Sustaining Distance Training
(Book review)

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Sustaining Distance Training
Zane L. Berge (Ed.)
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Training or education? Berge writes: "Training has to do with the learners' acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are useful to them immediately to improve performance on the job. Education … is just-in-case and not just-in-time." (p.4). He also writes he "strongly believe that there must be a direct and clear link between training and the solving of a business problem." (p.4). As he looks at the mega-trends affecting training and education (p. 10 -12), he concluded that "today's organizational focus needs to be on learning, not training, in meeting business goals in the competitive environment". (p.11) By this, he means "a move toward all students' taking responsibility for their own learning…. Helps employees accomplish a variety of jobs and solve unpredictable problem". This book is about training in organizations which embrace the notion of "learning organization".

Quoting Schreiber, a brief model that describes stages of organizational maturity with regard to delivery of distance education/training is:

- Stage 1: Separate or sporadic distance learning events occurring.
- Stage 2: Infrastructure to support distance learning events established
- Stage 3: Established distance learning policy supporting stable and predictable learning events
- Stage 4: Distance training and learning institutionalized with practices aligned with business objectives and systematic assessment and evaluation of the distance training and learning program.

Stage 1 is characterized by effective use of project management processes. Stage 2 is more on program management. Stage 3 shifts to organization development and cultural change and Stage 4 is about organizations' strategic planning to guide cultural change and resource allocation. This book is a collection of 17 case studies (in Parts Two to Four), two chapters in Part One and 1 chapter in the final Part Five. These case studies cover organizations of different stages of maturity and summarize the organizational obstacles encountered as well as the pitfalls and limitations that were overcome in meeting the business goals and objectives through distance training. These case studies cover 17 organizations including for-profit, nonprofit and government organizations, all at the leading edge of change.

As such, this book is not about training design or pedagogical design. This book is for organizational managers, performance consulting professionals, and practitioners charged with the training functions in organizations.

The key word in the title is "Sustaining". The case studies collectively show the readers how the 33 authors approached their unique organizational context to create sustaining learning organizations. In about 400 pages, the readers can gain insight to the war stories of these practitioners. If the editor of the book has provided discussion questions to guide the understanding of each case study, the value of this book as a text in a business school program would be greatly enhanced.