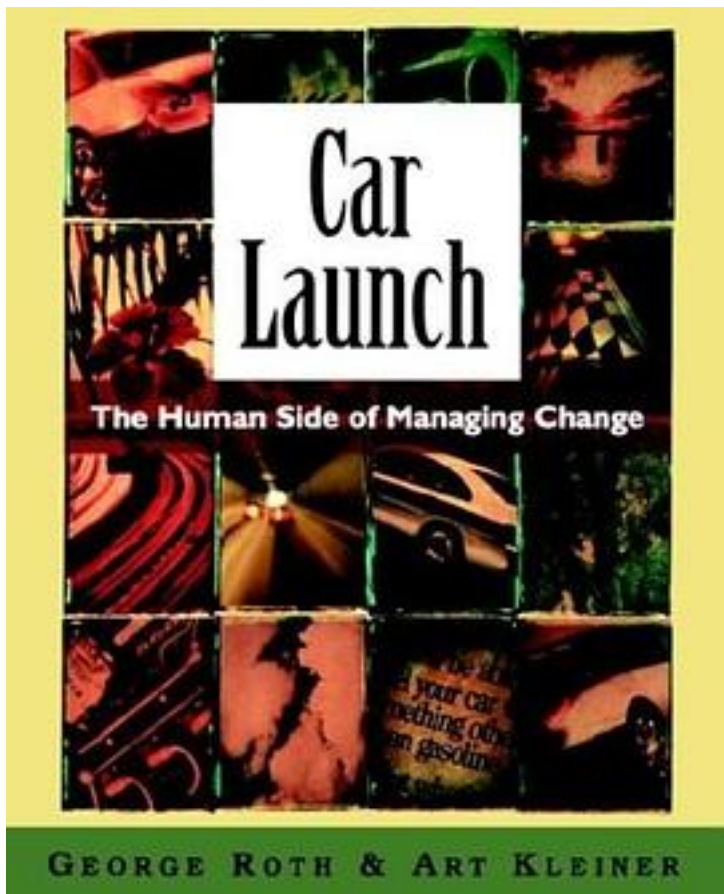


Car Launch



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"Car Launch" is the first book in the "Oxford Learning History Library", edited by Art Kleiner and George Roth, who originated the concept of learning history, and presented it formally in an article published in the "Harvard Business Review". The general editors are also authors of this particular volume. These extended, "living" case

studies, starting with "Car Launch", use an innovative format based on "the jointly told tale", narrating the story of major intra-firm transitions, in this instance an innovative car launch. Organizations everywhere are experimenting with innovative pilot projects. Here's a story of one group that succeeded dramatically, even while facing the rigours of open opposition. Told in the words of the people who were there, with commentary by the authors and other observers, this document was first commissioned by the firm (AutoCo) to help production teams learn from each other across organizational boundaries. The automobile industry is going through turmoil and this book shows why. It also provides an "insider" look at relationships between subordinates and bosses. As part of the validation process, several people within the (unnamed) organization agree that the interview selection is representative, and that findings and perspectives of the study are valid. This story will be of interest to any manager, or student of management, who is, or will be, engaged in transformation work, and who wants to improve development and manufacturing operations. In the new business environment, every company will face this kind of change, sooner or later. "Car Launch", and other learning histories, will prepare students and employees for similar experiences in their own firms. Students of management theory and business people alike can work from this story to develop their own participatory action research initiatives. The authors experience with corporate managers is that most find it far easier to read, and identify with, a learning history than a formal report, or traditional case study. The narrative, told by participants in their own words, draws students and managers into the story; the interpretative remarks give the reader suggestions on broader applications of the story. Although unfamiliar to many of those in fields of business research dealing with organizational change, the learning history succeeds in balancing the traditional research, with pragmatic imperatives and powerful imagery. While not reading like traditional "research," the study has been conducted with as much rigour as any form of qualitative social science research. Discussion of the learning history concept is available in the new "Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: The Dance of Change" (Doubleday, 1999) and on the MIT and Society for Organizational Learning websites. Reviewers have acclaimed the learning history as a concept which is not only "useful but essential" for business education. One management professor writes: "there is nothing that comes close to developing and preparing students (or employees) for the new work environment." And Peter Senge of the Sloan School of Management has remarked: "Learning histories have proven to be a critical piece in solving the puzzle of learning about learning."

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