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MINDS

AT

WORK



MANAGING FOR SUCCESS IN  
THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In their newest book, *Minds at Work*, David Grebow and Stephen J. Gill focus on the dramatic changes taking place in the ways we work and learn. For thousands of years, people used their hands to make things, and work was labor intensive. During this period, which includes both Industrial Revolutions, the way we structured our organizations and our approach to management and learning was a result of our need to manage hands to get the most effective performance.

For the first time in history, for the last 50 years, most people have been using their minds to produce work. We no longer need to manage hands; we have no choice but to restructure our organizations and change our approach to management and learning to reflect this historic change. In this mind-intensive knowledge economy, we must learn to manage minds to get the smartest, most creative, and most innovative results.

*Minds at Work* is a groundbreaking and carefully researched book, and includes many examples from the world of outstanding—and often unknown—companies that have taken the lead in learning new ways to manage people. They are discovering what it takes to enable people to perform at their peak, learn what they need when they need it, and grow professionally *and* personally. The book is a well-developed guide that shows you exactly what you need to do to manage minds and succeed in this new knowledge economy.

*Minds at Work* will be published by ATD Press in December 2017, and is available for pre-order from ATD Press, Amazon, and other online bookstores.

It seems as if we all went to bed one night, and when we woke up the next day, everything had changed. Yet many of us are still operating as if it were yesterday.

We were looking for the root cause of the many problems plaguing companies with whom we worked. Because of our backgrounds in education and educational technology, we assumed it was related to the way companies enabled or prevented learning on the job. We began our research looking for examples of companies that said they were learning cultures, where learning was continuous and supported in every aspect of organizational life. The idea was that a learning culture is more effective and would have fewer challenges related to hiring, retention, performance, and engagement. We never found one. After a careful analysis, we realized why. A company can tell the world it has a learning culture, provide lots of learning opportunities, and supply educational technology for everyone. But if management support for learning is not apparent and constantly on display by managers every day, the original culture that supported and rewarded “not learning” will hold sway over any attempt to be a culture focused on learning.

We started to look at the critical relationship between managers and learning. Managers are expected to direct people’s daily work and performance. They are not usually expected to develop employees. That’s when we found ourselves exploring new, uncharted territory, in which we discovered four big surprises.

The first was that there are two types of companies, and that they have very different ways of managing how their employees work and learn. We call the first type a “managing hands” company, which was developed during the two Industrial Revolutions, when we used our hands to make things and learned to manage hands. We call the second type a “managing minds” company, developed for the new knowledge economy, in which we use our minds to produce work. The hallmark of these managing minds companies is the dramatic new ways they manage people and enable learning.

That led us to the next surprise. Too many of the managing hands companies we looked at were an endangered species, stuck in a 20th-century time warp. Corporate Darwinism proves that a company must evolve to meet the demands of new and different environments or else perish. There are more than enough examples of extinct companies that did not—or could not—change quickly enough from managing hands to managing minds to prove this point.

The third surprise arrived when we started connecting the dots representing the companies that are managing minds. We saw examples of this new type of company all over the world. These companies all shared identifiable characteristics and measurable results. They are in every industry from manufacturing to mobile communications, construction to computer processing. They are clearly making learning the most important, ongoing, and pervasive aspect of their organizational culture.

These companies are part of a relatively recent worldwide trend resulting from the needs of the new knowledge economy. They are talent magnets with low turnover, producing rapid growth and profits year over year. And we believe they are the future of management and learning. They represent the direction companies must take to be successful in the 21st century.

And that was the biggest surprise of all.

## **Why Management Needs to Change**

As the economic paradigms change, the companies that fail to evolve disappear. We describe the 21st-century corporation as an organization that is global and virtual. People all over the world will form the intersecting nodes for a constantly humming web of communication. They will be able to continuously and seamlessly communicate and collaborate. From the individual to the group, their actions will be quick, decisive, and informed, and the results relevant, smart, and proactive.

To create this corporation, how we share information must change. The previous command-and-control structure—where knowledge was power, but only a few could access it and make decisions—will be replaced with the new structure, where sharing knowledge is the real power and decisions are made by everyone focused on the job. There is no alternative future.

Managers need to take on new roles and responsibilities very different from the ones they are used to, have been mentored and trained to do, or have been taught to follow from their management courses or MBA programs. Many

of these companies are trying a variety of approaches and ideas to reinvent themselves to meet the challenges they experience every day. They are getting parts of the puzzle correct, but when we looked at the companies that are managing minds, we realized they have figured out the central idea that pulls all the pieces together into a coherent picture.

## **The Benefits of Managing Minds**

One way to think about the overall capability of your company is the metaphor of the Corporate IQ, which represents the total brain power of your organization. Examining your Corporate IQ is a way to get a handle on how well you are managing minds, and on what chance you have to succeed. It shows you how smart your organization is today, how well it will perform tomorrow, how the expected will be handled and, most important, how the unexpected will be encountered. To grow their Corporate IQ, 21st-century companies must focus on managing minds and enabling learning.

Twenty-first-century companies need people who believe that sharing knowledge is power. By creating and sustaining a company that is focused on learning, you can control the direction in which your company's Corporate IQ is moving. Being obsessive about managing minds will make you and your company smarter. And smarter means more successful in today's marketplace.

The results achieved by these managing minds companies consistently help them to be the smartest, fastest-growing companies, with enviable financial results: a steady, long-term increase in revenues and value; key performance indicators moving in a positive direction; lower-than-average turnover; and greater innovation in response to competition.

## **Communicating and Collaborating**

One of the prerequisites to being a company that manages minds is to break away from the established command-and-control model. This way of running a business was developed to maintain order in a company that was managing hands. While it may have worked in this older type of company, a command-and-control style of management is the main barrier to corporate learning and to becoming a company managing minds. The newer communicate-and-collaborate model facilitates and supports what companies need to do to manage minds—create a more open, transparent, and fearless approach to work.

The communicate-and-collaborate approach is characterized by an ongoing free flow of information and decision making that is top-down, bottom-up, and sideways. This concept is called shared consciousness; it provides everyone with not only the big picture, but also updated details as a situation changes. Using technology, the entire organization can function like a network in which all the nodes—individuals—are interconnected and sharing information back and forth in real time. In that context, to rapidly learn new information and react creatively, everyone needs to know everything.

Companies around the world that are successfully managing minds and are obsessively focused on communicating and collaborating at every level are discovering:

- more impact from learning solutions
- faster time to performance
- improved job growth and satisfaction
- greater innovation and creativity
- more agile problem solving
- faster and better decisions
- increased savings and profitability.

## **Pushing and Pulling**

To manage minds and not hands, you need to discard the old dichotomy of formal training and informal learning. This arbitrary distinction is not very helpful in a managing minds world. We believe a more useful distinction is whether learning is push or pull.

Push training is a siloed, top-down, management-driven approach that sends people to formal training events where they receive nice-to-know information—as in, it will be nice to know someday. People are not connected to one another

during or after the training event, and do not communicate or collaborate. The focus is on showing up (attendance), participating (raising your hand), and passing or failing (testing). If that sounds familiar, that's because it's school transposed onto the workplace. It is a static system created to control knowledge and manage hands.

In contrast, pull learning is a learner-driven, bottom-up approach that enables people to access the information when and where it is needed. People are able to collaborate and make the best use of the supporting technology that links them to one another and sources of information. The focus is on performance (what you can do), sharing knowledge that leads to better performance (collaborating), and providing two-way feedback about the information that affects what others will learn (communicating).

## **Continuous Learning**

In the 20th century, when hands made things and we needed to manage those hands, there was time to learn. In the 21st-century knowledge economy, work is produced by minds, and we are quickly learning how to manage them. We've realized that everything is changing more quickly. The idea of learning something someday or soon no longer works. Making sure that everyone in the organization can connect using any number of devices enables people to ask for and receive just-in-time information that will help them continuously improve performance. It is one of the key characteristics of a managing minds organization.

There are many ways to help facilitate continuous learning and help people use and develop the skills they need. Managers, in companies managing minds, play a critical role in helping people develop self-directed learning skills, including curation, critical thinking, effective communication, active participation, self-reflection, creativity, and emotional intelligence. There are a number of useful insights and strategies to support and direct people so their skills can be used, practiced, and developed.

## **Policies and Workspaces**

In the previous industrial economy of managing hands, work was all about what you did. If you could do it faster and cheaper legally (but not necessarily ethically), it was business as usual. If you closed the lid on your moral compass when it no longer seemed useful, that was OK. You could have the illusion that you were invisible and focus solely on doing the next thing right. Now it's all about how you operate. The things that you produce can be made by almost anyone. Who you are is unique. The key is not about just doing the next thing right, but doing the next right thing.

Companies that are learning to manage minds are focused on being open, transparent organizations in which collaboration and communication are basic operating principles. They believe that sharing knowledge is power, and continuous learning is the key to successfully meeting the challenges of the knowledge economy. Failures are to be learned from and not hidden. Opposing viewpoints and ideas are valued and listened to by everyone in the company. Conversations are open and honest. The hierarchy of roles, and the secrecy and compartmentalization that go with it, has been replaced by the hierarchy of ideas, in which openness is a prerequisite.

Everything in a company managing minds reflects the beliefs and attitudes that make a managing minds company work. There are numerous examples from companies around the world—from policy guidelines and statements, to employee handbooks and onboarding guides, to the choice of wall colors and the open design of workspaces—that contribute to the feeling that everyone is in a company that values and fully supports their ability to use their minds to produce their best work.

## **Making the Shift**

It should be clear by now that organizations everywhere need to stop managing hands and transition to managing minds to succeed in the knowledge economy. There are several key steps managers need to follow to make the shift. They range from creating the right culture, to understanding how to manage in ways that ensure individuals, teams, and the entire organization are ready to fully participate in a company managing minds. There are many ways to assess the extent to which the company is already managing minds and where there is room for improvement. Being able to complete these assessments is a critical first step to becoming a managing mind company.

## Workplaces of Tomorrow

Imagine that we have traveled to the not-too-distant future. From the most high-tech companies to the oldest factories and mills, all organizations are managing minds. We can envision what a day in that life would feel like.

There is a purpose to imagining a company in which people are managing minds. The current neuroscience theory is that we use the past as a scaffold to build an image of the future; the way we did things in the past helps determine what we will do in the future. But the biggest problem any organization has when it tries to change is the inability to imagine a different way of doing things. So imagining a company in which we are managing minds, doing things very differently from when we were managing hands, is necessary if we are to get from here to there, from today to a better future.

The practice of managing minds is becoming the new normal, even though its parts have received more attention than the whole. We see these pieces discussed and written about every day. They indicate a desire to make the workplace more engaging and productive. What managers are realizing is that it's not about events and perks; it's about making a profound cultural shift from managing hands to managing minds.

## Afterword

You cannot keep doing what you have always done, hoping it keeps working as it always did. That is magical thinking. In the knowledge economy, trying to maintain the status quo becomes a company's obituary. You need to keep learning and changing.

These new knowledge economy companies are being forced to learn how to manage the way people think, process information, and make decisions to survive and thrive in the new global, digital, hypercompetitive economy. We believe that people who can adapt to this new management environment will have successful and satisfying careers. Our hope is that these new companies will be kinder, gentler, and more concerned about how they affect their workers, families, and communities. These companies can choose to be more socially responsible and environmentally sustainable, with a stronger moral compass than their predecessors. They are dealing with the whole person; to them, the idea of work-life balance is no longer a seesaw, but a circle in which work is a part of life. In a company managing minds, each mind is irreplaceable and brings a unique set of ideas, experiences, skills, talents, abilities, and passion to grow professionally and personally. That is one of the great differences between a company managing hands and one managing minds.

We hope *Minds at Work* can be a map that shows you what this new workscape looks like, and how to shift to a new way of managing that is helping create some of the world's most successful knowledge economy companies.

*Minds at Work* will be published by ATD Press in December 2017, and is available for pre-order from Amazon and other online bookstores.

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