



Organizational Learning at NASA: The Challenger and Columbia Accidents (Public Management and Change series)

Julianne G. Mahler

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Just after 9:00 a.m. on February 1, 2003, the space shuttle *Columbia* broke apart and was lost over Texas. This tragic event led, as the *Challenger* accident had 17 years earlier, to an intensive government investigation of the technological and organizational causes of the accident. The investigation found chilling similarities between the two accidents, leading the *Columbia* Accident Investigation Board to conclude that NASA failed to learn from its earlier tragedy.

Despite the frequency with which organizations are encouraged to adopt learning practices, organizational learning—especially in public organizations—is not well understood and deserves to be studied in more detail. This book fills that gap with a thorough examination of NASA's loss of the two shuttles. After offering an account of the processes that constitute organizational learning, Julianne G. Mahler focuses on what NASA did to address problems revealed by *Challenger* and its uneven efforts to institutionalize its own findings. She also suggests factors overlooked by both accident commissions and proposes broadly applicable hypotheses about learning in public organizations.

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