With all the available technical literature on using virtual learning and collaboration tools, the human factor easily gets lost. And with more business being done outside the traditional office, the need to keep geographically dispersed teams developing new knowledge and performing every day at an efficient level is crucial, whether they are interacting from across the street or from the other side of the planet.

Ubell has pulled together some of the best minds in the field to present a practical guide to managing and instructing these teams. But even more to the point, this book offers multiple perspectives on how to best navigate the roadblocks of geography, cultural stereotypes, varying communication styles, and individual desires, with the goal of creating productive group experiences.

The book opens with five chapters on managing virtual teams. Like training or supervising any team, this kind of management often involves leveraging personalities and ensuring that all team members possess an equal voice and opportunities to share and discover new things.

Interestingly, we get a look into managing both student teams participating in online class projects, as well as dispersed, collaborative workgroups within organizations. We also get a sense for how much learning groups and working groups have in common in terms of best practices. For example, both situations necessitate methods for keeping conflict at bay and supporting group leaders.

This book offers multiple perspectives on how to best navigate common roadblocks and create productive group experiences.

The second and third parts cover virtual team technology, and enterprise and global teams, respectively. The chapters on choosing online collaborative tools will be a useful primer or refresher for exploring those technologies that serve as the backbone of collaboration. The “Teaming Across Borders” and “Global Corporate Virtual Teaming” chapters provide blueprints for communicating and building relationships among very culturally diverse groups.

All in all, Ubell has done a fantastic job of bringing together an assortment of ideas about virtual teams. And in an age when corporate and higher-ed universities are abandoning the bricks and mortar for bytes and pixels, it couldn’t have come at a better time. I give this one three caramel macchiatos.

Juana Llorens is managing editor of T+D; jllorens@astd.org.
The Seven Arts of Change: Leading Business Transformation that Lasts

David Shaner (Union Square Press, 184 pp., $17.95)
The author—a consultant to Fortune 500 companies, a philosophy professor, and martial arts master—argues that sustained organizational change requires employees who are committed to and see the benefit of changing personally as well. A quick read, the book uses spiritual and business terms to outline seven basic elements for organizational change: assessment, participation, accountability, clarity, focus, visibility, execution, sustainability, and generosity. Chapters also include case histories from Frito-Lay and Duracell, as well as lessons from the author’s many years studying martial arts. Those involved in change management will get practical ideas as well as food for thought.

Tools of Engagement

Tom Bunzel (Pfeiffer, 280 pp., $45)
This is a textbook on what’s new in the presentation world as well as how to use the latest tools. Bunzel, a technology trainer, covers the technical, logistical, and content issues involved in delivering effective training and presentations using the Internet, social media tools, and multimedia applications, including email, video, virtual slide shows, real-time broadcasts, Twitter updates, and other technologies “not yet conceived.” The book is organized by chapters that detail the tools and uses of social networks and media, how to create effective visual messages, and how to conduct virtual meetings. It also discusses the future of global communications.

Instructional Design for Action Learning

Geri McCardle (AMACOM, 272 pp., $34.95)
Action learning has been recognized as a technique that works because learners can relate lessons to their own experiences. The author, an ASTD master trainer, takes readers through the instructional design process to create engaging training programs for a variety of learning styles. Each chapter represents a step in the ISD model: identifying the need, designing the outline, developing the course material, and implementing the training. The author adds two additional steps: managing the setting and evaluating the training. The book also covers facilitating large and small training groups effectively and handling difficult learning situations, and learners, with ease.

What’s on Edgar Schein’s Bookshelf?

At the top of the list is Erving Goffman’s book, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. His understanding of how relationships form and how we all present ourselves and maintain our self-esteem is crucial to understanding all kinds of relationships, and his work just has not been used enough.

Second on the list is Mindfulness by Ellen Langer, the Harvard psychologist. We can’t build a relationship if we’re not fully mindful of everything that is going on. Her work is on what it means to be mindful and how we can maintain order and better perspective on everything that’s going on around us, I find that crucial to understanding my line of work.

Goffman and Langer are my favorites right now. Neither of them are businesspeople by the way. I think the business books are neither sociological nor psychological enough. They go straight to practice and don’t build their propositions on better basic concepts. If you read someone like Goffman, you realize the importance of the sociology of relationships.

For more from Edgar Schein, see this month’s Long View on page 66.
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