



Review

Mob Rule Learning: Camps, Unconferences, and Trashing the Talking Head

Michelle Boule. Medford, NJ: CyberAge Books, 2011. 230 pp. ISBN: 978-0-91096-592-7. \$24.95.

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When I first started reading *Mob Rule Learning*, the title put me off a bit. Why? Well, to me, *mob* has a negative connotation. It is soon obvious that the title is meant to catch the attention of the reader, and it does just that. Boule uses *mob* where other authors might use the word *crowd*. The purpose of this work is to show “how a mob of professionals can take the power back from the talking heads to educate themselves and share their collective knowledge in meaningful ways --- and maybe, just maybe, change the world in the process” (p. 4).

This book is divided into two parts. Part one focuses on using unconferences for professional development. Part two takes a look at the classroom and how to change the rules of learning, much in the same vein as part one.

In chapter one, “Traditional Conferences: What They Do and How They Get It Wrong,” Boule examines what conferences get right but then clearly shows what they do not do well. They tend to be “more about the organization putting on the conference than the

people attending” (p. 7). She points out most conferences do a mediocre job of facilitating learning and providing information. According to Boule, the most useful learning happens outside of the presentation hall. She also examines many other problems with the conference setting, such as the distance between the planner and the attendee. She ends the chapter with one radical intention: to turn the idea of the traditional conference on its head. She advocates for the unconference or the camp and suggests, “A small gathering of people, self-organizing, has a greater potential to meet their own needs” (p. 15). In my mind, this is a radical and innovative idea worth considering.

The next few chapters define the unconference, also called a camp, and examine how to conduct such an event. One innovative concept she explains is Open Space Technology (OST). It is an anthropological technology that “hinges on the belief that a group of people, given a purpose and freedom, have the ability to self-govern, self-organize, and produce results” (p. 17). An unconference “will have little or no agenda, no predetermined outcomes, and no predetermined leaders” (p. 18). Boule goes on to examine how OST relates to unconferences and examines common elements from successful unconferences. Boule also examines various facilitation styles including appreciative inquiry, birds of a feather, dotmocracy, the fishbowl, and more. The rest of part one looks at how to organize successful unconferences and examines several case studies.

Part two, “Changing the Rules of Learning,” looks at applying the ideas of mob rule to the learning process and to the classroom. She asserts the biggest problem with learning today is the lecture, which, according to Boule, has been used in universities since at least 927 AD. She states, “the mob has the capacity, knowledge, and ability to become a self-educating entity” (p. 100).

In later chapters, Boule examines how classrooms are typically passive learning environments that ignore the large mix of learning styles of individuals. The traditional classroom lecture works best for auditory learners; visual and active learners need a different environment. She suggests that the ideas from mob rule could be applied in the group work that has become traditional in many modern classrooms. Boule contends that learning must move outside of the classroom and the traditional classroom time schedule. She then discusses how this could be accomplished with the use of computer technologies and the Web. She points out that much of the continuing education offered to us is also stuck in the classroom and suffers many of the same problems as traditional higher education.

Boule continues on to examine the benefits and challenges of moving out of the classroom by discussing the use of Blackboard and other learning management systems. She discusses the blended classroom where students do work online but also meet face-to-face in the classroom. Boule next examines how mob rule could be applied to continuing education. She suggests ways organizations can enable their own mob rule learning by getting people to create their own knowledge ecosystem. She suggests tools and strategies for doing this and then provides case studies of successful mob rule learning being applied.

Boule ends her book with a short conclusion and manifesto. Her ideas and conclusions are interesting and certainly innovative. This book is a must read for all those tired of the traditional conference model and classroom learning environment who hope to find a way to change the status quo.

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