

CORPORATE UNIVERSITIES: LESSONS IN BUILDING A WORLD-CLASS WORK FORCE

Corporate universities that invest in flexible learning and innovation to manage knowledge are “emerging into the twenty-first century as the fastest growing sector of higher education,” writes Jeanne Meister. Several trends support this growth: “the emergence of the flat, flexible organization; the transformation of the economy into a knowledge economy; the shortened shelf life of knowledge; the new focus on lifetime employability rather than lifetime employment; and a fundamental shift in the global education marketplace” (1).

In 8 chapters, 256 pages, *Corporate Universities* addresses the phenomenon as a model for higher education and as a force for cultural change:

1. Changes in the Workplace
2. How the Corporate University Model Works
3. Designing a Corporate University
4. Learning Program at Best Practice Corporate Universities
5. Corporate Universities Become Learning Laboratories
6. Outreach: Forging Partnerships with Suppliers, Customers, and Institutions of Higher Education
7. Corporate Universities: Opportunity or Threat to Higher Education?
8. Twelve Lessons in Building a World-Class Work Force

A corporate university is defined as “a strategic umbrella for developing and educating employees, customers, and suppliers to meet an organization’s strategies” (267). Although *Corporate Universities* is five years in print, its prognostications about the attractions of online learning are borne out by the ways it growth affects higher education. Chapter 8, “Twelve Lessons” is particularly helpful for its advice on linking learning with mission, earning and corporate citizenship; developing alliances with higher education; obtaining accreditation; and developing the corporate university as a brand for competitive advantage. In fact, the twelve lessons align well with higher education’s revitalized focus on learner-centered teaching. An appendix provides the names and addresses of 50 exemplary corporate universities that regard education as a lifelong, ongoing endeavor.

Are corporate universities a threat or an opportunity to institutions of higher education?
Meister answers:

[They] have proliferated because offer a market-driven model of education with a focus on convenience, self-service and uniformity of product. As a group, these entrants represent both an opportunity for partnering as well as direct competition to the traditional educational system.

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