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Non-linear learning in large technological firms: Period four implies chaos $\hat{\sim} \dagger$

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Abstract

Advancing technology is causing rapid and often uncharted changes for many large firms. Responses to these changes reveal the more radical, non-linear forms of organizational learning to be even more important than previously believed. This article identifies types of organizational learning in large high technology firms; proposes a learning framework derived from previous work; augments the framework with an intensive case study of one exemplar; and focuses upon the discontinuous learning abilities needed during two learning periods which are especially critical today, crisis and renewal of innovation. Stages at which a successful technological unit must alter radically its learning modes are identified and analyzed. Strategic managerial practices to enhance innovation by fostering appropriate organizational learning modes are presented.



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† The phrase “period four implies chaos” is an allusion to a pathbreaking article in that branch of modern physics known as chaos theory [46]. In layman's terms, Yorke proved that in any one-dimensional system driven by increasing change regular cycles of activity emerge. These do not remain stable and predictable, however, but are punctuated by both chaos and bits of ephemeral order.

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