



Edgewalkers: People and Organizations That Take Risks, Build Bridges, and Break New Ground

Judi Neal

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In ancient cultures, each village had a shaman or medicine man who would visit the invisible world to obtain vital information, guidance, and healing for members of the tribe. These edgewalkers have contemporary counterparts in today's organizations—those individuals who don't fit squarely into any one box; in their metaphorical travels they interpret trends from the marketplace, translate messages across departments, and envision the future impact of today's decisions and actions. Edgewalking doesn't come without its own risks and challenges; these unconventional people often clash with more traditional, rule-bound colleagues, and they are often frustrated by organizational systems that emphasize quantitative results over creative impulses. And yet in today's fast-changing, diverse, and globalized business environment, organizations must recruit and support these people in order to stay competitive. Featuring colorful interviews and practical tools to gauge and manage your own edgewalking skills, *Edgewalkers* explores the opportunities that are created by defying formal boundaries and fostering creativity at every level of the organization.

They're the first people to volunteer to head up a new business unit, lead a cross-company initiative, or take on an overseas assignment. They're the glass half-full folks, who are constantly thinking out of the box, forging alliances with colleagues in other departments, seeking out new solutions to old problems, and anticipating challenges on the horizon. And in today's increasingly diverse workplaces, they are often people who have pursued unusual educational and career paths, traveled widely, and speak more than one language. Judi Neal has a term for these people: Edgewalkers.

Literally, an edgewalker is someone who walks between two worlds. In ancient cultures, each village had a shaman or medicine man who would visit the invisible world to obtain vital information, guidance, and healing for members of the tribe. Today's corporate edgewalkers serve a similar function, interpreting trends from the marketplace, translating messages across departments, and envisioning the future impact of today's decisions and actions. Edgewalking doesn't come without its own risks and challenges; these unconventional people often clash with more traditional, rule-bound colleagues, and they are often frustrated by organizational systems that emphasize quantitative results over creative impulses. And yet in today's fast-changing, globalized business environment, organizations must recruit and support these people in order to stay competitive. Featuring colorful interviews with edgewalkers from a variety of fields and practical tools to gauge and manage your own edgewalking skills, *Edgewalkers* explores the opportunities that are created by defying formal boundaries and fostering creativity at every level of the organization.

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