

Andrew Sense, *Cultivating Learning within Projects*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

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Andrew Sense's *Cultivating Learning within Projects* is concerned with the dynamics of learning in a project-based environment. At 200 pages, it is not a thick book, but it is densely written and argued. Drawing on a participative action research study conducted within an Asian heavy engineering company, Sense introduces a five-fold model of how informal workplace learning in projects can be either enabled or constrained by the cognitive styles of leaders and participants, the learning relationships between them, the pyramid of authority, knowledge management and the project's situational context. Here, cognitive style refers to a person's preferred way of gathering, processing and interpreting information. More than that, it refers to the totality of dispositions, motives, feelings and sense of self-identity that practitioners carry. Following Argyris, Sense makes the point that in the high-pressure 'world of projects, relationships between participants can regress to defensive routines and thus avoid discussion of difficult project issues. Moreover, recourse to positional authority usually means the end of any positive learning. Paradoxically, there is reluctance – perhaps an ability – to use power or authority to support learning.

Project teams are necessarily multidisciplinary, if not transdisciplinary in character. Project work involves skilled professionals who need to cooperate one with another not only to achieve a project outcome, but also their own set tasks within it. While project teams have much in common with communities of practice, a particular insight for me in reading this book was Sense's development of the construct. Since projects are necessarily focused on specific, usually near-term outcomes, the professional identities of the team are largely formed externally. This is not deny that the very best project teams can develop shared values and an identity in common, yet often the project, its practices and artefacts serve as locations and occasions for knowledge exchange between multiple communities of practice and, sadly, incommensurable professional discourses.

This densely argued book repays careful reading. In our manic 'just do it' (JDI) world, Andrew Sense deserves our thanks for encouraging us to take the possibility of learning within projects seriously.

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