists or computer specialists may choose to focus more on Parts Four and Five, where applications and methodologies are discussed at length.

Each short, easy-to-read chapter is organized in a consistent manner, offering many simple examples, crisp figures, and real world case studies. New concepts and models presented in each chapter are subsequently applied to a running commentary (a generic firm) to demonstrate application of *iLearning* solutions to actual corporate knowledge problems.

Salisbury makes a strong argument for organizations supporting collaborative intelligence so that teams can focus on larger, more complex tasks. While too many companies may think technology is *the* answer to collaboration, learning to solve new problems occurs when teams “incorporate new information that enables them to master new knowledge and skills” (p. 9). Learning in organizations also requires a change in the firm’s internal processes leading to improved performance.

Part One presents definitions of the stages of knowledge creation and how to tie innovative learning (*iLearning*) to performance objectives. As a part of collaborative learning and team goals to produce new knowledge, an example of operating a large ship at sea is given in Chapter 2. No one person on a ship can know or be able to conduct all of the activities required for the ship to run; likewise, organizations require *distributed knowledge workers of differing expertise* to solve new problems.

Part One closes out with tips on capturing tacit knowledge from expert workers through storytelling and documentation. Especially as baby boomers move toward retirement, capturing their tacit knowledge and converting it explicitly to retrievable documentation is important for the next generation of

knowledge workers to successfully practice NPD. Additionally, new hires have a steep learning curve and can benefit from frequent, easy access to all forms of knowledge.

Salisbury believes the point of creating better knowledge workers requires a better understanding of the knowledge itself versus implementing a process that merely makes collection of knowledge artifacts (documents) easier. An “ability to externalize knowledge is a pre-requisite for innovative learning in an organization” (p. 56). Thus, Part Two focuses on how to facilitate such learning and knowledge sharing. Four types of knowledge are described, along with the best ways to capture and disseminate knowledge through the organization for more effective problem-solving: actual knowledge, conceptual knowledge, procedural knowledge, and metacognitive knowledge (knowledge about knowledge). Several examples of the best way to deliver knowledge to teams are given in Chapters 7 through 9.

Though not revolutionary, since most organizations already know the commonsense provisions of knowledge sharing, *iLearning* combines definitions and applications of knowledge into one, easy-to-reference source. Part Three in particular addresses how to implement iLearning. Chapter 11 is dedicated to the “how-to” of incentivizing employees to more openly share knowledge, while Chapter 12 presents examples of assigning performance scores aligned with the performance objectives (already described in Part One). Finally, Chapter 14 again emphasizes

the need for teamwork as “innovation requires a team to build off what it already knows” (p. 138).

Parts Four and Five provide a focus on particular technology solutions and methodologies for capturing and storing knowledge, as well as the impact of new iLearning systems on the future direction of K–12 and higher education, alongside in-house training for organizational NPD teams. In particular, Salisbury champions reusing and repurposing knowledge assets throughout the corporation. For example, a centralized training database allows a common knowledge set to be deployed across many geographical sites, while still allowing customization of the information for specific development opportunities at each individual plant or factory.

iLearning is a great reference manual for innovation professionals in charge of capturing and disseminating knowledge for problem solving. Tools, examples, and applications throughout the text can be easily utilized in any organization or firm. Each chapter and/or section can be referenced as needed to help teams, organizations, managers, and independent contributors build on knowledge to deliver cutting-edge innovation in their products and services. *iLearning* is a recommended reference for any NPD team interested in transferring knowledge for the next generation of innovation or for any NPD team that finds itself mired in reinventing the wheel.

Teresa Jurgens-Kowal
Global NP Solutions, LLC