The Leadership Toolbox (CD-ROM)

The Professional Learning Unit of Shell International Exploration and Production B.V. (Global Learning and Development, The Hague, The Netherlands; 2000) GB£130; US$195

REVIEWED BY GREG LATEMORE CMC

The unnamed authors of *The Leadership Toolbox,* a CD-ROM learning tool, introduce the material by asserting:

> This is a one-stop shop that underpins the Business, Commercial, Team and Self Skills Portfolio (BTS) used by Shell International. The principle of providing a "just in time" source of quality information at your desk is relevant for any organisation and the Toolbox will meet most of your educational needs for personal and team development.

There are nine BTS "ellipses" (topics) within the main menu: (1) Manage Self—Own Performance and Development; (2) Work and Lead in Teams; (3) Create and Manage Change; (4) Drive Down Costs and Cycle Times; (5) Grow the Business; (6) Develop and Manage Alliances; (7) Focus Externally; (8) De-velop Customer Intimacy; and (9) Assure Future Presence and Reputation

The content menu for each one of these topics contains the following headings:

- Soundbites (2-page summaries)

- Learning Modules (25 pages each)

- Open/Distance Learning (on a separate mail-order basis)

- Business School Courses (most are understandably from the U.K. or France [INSEAD], Spain [ESPN], or Switzerland [Lausanne]).

There are also links to an order form, a search facility, a glossary, a site map, and study aids.

Curiously, no learning modules or open/distance learning material were provided under "Develop and Manage Alliances" or "Focus Externally," nor was there any explanation offered—perhaps the CD-ROM was released before completion?

An Assessment

What was perplexing and then annoying about this mode of learning was the sheer difficulty in getting to the items on the CD-ROM. Even for computer-literate reviewers (!), the number of screens needed to access the material and to access Acrobat Reader was excessive. Surely CD-ROM material can be more user-friendly—especially for Generation "X"-ers?

The summary booklet states, "at the end of some Soundbites and many of the Learning Modules you will find extensive lists of further reading material." But I could find no such references apart from a short, somewhat dated reading list that listed ISBNs but provided no publication details. The reading list is also inadequate given the range of nine major content areas—there seem to be only 19 references provided for the whole Toolbox. Their authors include Meredith Belbin, Peter Drucker, Tom Peters, Peter Senge, and Noel Tichy.

I find it puzzling that the Toolbox's "Study Aids" acknowledges that learning is an active process—and yet there is little encouragement in the CD-ROM contents to discuss, apply, use, experiment, or reflect upon the material. Just as a one-day seminar can hardly teach you skills in a variety of topics, this Toolbox seems to suffer from the assumption that solitary and passive exposure will equip the reader with leadership skills.

The assertion that this Toolbox "provides 'just in time' information at your desk" is supported; the claim that "this Toolbox will meet most of your educa-

tional needs for personal and team development" is simply unsustainable—unless one adopts the view that learning is not only solitary and passive but also not in need of assessment or application. This CD-ROM merely offers awareness raising.

For a human resource manager or an organizational development professional, this Toolbox might be useful in scoping the menu for in-depth interventions.

Best Practice in Leadership Development

The art and science of leadership development is alive and well throughout many Western organizations. However, this CD-ROM appears to recognize little of the learning elements in contemporary, best practice leadership development.

Best practice in leadership development these days includes at least:

- Issues mapping and needs analyses
- Being a mentor or having a mentor
- Personal learning contracts
- Personal leaning journals
- 360-degree feedback
- Chat rooms and/or book clubs
- Case studies—especially tailored to the organization
- Selected articles from current "thought leaders"
- A list of websites on contemporary authors and "blue ribbon" universities
- Action learning or action research projects
- Syndicate discussions/strategic conversations
- Self-report questionnaires
- Socratic-style questions for reflection and clarification
- Summaries, review questions, and additional readings

If *The Leadership Toolbox* contained any of these learning elements, I was unable to find any information about them.

Conclusion

I endeavored to suppress any potential "luddite" bias expressed as a preference for printed articles and books, but was frustrated by not being able to copy the material off the screen for a more careful scrutiny. So, especially for highly computer literate learners, this CD-ROM provides quick access to a variety of important topics in organizational behavior, financial management, customer relations, and change management. As a complete toolbox for learning, certainly for such a complex and important field as leadership, it is inadequate.

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