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Leadership at the Inflection Point by Mitch Saunders

Facing an unprecedented demand or opportunity for which there are no easy answers often signals that one phase in an organization's life is ending while something new is struggling to emerge. We might call this moment in time an "inflection point." Leadership at the inflection point requires recognizing and being able to react adeptly at key moments in an organization's history, quickly developing a wide range of individual and organizational responses to novel situations, and challenging long-held reflexes and mental models in order to help sense and influence the future.

To be successful, leaders must become intentional about altering their own leadership styles in order to direct a radical refocus of the organization. We can initiate this transformation by consciously assessing our own way of living and of leading others. Metamorphic change at the organizational level involves simultaneously altering product lines, organizational structure, and deep-seated corporate culture in anticipation of shifting market conditions. Creating an ongoing infrastructure for learning and experimentation is essential for realizing the potential of leadership at the inflection point.

7 | From the
Resource
Shelf

Capturing the Knowledge of "100,000 of the World's Brightest People" by Lauren Keller Johnson

In *Learning to Fly: Practical Lessons from One of the World's Leading Knowledge Companies*, BP's Chris Collison and Geoff Parcell (Capstone Publishing, 2001) share behind-the-scenes details from their company's experience in becoming a knowledge-management juggernaut. Through a wealth of hints, tips, tools, and techniques that any company can apply, they underscore that successful knowledge management means learning before, during, and after everything you do; it also hinges on a company's ability to create the kind of environment that enables people to get in touch with "those who know" and to "develop communities [of individuals] who act as guardians of the company's knowledge." As the authors themselves admit, "You won't find too much theory here." Rather, this is a book about what the folks at BP have practiced and what they have learned from practicing it.

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How Attractive Can Our Communities Be? by Andrew Jones

The experiences of cities large and small show that working to improve all aspects of a community will probably be self-defeating. According to Jay Forrester's "attractiveness principle," no urban center can remain an overall better place to live than others for long. People would flock to any community with high wages, inexpensive housing, clean air, and no traffic congestion, causing wages to fall, rents to climb, levels of smog to increase, and roadways to become jam-packed. In this way, changes that improve the attractiveness of one city will result in compensating changes that lessen its attractiveness until it is generally as appealing as other places. Accepting this principle can boost our power to shape our future, by compelling us to choose the imperfections that we are willing to live with. Otherwise, the urban system will choose ones for us.

10 | From the
Headlines

The Risk of the Cure in Public Health by Janice Molloy

In the U.S. and other countries, vaccination programs have played an important role in virtually eliminating serious diseases such as diphtheria, whooping cough, polio, and measles. But distrust of immunization programs is on the rise. In recent years, groups that oppose vaccinations because of their potential health risks have sprung up. In response to such concerns, more and more people are choosing not to vaccinate. But as more people avoid immunization, the incidence of certain diseases is bound to rise. The pendulum swing between concerns about disease to concerns about the vaccines themselves represents a classic balancing process. Rather than writing off such fears, by recognizing this dynamic, public-health officials can anticipate and manage them through ongoing investments in vaccine safety, education, and immunization programs worldwide.

11 | Systems
Thinking
Workout

The Downsizing Dilemma

In the face of growing economic uncertainty, some companies continue to reject the quick fix of layoffs, preferring to rely on other means of containing costs. Does a systemic analysis of the trends suggest advantages or disadvantages of one approach to cost-cutting over another? Explore the pros and cons of downsizing in this month's column.

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