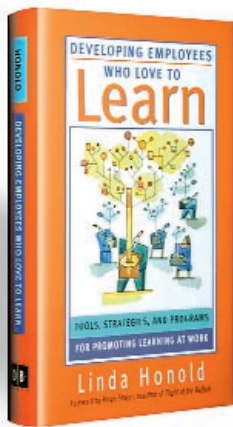


# SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries®

FILE: PERSONNEL/  
HUMAN RELATIONS

By Linda Honold

## CONTENTS

### Why Focus on Learning?

Pages 2, 3

### The Characteristics of Learning in the Workplace

Page 3

### Workplace Learning Issues

Page 4

### Designing and Implementing a Learning System

Pages 5, 6

### Tools for Developing Self-Knowledge and Interest in Learning

Page 6

### Individual Learning Tools

Pages 6, 7

### One-on-One Learning

Pages 7, 8

### Learning in Group Settings

Page 8

### Integrating Learning With Work

Page 8

## How to Promote Learning at Work

# DEVELOPING EMPLOYEES WHO LOVE TO LEARN

## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Imagine a canoe floating down a gently flowing river. Aboard is a manager who's responsible for guiding the canoe and providing direction to the paddlers. The paddlers are the employees, simply doing what they are told.

This image reflects the old economic system. However, navigating today's business world of constant change; instantaneous information and data; and fierce, global competition is a different experience. Instead of a gentle river, think of continuously churning white-water rapids. There's little time for paddlers to wait for guidance from one manager. Everyone must take responsibility; everyone must make quick decisions.

Do your employees have the knowledge, skills and information needed to make decisions? Do they have the self-confidence, as well as the organizational support, to take responsibility and initiative?

The answer to these important questions, according to author Linda Honold, can be wrapped up in one word: learning.

A workforce of employees in a learning mode — that is, motivated and prepared to take responsibility for learning — is key to the short- and long-term success of your company, Honold says. In this summary, she shows what it takes to create such a workforce.

Specifically, this summary presents:

- ✓ the benefits and unique characteristics of workplace learning;
- ✓ the four key issues that workplace learning programs and tools must address: learning stages, context, learning styles and desired outcomes;
- ✓ a five-step plan for implementing a learning system;
- ✓ a sample of specific tools, strategies and programs for individual learning, one-on-one learning, learning in groups and learning integrated into work. Tools for developing an interest in learning — the first, vital step to becoming a learner — are also presented.

With this primer on the fundamentals of workplace learning, your company will be prepared for the most turbulent of the white-water rapids that — inevitably — lie ahead.



# DEVELOPING EMPLOYEES WHO LOVE TO LEARN

by Linda Honold

## — THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

### Why Focus on Learning?

In this world of fierce, global competition; infinite and instantaneously accessible information; and constant change, “every person in the company must, at times, act like a manager,” writes Linda Honold. “All employees contribute to keeping up with the marketplace. Sometimes this means involvement in decision making. At other times, employees must be willing to implement changes recommended by management.”

How can you make this happen? Simply telling employees, “You need to act like a manager,” or, “You need to be open to change,” isn’t good enough. Employees need to have the skills to make the right decisions. Even more important, they need the right attitudes. They must be willing to embrace change and take more responsibility. Such attitudes can’t be taught. Attitudes come from within individuals and can only be changed by the individuals themselves.

The key is to develop a workforce of learners. Learning and change are synonymous. Workers can’t change without learning something. And they can’t learn without changing something.

### Other Benefits for Organizations

Developing and maintaining a workforce of learners ensures that the organization can navigate successfully through the choppy waters of constant change and intense competition. Increased adaptability to change, however, is just the beginning. There are many other benefits — to both the organization and the individual — of building a workplace environment that is conducive to the kind of ongoing, self-directed learning required in today’s companies.

For the organization, encouraging and enabling workplace learning offers the following benefits:

**Increased productivity and quality.** When people are learning, their performance and the quality of their work increases significantly. Before Chaparral Steel implemented learning processes, it produced one ton of steel for every 2.5 to 3 employee-hours. It now produces one ton for every 1.5 employee-hours.

**Increased innovation.** Employees who are learning are more inclined to innovate, especially if innovation is encouraged and supported by the company.

**Competitive advantage.** High productivity and

### How Employees Benefit from Workplace Learning

While workplace learning benefits the company, it offers additional rewards for employees:

- ✓ **More interesting work.** A job is no longer a routine chore but rather a series of opportunities for new ideas, self-fulfillment and personal growth.
- ✓ **Discovery of career direction.** Learning about what others do can lead to new careers.
- ✓ **Understanding of personal values.** The first step to becoming a learner is self-knowledge, including understanding one’s personal values.
- ✓ **Universal accessibility.** Everyone in the organization can learn — not just the “knowledge” workers.
- ✓ **Personal satisfaction.** Employees develop a strong sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.
- ✓ **Joy of achievement.** Learning leads to a higher level of personal development, which encourages learners to continue learning.
- ✓ **Enhanced employment security.** Employees who learn can handle new developments.
- ✓ **Employability.** Learning is portable.
- ✓ **Increased wages.** Increased productivity and quality of work leads to increased wages.

adaptability, as well as greater quality of products and services, make a company more competitive.

**Fewer barriers to communication.** Middle managers formerly acted as information gatekeepers. Knowledge was distributed on a need-to-know basis. In organizations that promote learning, middle managers are mentors and teachers, helping employees understand as much information as they need to improve their performance.

*(continued on page 3)*

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**Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries** (ISSN 0747-2196), 10 LaCrue Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corporation. Publisher, George Y. Clement. Publications Director, Maureen L. Solon. Editor-in-Chief, Christopher G. Murray. Published monthly. Subscription, \$89.50 per year in the United States and Canada; and, by airmail, \$95 in Mexico, \$139 to all other countries. Periodicals postage paid at Concordville, PA and additional offices.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to **Soundview, 10 LaCrue Avenue, Concordville, PA 19331**. Copyright © 2001 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

### Why Focus on Learning?

(continued from page 2)

mance and understand the importance and relevance of their jobs.

**Increased employee attraction and retention.** A learning environment attracts knowledgeable, motivated new employees.

**Increased employee motivation.** Pay is an extrinsic motivator. The opportunity to be engaged in one's work as a result of a learning environment is a powerful intrinsic motivator — the motivation comes from within the employee.

**Increased benefit from education or training dollars.** Informal learning (from mentors or new job experiences) is especially cost-efficient since it requires no additional structures or costs.

**Integration of learning into work.** Classroom-based training is difficult to apply to the workplace. Learning systems that encourage learning at all times and places help workers integrate the learning into their jobs.

## The Characteristics of Learning in the Workplace

How can an organization create and maintain a workforce of learners? The first step is to better understand the characteristics of learning in the workplace. For example, most of us automatically equate learning with a formal setting, such as a classroom. But in the workplace, much learning is achieved outside of formal settings — for example, in the middle of a project, when struggling with a thorny problem or even in the midst of a conversation with a peer or mentor.

### Organizational Benefits

Flexibility in setting is just one characteristic of learning in the workplace. Other key characteristics include:

**Responsibility for learning resides with the learner.** Traditional learning places the responsibility for teaching on the teacher, who determines what students will learn and how. Workplace learning should be managed by the student/employee. Teachers act as facilitators, not imparters of knowledge.

**Learning begins with knowledge about self.** “What would you like to learn and why?” This is not a question on which most people spend much time. Effective learning, however, requires an understanding of one's learning style, values, beliefs and interests.

**Learning occurs just in time for use.** Unlike the structured, classroom learning with which many people are familiar, workplace learning often occurs on the spot — when and where it's needed.

**Solutions are not necessarily known.** The outcome of training is known, at least by the teacher. Workplace learning often depends on experimentation. As an employee struggles to find a solution to a persistent problem, he or she is learning.

**Learning requires flexibility in approaches.** Experimentation is one approach to learning. At other times, reflection or reading is required. A single “right” approach to learning in the workplace does not exist.

**New learning often involves unlearning.** Learning often begins with the question: “What are we doing wrong?”

**Learning is integrated with work.** Some workplace learning may occur in special classroom sessions or during off-site personal development events. Much learning, however, occurs while working, not before or after.

**Learning is a conscious process.** Unstructured, just-in-time learning does not mean that learning should be “accidental.” Employees must make a conscious decision to be in a learning mode. Otherwise, they will pass up learning opportunities — or perhaps not even realize when they have learned something new. ■

## Workers Learn on the Job (If They Get the Chance)

While some learning takes place as a separate activity, much workplace learning occurs during the process of getting the job done.

Nearly 20 years ago, for example, a company opened a packaging facility to make plastic wrapping and wrap products for their clients. The demand for this service was so high that employees had little time to be trained on the new packaging equipment; they learned on the job.

Recently, the company experienced sufficient growth to warrant an influx of new employees at the plant. Veteran workers complain, however, that the new employees, “just don't seem to be able to learn the machinery.”

A closer look reveals the reason: When equipment problems occur, new employees (for the sake of expediency) ask veterans to fix the problem. The process is efficient — less time is wasted. However, if long-term workers fix all the problems, no learning is taking place. The result is that veterans complain about newcomers' lack of knowledge, while new employees complain that veterans won't teach them what they know. The solution is to ensure that veterans act as coaches rather than safety nets to new employees. New employees will then acquire the skills they need to perform their jobs.

## Workplace Learning Issues

When designing a workplace learning system and choosing learning tools, you must consider these four important issues:

1. *What stage of learning is targeted?*
2. *What context is appropriate for the learning opportunity?*
3. *Which learning styles are most easily accommodated?*
4. *What outcome do you seek?*

### Learning Stages

Different people will be at different stages when learning a skill. Some will be novices, not knowing anything about the topic. Other people will have reached a certain level of knowledge, but need help acquiring more knowledge about the topic.

These stages of learning apply to the self-directed learning process.

**Stage 1 learners** are people who are unsure of their learning skills. They are not self-directed; instead, they are used to relying on a teacher to tell them what to do. They are not, in other words, in a learning mode. The organization must find ways to push these employees into learning, to get them started so that learning is fun and becomes a way of life.

**Stage 2 learners** are more self-directed but still need someone to identify what is important for them to learn. They still need some help getting into the learning mode.

**Stage 3 learners** have the skills and basic knowledge of learning. They are ready to explore a subject area on their own; however, they may still need occasional help refining learning goals and identifying mechanisms for learning.

Finally, **Stage 4 learners** are highly self-directed — willing to plan, execute and evaluate their own learning.

### The Context for Learning

The second learning issue to consider involves the context for learning. The most familiar context is **formal learning**, which takes place in a classroom setting and involves lessons led by a teacher. **Semiformal**

**learning** takes place in a conference-type setting where participants can talk to each other. The facilitator provides a broad outline of the general content and offers some specific content, but then draws on participants' ideas and experiences to create the lesson.

**Nonformal learning** is planned learning but it takes place in a nonclassroom setting — for example, around conference tables or even coffee tables. Learners are largely responsible for the learning content and process.

**Informal learning** is acquired through life experiences, either positive or negative. The important thing is to be able to reflect on the experience and recognize it as a learning opportunity.

### Learning Styles

The third issue to consider when designing a workplace system concerns learning styles. Not everyone learns the same way. Researchers have identified the following four basic learning styles:

1. **The activist**, who is open-minded and enthusiastic about learning;
2. **The pragmatist**, who is a down-to-earth problem solver;
3. **The theorist**, who is logical and analytical;
4. **The reflector**, who is cautious and observant.

Effective learning systems are designed with opportunities and tools that accommodate each of these styles.

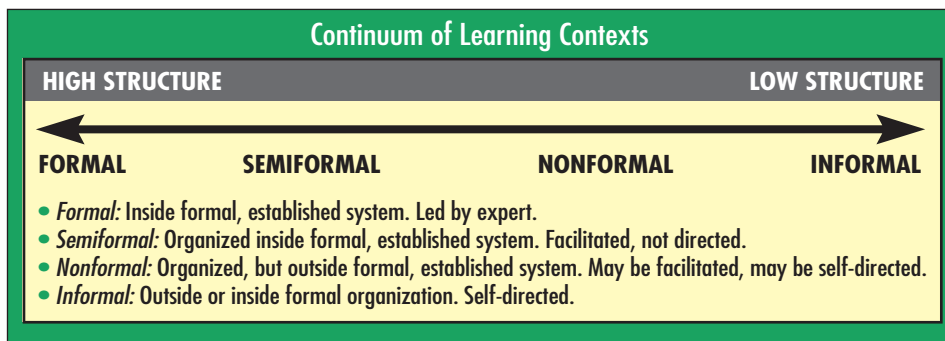
### Outcomes of Learning

The fourth and final component to consider is the outcome of the learning experience. There are four potential outcomes of learning:

1. **Cognitive or knowledge learning** develops understanding. For example, a production worker observing a salesperson for a day may not be able to start selling, but would have developed a better understanding of the job.
2. **Attitude and values learning** changes people's perceptions. For example, something that was considered important is no longer seen as important; or what was previously discounted is now viewed as more important.
3. **Skill development**, the most common form of workplace learning, leads to new abilities.

4. **Aspiration learning** changes a person's goals. A production worker might decide to go to school and become an engineer, for example.

As you establish a learning system, keep these four issues in mind. You must always ask yourself if there is a way to redesign the opportunity to make it more applicable to the potential learners. ■



## Designing and Implementing a Learning System

According to Honold, the strategy for designing and implementing a learning system consists of five phases: exploration; envisioning; planning; incubation and development; and implementation and improvement.

### Exploration

The first phase is exploration. In this beginning phase, you make the decision to create a learning system. You then choose the members of the planning team who will design the system; you also name a team leader.

### Envisioning

The second phase in designing and implementing a learning system is envisioning. This phase includes the very important step of identifying the relationship of learning to the organizational mission. Look at your company's mission statement, which may refer to issues such as individual performance, continuous improvement or customer service. These areas all require learning. Articulate a learning-unit mission statement that supports the goals of the organizational mission statement.

In envisioning the mission of the learning system you are designing, it is helpful to understand your organization's underlying principles or beliefs about learning.

There are many principles about learning that can apply to your organization (see box). Narrow them down to a maximum of five fundamental principles. Using these five principles, write a short mission statement followed by a narrative that includes the learning principles.

### Planning

The third phase in designing and implementing a learning system is planning. The steps here are straightforward:

- 1. Analyze current learning opportunities in the organization.** Talk to people in each department to determine what they do to learn.
- 2. Analyze the space available for learning.** Does your company have space set aside that can accommodate formal, semiformal, nonformal and informal learning?
- 3. Determine the components of the learning systems — that is, the specific tools and learning opportunities that you will offer to your employees and managers.** We will review a few of these tools in the following section of the summary.
- 4. Determine your staffing needs.** For example, do the learning needs of your company warrant a full-time learning facilitator?
- 5. Develop the budget for the system.** Issues will include the costs of staff, space and instruments for personal development planning. Also, who pays for the

## What Does Your Company Believe?

Use your organization's principles and beliefs about learning to design the mission or philosophy statement of your learning system. Here is a small sample of principles that may apply to you:

- ✓ Continuous, lifelong learning must become a standard feature of the workplace.
- ✓ When possible, learning must be taken out of the classroom.
- ✓ Employees and management must both be involved in developing, designing and implementing learning opportunities.
- ✓ When possible, learners should initiate the learning process to meet their needs.
- ✓ Each employee (salaried and hourly, exempt and nonexempt) should have a development plan.

time spent on learning?

### Incubation and Development

If the first three phases of the process focus on designing the learning system, the next two focus on implementing the system.

Phase 4 is the incubation and development of the system. Among the steps you need to take are the following:

- Develop the learning opportunities you chose earlier so that they fit your needs.
- Make the learning space you identified earlier ready for use.
- Plan and implement a marketing strategy. How will employees find out about the learning system? What do they need to know? Options might include newsletters, brochures and informal presentations.
- Plan and implement a support system. Individual learning cannot survive in a systematic way without support from the entire organization. What kind of support is needed? Financial support is key. Are personal development or continuing education funds available to employees?
- Develop reward and recognition systems that encourage or push employees to learn.
- Allow employees to create a personal development plan.
- Take steps to turn managers and supervisors into coaches and developers of people.

### Implementation and Improvement

The final phase of designing and implementing a learning system is the implementation and improvement process. Launch the learning opportunities that you

(continued on page 6)

### Designing, Implementing a Learning System

(continued from page 5)

identified and developed earlier. Then measure and document the success or failures of those learning opportunities and make improvements where you can.

The job, of course, is never over. Evaluating and improving learning systems is an ongoing priority. ■

### Learning Tools and Opportunities

In the final section of this summary, we'll present a sample of learning tools and opportunities that can be adopted by or adapted to your organization.

When deciding which tools to include in your learning system, you must take into account the fact that different employees have different learning needs and skills.

Some employees, for example, will need to be pushed into a learning mode. These employees have yet to understand the importance of learning or have not acquired the desire to learn. This summary offers several methods for developing interest in learning and self-knowledge.

Once employees are open to learning, the next challenge is to continue the learning process — which can include individual learning, learning in one-on-one relationships or learning in group settings. This summary offers examples of learning tools and opportunities for each of these three approaches.

The final, but by no means the least important tools covered in the summary will offer opportunities for integrating learning into work — a key element of a successful learning system. ■

### Tools for Developing Self-Knowledge and Interest in Learning

The first set of learning tools is intended to help employees develop an interest in learning and self-knowledge. As author Linda Honold explains, "Before learning can become a strategic organizational tool, employees must first engage in it and find value in it." The first step to becoming a learner is for employees to understand themselves — or, more specifically, their goals, learning styles, decision-making approaches and values. Only then will they be able to create for themselves an effective plan for learning and development.

There are a number of famous instruments that lead to self-knowledge. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®, which categorizes people according to their perceptions

Personal Values		
BEHAVIOR	OPPOSITE	VALUE
1. Meeting starts late	Meeting starts on time	Respect for others' timeliness
2. Lying about reason for tardiness	Telling the truth	Honesty

and tendencies, is perhaps the most comprehensive of these. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (safety and security, belonging, status and self-actualization) and Herzberg's satisfiers and demotivators are classic tools that will help employees identify what motivates them to learn. In addition to established instruments such as these, many other types of tools can add to an employee's self-knowledge.

For example, a core value chart can help employees clarify their essential personal values. The chart (see example above) has three columns. The left column lists behaviors that make the employee angry. The middle column lists the opposites of the behaviors in the left column. The right column lists the core values that are violated by the behaviors in the left column.

A current skills inventory will help employees identify their strengths. To create this inventory, ask employees to list 10 things they have done that made them feel successful. These items can range from writing a research paper or organizing a project to coaching a youth sports team or teaching a child to drive. Once the 10 items are listed, ask employees to choose the three most important ones for them. Then ask them to write a short narrative describing what they did for each of these three items — that is, identifying the specific skills involved in the activity.

A voluntary, 360-degree feedback process — which shows employees how others perceive them — will also help employees learn more about themselves.

Armed with self-knowledge, employees must now create personal development plans. Of course, learning facilitators will be needed to guide them in this step. The development plan should cover what is to be learned, how this will be learned, what resources are necessary, and how the employee will know when they've learned what they set out to learn. A target date for completion of the learning should also be set. ■

### Individual Learning Tools

When individuals enter a learning mode, the challenge of the organization is to keep them learning. Your company can better meet this challenge if it provides a variety of learning tools and opportunities that fit different types of learners.

(continued on page 7)

### Individual Learning Tools

(continued from page 6)

One individual learning tool is a learning log or journal. A daily entry in a journal that reflects on the day's events can help employees focus on what they've learned that day.

Job shadowing — following another employee for a half-day or a full day — is a highly effective learning tool that broadens an employee's understanding of his or her own work and its impact on others.

For employees who don't have direct customer contact, working in the customer service department on a regular basis can be another important learning opportunity.

Books and audiotapes, especially if the employee takes time to reflect in writing on what he or she has learned, can be very valuable. Self-study workbook programs are also available for more extensive learning.

Engaging in individual research projects, pursuing innovative personal ideas at work and preparing public presentations are other methods or learning opportunities that contribute significantly to an individual's knowledge and skill set.

Membership in organizations and attendance at conferences and conventions are further opportunities for individual learning.

Finally, employees may want to take advantage of college-credit classes on the Internet or computer-based training offered by the company.

Once again, carefully consider the four learning factors when deciding which tool to use for which employees. For example, the learning log is great for the theorist or reflector and less appropriate for the activist or pragmatist. Job shadowing and direct customer contact, on the other hand, fits well with the learning style of the activist and pragmatist.

Another example: individual research projects are more likely to be successful with Stage 3 or 4 learners — learners who are prepared to take full responsibility for their learning, than with Stage 1 or 2 learners. ■

### One-on-One Learning

The next set of learning opportunities involves one-on-one learning. Often, learners will find themselves with the opportunity to learn with and through another person — for example, a mentor, a coach or even a peer.

Mentoring programs are among the most common one-on-one learning opportunities in business settings. According to Honold, mentoring relationships are establishing in six phases:

**Phase 1.** The mentor and protégé get to know each other.

### Remember Four Issues

When choosing any of the tools and methods listed in this final section of the summary, keep in mind the learning factors discussed earlier: the learning stages (how prepared an individual is to take responsibility for self-directed learning); the learning context (formal, semiformal, nonformal or informal setting); learning styles (which, as mentioned earlier, range from the enthusiastic, open-minded activist to the problem-solving pragmatist, analytical theorist and cautious reflector); and the outcome (new knowledge or understanding, new skills, new attitudes and values or new aspirations).

For example, the core value chart is best for Stage 1 or 2 learners, that is, learners who are not self-directed or just beginning to take responsibility for learning. The learning context of the chart is semiformal; it is best for the activist, pragmatist and reflector learning styles. The outcome is both new understanding and new attitudes or perceptions.

Voluntary, 360-degree feedback, on the other hand, requires learners who are further advanced in their self-directed learning skills — in other words, Stage 3 or 4 learners. Another difference: the feedback process takes place in a nonformal or informal setting; the process can be organized, but it does not have a traditional teacher/learner structure. The theorist can take advantage of 360-degree feedback, and in addition to new understanding and values, 360-degree feedback can spark new aspirations in the learner.

**Phase 2.** Mutual trust develops as they work together and learn from each other.

**Phase 3.** Mutual risk taking begins as the mentor encourages the protégé to stretch.

**Phase 4.** The mentor and learner understand each other and create new opportunities for learning.

**Phase 5.** The learner starts to take a dominant role in the process, initiating changes in the mentoring relationship.

**Phase 6.** The learner assumes the lead role and begins to separate from the mentor or become a colleague at the same level.

There are a number of steps your company can take to ensure successful mentoring relationships. For example, the process should be voluntary; don't push people to become mentors or protégés. Also, determine clear outcomes for the relationship. Ensure that face-to-face, telephone or e-mail meetings between mentor and learn-

(continued on page 8)

### One-on-One Learning

(continued from page 7)

er occur at least once a month. And assess the value of the mentoring program with exit interviews of both parties at the end of the relationship.

While mentoring focuses on strategy, coaching offers a chance to learn more specific, tactical skills. A coaching session can be a one-time deal, focused on a specific task or skill. Or it can be ongoing, while still focusing on specific skills.

Coaches are often the learner's boss; however, peer coaching can also be used to upgrade on-the-job knowledge or bring new employees up to speed. Peers can also be mentors. Microsoft, for example, uses peers as mentors for new recruits in technical jobs.

The following mentoring or coaching opportunities are just some examples of the learning opportunities that can be offered to employees:

- **Coaches for learning skills;**
- **Personal coaches contracted from outside the company;**
- **Strategic development advisors to work one-on-one with learners on specific business areas;**
- **Peer coaching for specific skills;**
- **Peer tutoring for learning a language; and**
- **Technical peer mentoring for new employees. ■**

### Learning in Group Settings

The next category of learning tools and strategies involves individual learning in group settings.

Courses in a traditional, formal learning context — that is, in a traditional classroom setting, falls into this category of learning tools and strategies. Some companies teach courses on economics to enhance the knowledge of their employees. Other companies offer personal interest classes — ranging from subjects such as math and reading to personal topics (quit-smoking programs, for example) and technical skills (such as small-engine repair or blueprint reading).

Individual learning can also take place in groups outside of formal classes. Learning networks is one example. In learning networks, each individual manages his or her own learning, but receives feedback and help from other learners in developing a plan. The network should meet every four to six weeks to work on issues related to the organization and on the needs of the people in the group. These meetings are strictly related to planning, not the actual learning.

A final example is storyboarding. In this case, a group of people meet to envision the future of the company.

### Send Employees on a Field Trip

A very different type of learning opportunity for individuals in groups is a shopping field trip for product comparison. If you manufacture a product that is distributed in retail stores, take a field trip with a work group and note how your product — and that of your competitors' — is sold. Questions that will help you learn from the experience include the following: "How is the product merchandised?" "What are customers seeing when they shop?" "How might your product or its presentation be improved?"

Each person is provided with a felt-tip marker and a large sheet of paper divided into six blank boxes. The facilitator asks participants to fill in box 6 with a drawing that interprets their vision of the future. In box 1, they are asked to draw the present. In boxes 2 to 5, they must show how the company moves from the present to the ideal future of box 6.

These examples occur in a nonformal context. In other words, while a facilitator may help the process, the learners don't just listen to a lecture, they contribute to the content of the learning, which often takes place in a nonclassroom structure. ■

### Integrating Learning With Work

The final category of tools and strategies will help integrate learning with actual work — one of the most important ways to create a workforce of learners. Your company must encourage and enable employees to integrate learning into their everyday experiences on the job.

Working on team projects is one strategy for integrating learning into work.

Another popular strategy that closely links learning to actual work is to involve employees in meetings in which their performances are linked to the company's financial goals. Such meetings are the featured characteristic of open-book management; top managers share a company's key financial figures with employees, who can then better understand how their activity impacts the organization's bottom line.

Finally, we cannot forget the work-related learning opportunity emphasized by many management writers and theorists today: mistakes. Learning from mistakes is appropriate for learners of all learning styles and learning stages. ■