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11-2021

Information technology and organizational learning: Managing behavioral change in the digital age by Arthur M. Langer

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Citation

HOE, Siu Loon. Information technology and organizational learning: Managing behavioral change in the digital age by Arthur M. Langer. (2021). *The Learning Organization*. 28, (6), 569-571.

Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sis_research/7162

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“Information Technology and Organizational Learning – Managing Behavioral Change in the Digital Age”

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Third Edition

by *Arthur M. Langer*

CRC Press, Taylor and Francis Group

2018

431 pp.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4987-7575-5 (Paperback)

ISBN-13: 978-1-138-23858-9 (Hardback)

Review DOI [10.1108/TLO-09-2021-275](https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-09-2021-275)

As the world battles yet another crisis because of the spread of COVID-19, the idea of digitalization brings about a whole new meaning. Many professionals and information technology (IT) managers have remarked that the spread of the coronavirus has accelerated the pace of digital transformation much more so than any effort put forth by C-suite executives. While it is true that most organizations do not accept new technology readily because of embedded legacy systems, changing the corporate cultures does play an important role in affecting the rate of IT adoption. Very often, leaders and senior executives focus on the technological aspect of digital transformation and neglect the human part in the digital initiatives. Intuitively, one would argue that the people side of IT change is as important if not more important than the introduction of new technologies *per se*. However, in practice, the former is generally side stepped because it is trickier and messier to engage people than to implement an IT system. It is in this context that the book, *Information Technology and Organizational Learning Managing Behavioral Change in the Digital Age*, by Professor Langer at Columbia University brings with it very timely and useful insights on the behavioral aspects of IT change.

The book adopts the view that because of rapid technological advances, individual and group strategic learning is required to transform a business into a technology-based learning organization. Such organizations have the capability to successfully integrate technology into organizational learning processes to grow and compete in the business environment. In general, this book is organized into 13 chapters. Chapters one to three set the stage around a technology context. Chapters four and five introduce the concepts of organizational learning (Argyris and Schön, 1996) and organizational dynamism. Chapter six and seven highlight the topics of balanced scorecard and virtual teams. Chapter eight showcases a few real-world organizations while chapters 9 to 11 feature different aspects of understanding and managing behaviors. The last two chapters, 12 and 13, conclude with various best practices and final remarks, respectively.

In chapter one, the author recounts his experience as a former consultant on the interactions between IT and the other departments at “Ravell” Corporation. This example is used to illustrate the growth of a company as a learning organization (Senge, 1990). The key



lessons learned with respect to the change of marginalized technical departments include emphasis on reflection, clear goal, quality, “not knowing” and culture. Chapter two elaborates on various IT dilemmas – the key among which is the perceived inability of technology personnel to function as part of the business. Thus, there is a need to better align IT and business objectives as a strategy. Chapter three highlights the concept of technological dynamism. In essence, organizations need to respond more effectively to the challenges posed by technology and its applications.

Chapter four presents several organizational learning theories such as reflective practices, learning organization, communities of practice and experiential learning. The progression from individual to organizational development is elaborated. The notion of organizational dynamism and the role of management are given much attention in chapter five. Pertinent issues such as whether organizational learning needs to be managed at different tiers of the organization and applied to a model that operates in responsive organizational dynamism are discussed. Chapter six describes the organizational transformation process and application of the balanced scorecard as an assessment tool. Chapter seven provides several examples of transformation projects that involve outsource arrangements and virtual team management. Chapter eight contains three examples of organizations that reveal how the proposed organizational learning techniques are applied in practice.

Chapters 9, 10 and 11 feature broad themes on cybersecurity, digital global economy and digital natives, respectively. These chapters provide a more complete and holistic coverage of topics that are relevant to organizational transformation. Chapter 12 includes some best practices to sustain organizational dynamism. These generally accepted ways of doing specific processes come in various clusters called arcs. For example, chief IT executive best practices arc and middle management technology best practices arc. The concluding chapter 13 summarizes the key idea of how IT and organizational learning operate together to support the responsive organizational dynamism environment.

In recent years, the application of digital technologies has been steadily transforming the global economy. The process is further accelerated with the spread of COVID-19. Many organizations have little choice and are compelled to introduce new technologies to enable employees to collaborate and keep the business going in the new normal. This book is an excellent resource for those who wish to deepen their knowledge in understanding human behaviors in the light of technological advancements. Readers will benefit significantly from the numerous insights from the author on how technology and organizational learning could go hand in hand to promote a strong digital culture and spur growth in the digital age. If one wishes to learn more about how to manage the various issues involved in developing organizational learning programs, and in integrating the digital component, then this book provides many practical ideas and insights. The book’s theme also ties in very well with the concept of the learning organization where people working together collectively to enhance their competencies to generate business for the company. Overall, it is a very interesting and enjoyable read.

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About the authors

Hoe Siu Loon is an Associate Professor of Information Systems (Practice) at Singapore Management University. His research interests include digitalization and information and knowledge management. Siu Loon obtained his PhD in management and MBA from The University of Western Australia, and BSc from the National University of Singapore. He currently serves as an Associate Editor of *The Learning Organization*, and Editorial Board Member of *Journal of Information and Knowledge Management and Development and Learning in Organizations*.