



Book Review

Management Learning


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Jean-Pierre Isbouts (ed.), *Organization Development Today: How individuals, groups and organizations can flourish in today's volatile world*. Santa Barbara, CA: Fielding University Press, 2025. p. 267, ISBN 979-8991258050

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Organization Development Today (Isbouts, 2025) is most usefully read as a contemporary statement of organizational development's ambition and its predicament. The volume brings together 10 practitioner–scholar chapters from Fielding Graduate University's Organizational Development and Change doctoral program and advances a humanistic vocabulary of learning and connection in which development unfolds through sensemaking and relational engagement with uncertainty. Its contribution to *Management Learning* readers lies equally in the tension between these humanistic ideals and the institutional realities in which “development” is authorized, narrated, and put to work. The volume offers practice-near illustrations of organizational learning and invites reflection on how developmental discourses position actors within managerial and institutional rationalities.

The edited volume examines leadership, learning, and professional practice in diverse contexts, including healthcare, education, technology, and community-based organizations. Many chapters adopt narrative, case-based, and interpretive approaches that foreground how individuals and groups interpret complexity, navigate transition, and construct meaning in practice. The volume does not advance a single theoretical framework but presents a series of situated explorations that collectively portray organizational development as a relational and reflective field concerned with sensemaking, identity work, and learning through organizational challenges. In this sense, the volume can be read as a collection of reflective practitioner studies and as an illustration of how professional learning and development are constituted in contemporary organizational and institutional contexts.

Across the 10 chapters, three interrelated themes emerge: leadership sensemaking, professional identity and career transitions, and the relational foundations of learning and creativity in organizational settings. Together, they illustrate how development unfolds through interpretive practice, biographical learning, and interactional processes in which individuals and groups navigate uncertainty and change. The first theme addresses leadership and decision-making, with a focus on sensemaking and adaptability. In the opening chapter, the Quantum Intelligence Process (QIP) is introduced to support leaders in interpreting and acting in ambiguous and changing environments.

Drawing on metaphors from quantum science, the authors conceive leadership as a process of pattern recognition and reframing.

A second thematic strand focuses on professional development and identity formation during career transitions. The chapter on midcareer self-actualization among multinational executives in China examines how individuals reinterpret success, purpose, and values as they depart from established career paths. Using narrative analysis grounded in Maslow's theory of self-actualization, the chapter highlights meaning-making and support as central to adaptive transition. A third theme foregrounds the social and relational dimensions of learning, collaboration, and creativity. The chapter on the "hidden curriculum of connection" conceptualizes leadership growth as emerging from interactions, emotional dynamics, and coordinated perspectives. Complementing this view, a study of collaborative processes in a professional design consultancy and a university design class shows how structured interaction and moments of critique can serve as catalysts for collective creativity. This finding challenges accounts that privilege purely nonjudgmental brainstorming as the primary route to group learning and idea generation. These themes suggest organizational development as a practice-oriented field concerned with how individuals and groups learn, adapt, and construct meaning. The volume's focus on sensemaking, identity work, and relational processes is consistent with contemporary perspectives on learning. At the same time, the prominence of growth-oriented and relational narratives anticipates the tension between humanistic developmental ideals and the institutional contexts in which these ideals are articulated and enacted.

The themes resonate with established perspectives on learning as socially embedded and interpretive, reflecting a practice-based orientation in which development emerges through sensemaking, identity work, and relational engagement. The opening chapter's discussion of leadership in dynamic environments engages a sensemaking perspective where organizing is seen as an ongoing process of interpreting equivocal cues and constructing plausible accounts that enable action (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). The QIP is presented as a set of cognitive and reflective practices through which leaders engage with ambiguity, reframe problems, and attend to patterns not immediately visible. The conceptual language draws on metaphors from quantum science, but the underlying concern with how actors interpret and act reflects a long-standing interest in organizational sensemaking.

A second point of connection lies in treating professional development and career transition as processes of meaning-making and identity reconstruction. The chapter on midcareer self-actualization illustrates how individuals reinterpret their past trajectories and future aspirations in light of changing values and life circumstances. Such accounts view learning as a biographical and experiential process, in which practice, reflection, and social context form professional identity (Raelin, 2007; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). Development then unfolds through engagement with work roles, critical incidents, and supportive relationships. The volume also foregrounds the social and relational dimensions of learning in the chapters addressing connection, collaboration, and creativity. The notion of a "hidden curriculum of connection" echoes sociocultural perspectives on participation, interaction, and negotiation of meaning (Lave and Wenger, 2009; Wenger, 2015). Leadership and creative capacity are depicted as emerging through dialogue, perspective-taking, and the coordination of viewpoints (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). This relational orientation is reinforced by analyses of collaborative processes in educational and professional design settings that show how conversational patterns facilitate collective sensemaking and innovation. These conceptual linkages place *Organization Development Today* in a practice-based understanding of learning and leadership. The volume illustrates how development is constituted through engagement with tasks, transitions, and social relationships, and how reflection and inquiry are mechanisms for interpreting experience and prompting action. At the same time, this positioning foregrounds the

normative assumptions for development, which become more visible when examined against the institutional contexts of organizational life.

Organization Development Today offers rich accounts of learning and development in contemporary organizational settings. But the volume raises questions about the normative assumptions underpinning the language of development, leadership, and self-actualization running through many chapters. Concepts such as growth, purpose, consciousness, and capability are largely treated as intrinsically desirable. This humanistic orientation is a long-standing and influential strand in organizational development, but it carries an individualization of responsibility for adaptation; structural constraints, power asymmetries, and institutional interests conditioning whose development is valued, supported, or visible are comparatively underexplored. This framing highlights how developmental discourses enable personal meaning-making while positioning actors within managerial and institutional rationalities. Questions of voice and standpoint also emerge. The empirical material primarily draws on leaders, executives, and professionals, and presents relational dynamics as matters of connection, dialogue, and mutual growth. This focus offers valuable insight into collaborative and reflective practice but leaves less room to examine learning as a contested process influenced by conflict, inequality, and divergent interests. The “hidden curriculum of connection,” for example, is articulated as emotional attunement and perspective coordination, with less attention to how power relations and institutional hierarchies influence which perspectives become audible and legitimate. The volume also draws on conceptual and metaphorical resources, most notably in the QIP, which seeks to capture the indeterminacy and complexity of organizing. These metaphors can be generative in encouraging leaders to think beyond linear causality. But under certain readings, they may depoliticize complexity by recasting structural tensions and contradictions as primarily cognitive challenges. Focusing on awareness and reframing may then obscure the extent to which organizational uncertainty is produced through economic, technological, and institutional arrangements.

These observations do not diminish the value of the volume as a set of reflective and practice-informed studies. Instead, they illustrate the duality of organizational development: humanistic and emancipatory aspirations alongside their embeddedness in managerial and institutional realities. *Organization Development Today* can be read as documenting how learning and leadership development are enacted and as illustrating the normative assumptions that render such enactment intelligible and legitimate. This dual character invites engagement with the volume as a source of insight into developmental practice and as an object of critical reflection on the purposes, assumptions, and power relations in organizational learning.

Organization Development Today brings together a practice-oriented set of contributions that illustrate how leadership and learning are enacted under complexity, transition, and relational interdependence. The chapters provide rich illustrations of how reflection, dialogue, and engagement with uncertainty inform learning in and through practice and demonstrate organizational development as a field concerned with human development. The accounts of leadership learning and self-formation are oriented toward adaptation, capability, and sensemaking, reflecting assumptions about development as a desirable and individualized response to organizational complexity. This positioning invites reflection on how humanistic and relational ideals of learning coexist with institutional imperatives of coordination, performance, and governance. For the readership of *Management Learning*, the volume’s value lies in its contribution to reflective and practice-based learning, and in its capacity to serve as an object of critical inquiry into the conditions of organizational development. An open question concerns how such developmental aspirations can be sustained and, potentially, reconfigured once they encounter the pressures of accountability and institutional legitimacy.

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