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Book Review: Leadership for 21st Century Learning: Global Perspectives from Educational Innovators

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Leadership for 21st Century Learning: Global Perspectives from Educational Innovators
Colin Latchem & Donald E. Hanna, (Eds.) (2001)
London: Kogan-Page
267 pp.
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Given the growth of open and flexible learning during the past 5 years, it is understandable that the number of books written on distance learning, particularly those focusing on the use of the Web to deliver education and training, has increased exponentially. Most purport to bring some shining new revelation to the field beyond the power of online learning, only to fall short of the claims in their opening prefaces. These publications all cite the current "buzz words," and they all have the answers (of course, this assumes they know the right questions to ask). Many of them predict the final, unavoidable, extinction of traditional higher education institutions that do not embrace technology, respond to competition and new markets, and recognize the global change from a supply- to a demand-based market economy.

The reader may wish to challenge this somewhat critical assessment of this high growth industry. But the real purpose of this opening is to point out that occasionally a book comes along that transcends the obvious, embraces the difficult, and provides a synthesis of theory, practice, and innovation that brings all the pieces of the puzzle into focus. Latchem and Hanna's *Leadership for 21st Century Learning: Global Perspectives from Educational Innovators* has met this scholarly challenge.

The editors open by identifying the major themes of their book: (a) examining global developments and trends in open and flexible learning, (b) highlighting the challenges and choices in this rapidly changing market, (c) developing an entrepreneurial culture that examines processes of organizational change, and most importantly, (d) analyzing leadership in open and flexible learning. Moreover, the editors point out that educational institutions must respond to the shift from a supply-driven to a demand-driven market. In sum, the editors build their entire book around the central theme of how visionary and entrepreneurial leadership can navigate and position an institution to be responsive to market

demands and changing priorities.

The first five chapters are written by the editors and lay the scholarly and practical groundwork for the remainder of the book. Chapter 1 provides a solid overview of the various approaches to open and flexible learning across the globe. Chapter 2 focuses on challenges and choices that face institutional leaders in strategically positioning their institutions to respond efficiently and effectively to an accelerated demand market. Major issues include customer focus, quality, branding and reputation, cost, technology, and organizational structure for innovative institutions.

Chapter 3 is particularly illuminating in assessing the challenges facing traditional institutions developing an "entrepreneurial culture", and the ways traditional ivory tower culture collides with an open, market-responsive posture that places the customer and student first. Latchem and Hanna astutely link leadership with fostering the kinds of institutional changes that are systemic rather than temporal, altering the status quo culture and the "core values" that define that culture. They do not candy-coat the challenges of changing the academic culture, particularly regarding faculty, given that they exert dominant control over most of the key governance processes for instituting change. The editors cite Barry Munitz, former Chancellor of the California State University System, on the topic of faculty change:

> faculty by and large are brilliant and creative people who are dramatically liberal about everything but their own work, in which case they become almost instant reactionaries....They are very happy traveling around the world committing everyone else to change and extra resistant to anyone who suggests they might also be changing (p. 47).

In chapter 4, Latchem and Hanna examine various processes of organizational change, including strategic planning, developing staffing capabilities, and open and flexible learning as a scholarly activity. Moreover, they provide numerous examples of how different organizational processes work successfully for different organizations. There is no "silver bullet" organizational structure or compilation of processes that work for every organization, especially academic institutions. This fact provides a good lead into chapter 5 that focuses on leadership in open and flexible learning, and the importance of creating organizational structures and processes that foster responsiveness, flexibility, and recognize and reward innovation across the organization. Latchem and Hanna insightfully distinguish between managers and leaders. The reviewer is reminded of the anonymous quote "Managers do things right – leaders do the right things!" The editors close chapter 5 by discussing the attributes of successful leaders and the role of leadership in open and flexible learning.

It is at the beginning of chapter 6 that this book rises above most, if not all,
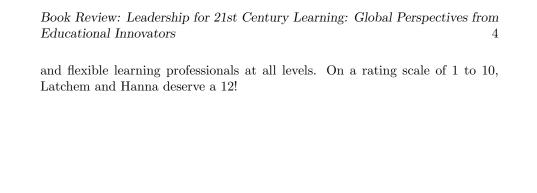
recent publications on open and flexible learning. Rather than write the entire book themselves by researching various global institutions and speculating on the role of leadership in these institutions, Latchem and Hanna do their greatest service to the field and the study of leadership by conducting interviews with leaders from around the globe who have been successful in guiding their organizations in the open and flexible learning marketplace.

Chapters 6 to 23 are a who's who of top leaders, including: Sir John Daniel, UK Open University; Denise Bradley, University of South Australia; Rajesh Chandra, The University of the South Pacific; Sister Joel Read, Alverno College; Betty Collis, The University of Twente; Muriel Oaks, Washington State University; Robert Albrecht, Western Governors University; Janet Poley, The American Distance Education Consortium; Abdul Khan, Indira Gandhi National Open University; Dominique Abrioux, Athabasca University; Don Hanna, University of Wisconsin Extension; Barbara Spronk, The International Extension College; Glenn Jones, Jones International University; Marmar Mukhopadhyay, The National Open School of India; Brian Talbott, STEP Start Network; Roger Lewis, Regional Consultant UK Higher Education Funding Council; Data Gajaraj Dhanarajan, Commonwealth of Learning, and Bernadette Robinson, University of Nottingham. As the saying goes, there is no substitute for experience, and the experience presented in this book is extensive.

In the final chapter, the editors synthesize the major leadership concepts from the literature that are consistent with the leaders' experience of applying leadership principles and attributes in the practical short- and long-term evolution of their organizations. Latchem and Hanna summarize leadership values, characteristics, and behaviours that are essential to open and flexible learning organizations. Finally, the editors summarize key strategies for leaders, including: (a) scanning the environment, (b) developing and implementing a strategic plan, (c) gaining commitment from multiple constituencies and stakeholders, (d) preparing for change and innovation, (e) leading the process, (f) achieving short-term wins, (g) consolidating and encouraging further innovation and change, and (h) institutionalizing new approaches into the culture.

In summary, this book should be on the shelf of every university president, senior institutional administrator, dean and department chair, board member, and mid-manager and faculty who has responsibility for leading open and flexible learning organizations. Moreover, this book's synthesis of scholarship, practice, and vision for the field means it should be part of every graduate program in open and flexible learning.

The editors' interviews with global leaders, combined with their scholarly approach to leadership and change, culminate in a wealth of information, experience, and practical strategies for all practitioners and leaders. Corporate training managers and government administrators who are leading open and flexible learning initiatives would also benefit immensely from this book. In conclusion, Latchem and Hanna have written and edited a "leadership handbook" for open

and flexible learning professionals at all levels. On a rating scale of 1 to 10, Latchem and Hanna deserve a 12!