

Learning Experts at Work: How Social Tools and Technology Catalyzed a Learning Renaissance

Insight and analysis from industry-leading experts on
expanding corporate knowledge in the digital age

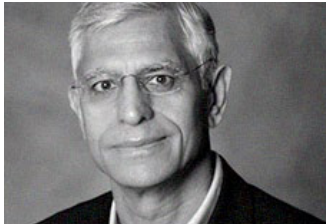
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Vikesh Mahendroo is CEO of Intrepid Learning and provides strategic leadership focused on finance and client, board, and investor relations. Prior to Intrepid, Vikesh held a distinguished 23-year career with Mercer Human Resources Consulting, concluding with his position as President of the U.S. Company from 2000-2006.

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Dear Friends,

Millions of words have been written about social networks and mobile technology and their impact on consumers, companies and communities all over the world. Is there anything more to be said? In a word, yes.

The following pages feature new insight from some of the brightest experts in the learning and technology fields. Each in his or her own way reveals how breakthrough technology and social tools are helping all of us to learn — and to learn more naturally, quickly and deeply than ever before. I learned something new from each of the contributors to this special report.

- David Metcalf shows how social networks increase corporate knowledge and performance.
- Ann Farmer and Julie Clow explain the importance of learning cultures in business, and how we can teach each other.
- Ethan Zuckerman reveals the inner workings of participatory media.
- Ellen Wagner takes us back to the fundamental truth: that learning is a human exercise, not a technological one.
- Clark Aldrich talks eloquently about the role of games and simulations in enterprise learning.

- Elliott Masie focuses on the promise and potential of video chat as a means of learning.
- Tony Bingham takes us inside how the CIA is using social networks to increase learning.
- Duncan Lennox celebrates Apple's role in the new wave of learning now taking place.
- Chris Hedrick shares his personal story about the Peace Corps' use of mobile devices to teach in far off places.
- And Darin Hartley tackles the reluctance of some companies and individuals to use social media or mobile technology for learning.

This is a stimulating mix of expert perspectives. I believe — and hope you will too — that each viewpoint expressed here is worth pondering.

Let us know what you think. What questions did these experts raise for you? What did you learn? What did you wish you'd learned, but didn't?

We very much want to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Vikesh Mahendroo
CEO, Intrepid Learning



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Digital Technology Can Enable — But Not Guarantee — Learning

by Ellen Wagner, Ph.D.

Innovative technologies like games, mobile apps, smartphones, Twitter, Facebook and other social or collaborative tools are definitely deepening learning today.

You get faster response times; a greater number of channels for sharing ideas and information; better communications; the ability to respond more quickly to market conditions, reach specific market segments with targeted solutions, and target messaging to specific stakeholders; more holistic performance support; and a greater number of channels for accessing learning / training assets. In addition, the back-send data collection enables great analytics for those who really use metrics.

I'm particularly impressed with the way that smartphones and Web conferencing deliver knowledge anywhere. You can have a job in New York, for example, and never come to the office, but still gather and process information every single day, from just about every single continent.

That said, it's really important to remember that digital technologies don't do the learning — people do. Digital technologies do create more ways for people using the technologies to respond to — and engage in — learning

events and opportunities, however. And the depth of the learning may be correlated with technology use, of course; but the presumption that the learning is due to technology alone has been shown time and time and time again to be false. Digital technology is simply enabling. And we should leave it at that.

There is also no generational divide when it comes to digital learning. In my experience, it really depends on the context and use case, as well as relevancy. If a new technology — whatever it is — provides greater return, and that greater return is articulated, and the value is clear, then people don't resist. If a new technology introduces more pain and greater barriers with no particular evidence of benefits to be accrued, then of course there is resistance. It doesn't matter how old or young you are.

“ Digital technology is simply enabling. And we should leave it at that.”

I especially like Twitter as a knowledge tool today. I use it for my market tracking and competitive analysis work. This type of learning helps me stay smart about more things than other media in the past. I'm also starting

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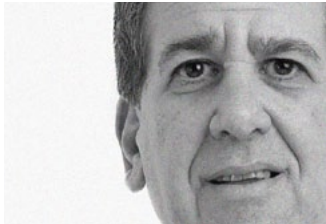
“ If a new technology introduces more pain and greater barriers with no particular evidence of benefits to be accrued, then of course there is resistance. ”

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to do a lot with predictive analytics for learning, and game layer developments for large data collection are pretty interesting in this realm.

One way or another, though, I'm fairly certain that we can all learn more and faster and better through technology; but we must have realistic expectations, and we must come to the table with an open mind in order to obtain the knowledge we need. ■■





Elliott Masie is an internationally recognized futurist, analyst, researcher and organizer on the critical topics of workforce learning, business collaboration and emerging technologies.

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Social Media Tools Provide Critical Context for Effective Learning

by Elliott Masie

Using social and collaborative tools today to enhance and enrich learning is really about the experiences that people have and what the tools, themselves, actually allow you to do.

Here's a good example: in some hospitals, surgeons now have their medical students play video games before going in to operate. The experience of using the games — no matter what the content — sharpens and engages the students.

This leads to a much larger point.

With the traditional model, the goal was to become a middle manager fast. As a result, you needed and required on-the-job training. Under the new model, however, the goal is to come in and get a range of experiences in order to become competent. That's where social tools become important. You can use them to talk to other new managers — and even established ones — to get the overall context and competence you need.

Having said this, I must confess that I'm a futurist and a Luddite. And I believe that all of the social and collaborative tools we're talking about today are provocative but insignificant cartoons.

Twitter by itself, for example, does not make a great heart surgeon. But when joined with

other social media tools, it helps connect legions of heart surgeons, and allows them to refine their skills so that the art and science that takes place in the operating room consistently improves based on shared knowledge. This ability to rapidly provide context for content, in my view, is the highest application for social tools right now. And it's a tremendously important application, without doubt.

A brief comment on gaming: it's very powerful as a learning tool, but it's also very far from widespread acceptance and deployment in the corporate environment. But we still need to keep our eye carefully trained on this tool, because of its huge promise and potential.

“ This ability to rapidly provide context for content, in my view, is the highest application for social tools right now. ”

Whether it's games or social media tools, the big challenge for learners is what they do with knowledge after they get it. It's not the information, but our ability to use or apply the information, that truly counts. Social media is a vibrant vehicle that helps you obtain information, but you have to engage and lean into it in order to get the necessary feedback. This is the case for all generations, even though

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“The ability to bring someone in instantly with low- to no-cost video contact really changes the game.”

the younger generation embraces these tools more fervently than the older generation.

From my perspective, though, video-chatting is one of the very best ways to teach and learn these days. The ability to bring someone in instantly with low- to no-cost video contact really changes the game. Many learning programs have yet to figure this out. But I'm confident they will, and that marketplace pressures will reinforce this over time. ■■





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Organizational Culture Trumps Tools When It Comes to Learning

by Ann K. Farmer and Julie Clow

Learning is a long-tail problem; however, the focus thus far has been on the front of the tail.

And that's understandable.

The long tail is hard, and it's expensive to build out programs that provide sustained knowledge, skills and information that people really need. Also, we need lots of niche expertise and workers, so it doesn't make sense to make mass tools for a slice of the working population.

That's why innovative Internet-enabled technologies like games, mobile apps, smartphones, and other collaborative tools are so important. They help individuals receive the customized information they must have on an as-needed basis.

We see this at Google, where we both work. It's a very social atmosphere. You can use the Internet to pose questions to a group, and usually someone in the company has the answers. It's low-tech and high-tech at the same time.

The other thing involved here is developing interfaces where we know who will interact with what. This helps us create the

right kinds of knowledge-based materials, suited to their intended audience.

We also believe that collaboration and mobile tools make it easier for people to experiment. And experimentation is absolutely core to innovation. In other words: get something out fast to see how it flies, and then iterate based on how it works. Or, to put it another way, we think you should test fast and test to a large volume of concepts. A higher volume of ideas means that more will stick. It's about learning; but it's also about breakthroughs. And online, collaborative tools get you the feedback much faster. You quickly know whether something is hitting and resonating — or not.

“ We also believe that collaboration and mobile tools make it easier for people to experiment. And experimentation is absolutely core to innovation. ”

Getting the input rapidly and directly helps you gain knowledge; and, by figuring it out yourself, that knowledge usually sticks. The Khan Academy is a good example of this. In no way is it a substitute for an in-class experience. But it allows you to get modular mastery

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**“ In the end, then,
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of the material. It deepens your learning experience, and it allows you to repeat content as needed. This approach to learning is not generation-specific. We don't see that at Google. The larger variables that trump generations when it comes to learning are organizational and cultural. You must have an innovative and collaborative culture to enable grassroots learning. Culture is the salient issue, whether the tools work or not.

In the end, then, the best learning cultures encourage people to help teach others in the organization. This happens at Google a lot. A company shouldn't get in-between the learner and the expert. Otherwise, you can't democratize the spread of knowledge. And that's what the next decade will require. ■■





Ethan Zuckerman served as a fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society from 2003 through 2009. Since 2009, he's been a senior researcher at the center, working on projects that focus on the impact of technology and media on the developing world and on quantitative analysis of media.

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Participatory Media Teaches Us So Much

by Ethan Zuckerman

The rise of social media is beginning to usher in an era where companies become much better at learning directly from customers about their wants, needs, satisfactions and dissatisfactions. Indeed, there are now whole categories of the business ecosystem designed to let companies know what their customers think and want, as measured through surveys, interviews and behavioral observation.

But, if you listen carefully to what customers are actually saying about you on social media, there's also a new, and more direct, way of understanding what they think; and this requires a sharp shift in corporate behavior. From my perspective, it's difficult to outsource listening as a form of market research. It's better to make listening a part of corporate behavior on all levels — not just in customer service or marketing departments.

So, looking at the long view, what's happening may be what “Doc” Searls identifies as a shift from an Attention Economy to an Intention Economy. In an Attention Economy, companies produce products and create advertisements to capture viewer attention and, eventually, their dollars. In an Intention Economy, customers tell producers what they want and companies compete to meet their needs. It's an extended shift from one to the other, but media that allows

everyone to speak and participate, like social media, is better matched to an Intention Economy than an Attention Economy.

One of the most promising developments in using participatory media for innovation is in the space of crowdsourcing. In general, the idea behind crowdsourcing is that it's possible for many problems to be tackled by large groups of relatively inexperienced people rather than a small group of experts.

“It's better to make listening a part of corporate behavior on all levels — not just in customer service or marketing departments.”

Some crowdsourcing is paid; for instance, many companies are turning to Amazon's Mechanical Turk service to digitize data that's hard for computers to process. This might involve thousands of low-paid workers looking at photos and identifying the names of any businesses shown in a photo that Google and others are using to verify business locations for their mapping services.

At other times, crowdsourcing simply relies on volunteer efforts. Facebook has translated its interface into dozens of different languages by letting volunteers

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“ It’s important to note that there are generational differences when it comes to social media learning.”

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offer local equivalents for the various phrases Facebook uses in its interface.

Crowdsourcing is a technique, not a technology. And it works remarkably well over mobile phones, as the Kenyan nonprofit, Ushahidi, has demonstrated. Ushahidi uses reports submitted by mobile phones to make maps of disasters, protests and other fast-moving news events.

Despite all its advantages, social media makes it possible to listen moment-to-moment, and it’s possible to over-react to an individual message. My view is that there’s a need to analyze and digest social media over long periods of time as well as reacting to short-term messages.

I say this because it’s important to realize that much of what’s created in social media reflects a person’s emotions at a particular moment in time — people speak when they feel strong emotions, which are often angry, frustrated, and desperate. Without contextualizing these messages, we can give the raw emotional content too much weight, and either conclude that our brand is doomed because our customers are angry, or that the Iranian regime is about to fall because people on Twitter support the Green Movement. The reality tends to be more complex, multifaceted and subtle.

This isn’t a reason to dismiss the sorts of knowledge we can take from participatory media. It just means that we need to learn how to listen at length. What we find out from

listening to a single conversation isn’t as helpful as what we learn from listening to a group of people over time, in different contexts. Over time, rumors are debunked, facts coalesce, and emotions turn into trends or movements. The key is to acknowledge the speed of the medium and learn not to draw conclusions as quickly as new input comes into play.

It’s important to note that there are generational differences when it comes to social media learning.

As Douglas Adams famously pointed out, anything invented before you were born is routine; anything invented before you were 30 is exciting and fascinating; and anything invented after you are 30 is against the natural order of things, for at least 10 years, at which point it becomes less threatening.

Grasping the universality of this observation helps us understand why different generations can react to participatory media so differently. Even “digital natives,” who’ve grown up on the Internet, but turned 30 before the advent of Facebook, can find a culture in which people share details of everyday life with a nebulous group of “friends” a little strange.

That’s why there are generation gaps between people using all sorts of new media tools. There are also, as Eszter Hargittai points out, skill gaps — not all 18 year olds are equally expert in digital media. To cope with these differences, it’s important to accept that using participatory media is a skill, not

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“ Given the positives and negatives, I believe social media is a more powerful tool for uniting than for dividing us.”

an inherent character trait. Some people are better than others, usually because they've spent more time understanding and mastering the tools. Recognizing that there are different skill levels lets us forgive those who make egregious errors and encourages us to identify people who are better with the tools than we are and learn from them.

Given the positives and negatives, I believe social media is a more powerful tool for uniting than for dividing us.

I think that citizen media — publication online about local events for a global audience, via blogs, Twitter, photos and video — is one of the most powerful tools we've ever seen for helping us understand how people think, feel and live in other countries.

The ability to cross borders of nation, culture and language is truly a potent Internet capability. But understanding this pervasive connectivity to comprehend how people in Tunisia are coping with the aftermath of their revolution, for instance, is pretty

complicated. Most of us don't know any Tunisians, don't speak French or Arabic, and don't know what questions to ask.

Citizen media provides a space where people report on events that impact their lives. They may be writing strictly for local audiences, but they're using participatory tools that make their observations and reports visible to a global audience. By translating and contextualizing these reports — a process we call “bridging” at Global Voices, an NGO focused on reporting that uses citizen media — we get the sort of window into other people's lives, joys and struggles that provides essential context for events that come sharply in and out of focus in the news cycle. And, in today's world, that's very important learning. ■■





The former CEO of Intrepid Learning Solutions, Chris Hedrick is Peace Corps Director in Senegal.

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A New Generation Teaches the World With Technology

by Chris Hedrick

The Peace Corps is experiencing a very interesting time around the world today. The organization is totally field driven, with 9,000 volunteers globally, and it's finding that information technology is changing what's possible in learning and development.

In Senegal, for example, we have 250 volunteers, and we're seeing that IT allows poor people to better help themselves — in the areas of forestry, agriculture, health care and small-scale economic development.

The reality is that most young Peace Corps volunteers understand, and have embraced, iTunes, Facebook, smartphones, social networking and mobile apps. And so, even in small villages with no Internet, but some cell-phone coverage, we're able to use technology in a productive and thoughtful way.

The process actually starts when volunteers are first selected and a Facebook page bubbles up before they arrive in a country. This immediately helps build a sense of community. And it leads to the on-the-job adoption of social media as a free, ubiquitous and essential tool. Volunteers use Google e-mail and Facebook almost every day. And many use iTunes, smartphones and iPods as part of the technology foundation when they're working in the field.

These technology assets help us in community building and training volunteers from afar. They also help volunteers to learn the appropriate foreign and local languages as well as the technical skills they need to make a real difference. This is especially important because most volunteers have a generalist background. They get face-to-face training that lasts

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nine weeks, but they need more learning. So we give them performance support in addition, because nine weeks just isn't enough on the technical side.

The extra learning includes a series of how-to videos that are 60-180 seconds in length. They offer three to five steps, and they're available on YouTube and iTunes. These videos provide a solid technical education for volunteers as well as just-in-time learning as they try to digest local languages for teaching purposes. In Senegal, the videos are dubbed into all the local languages.

Many of our volunteers live in low - or no - bandwidth environments, or in places

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“ But our larger learning is that if you embrace technology, and aren’t afraid of it, you can really break through...”

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with little or no access to electricity, so another key benefit of these how-to videos for both technical skills and language is that they are available just in time on iPods — whether you’re online or not. And this is having a huge impact out in the field.

As I mentioned, using technology in remote locations seems completely natural to this generation of volunteers and learners. They are acquiring critical and community-enhancing knowledge, and managing it,

through a host of shared Google documents and downloadable Internet-based tools. But our larger learning is that if you embrace technology, and aren’t afraid of it, you can really break through and reverse decades, and even hundreds of years, during which knowledge was simply inaccessible. ■■





David Metcalf, Ph.D., is CLO Advisor / Researcher at the Institute for Simulation and Training at the University of Central Florida. His specific areas of focus include: learning business strategy, performance measurement, operational excellence, outsourcing, and blended learning and mobile learning.

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Companies Can Generate Even Higher Performance with Faster Learning

by David Metcalf

Organizations today are blending everything from podcasts to Facebook and Twitter as a means of learning more, speeding up development cycles, and driving value. This melding is taking place for training purposes, but also in the areas of human performance and productivity in the enterprise.

I believe that we will see even faster access to information and even faster development cycles because of cloud computing and mobile technology. When the science of human performance is appropriately integrated, the results will be quite significant.

A good example of this is already taking place at Johnson & Johnson, where one of their business units in pharmaceutical R&D has formed a learning continuum that delivers collaborative research data and compliance training in 3D virtual worlds. Everything is then linked to traditional knowledge bases like SharePoint and extended to mobile devices. As a result, individuals, as well as the entire organization, have become smarter, better aligned, and more productive.

Sometimes the immediacy of the information and content in these new paradigms seems like traditional performance support. However, I believe that instantly-on mobile devices provide personalized

and collaborative intelligence that is, in so many cases, contextually relevant.

I especially like point-and-shoot learning that allows you to take a picture and form an instant visual search based on a text logo or object with immediate results. This type of learning embodies the promise of location-based services and brings together the Golden Triangle of mobile, social, and real-time.

The rise and spread of learning from mobile devices spans a number of generations. Casual and social games, for example, have garnered quite an audience among middle-aged women, while older demographics are

“As a result, individuals, as well as the entire organization, have become smarter, better aligned, and more productive.”

familiar with gaming constructs like card and board games that have online analogs. So, I'm quite optimistic that this type of learning won't be restricted to younger employees just starting out. It should have broad currency, usage, and results over time.

Looking ahead, I think we should keep our eyes on the concept of “learning theory mash-ups.” This approach will allow us to

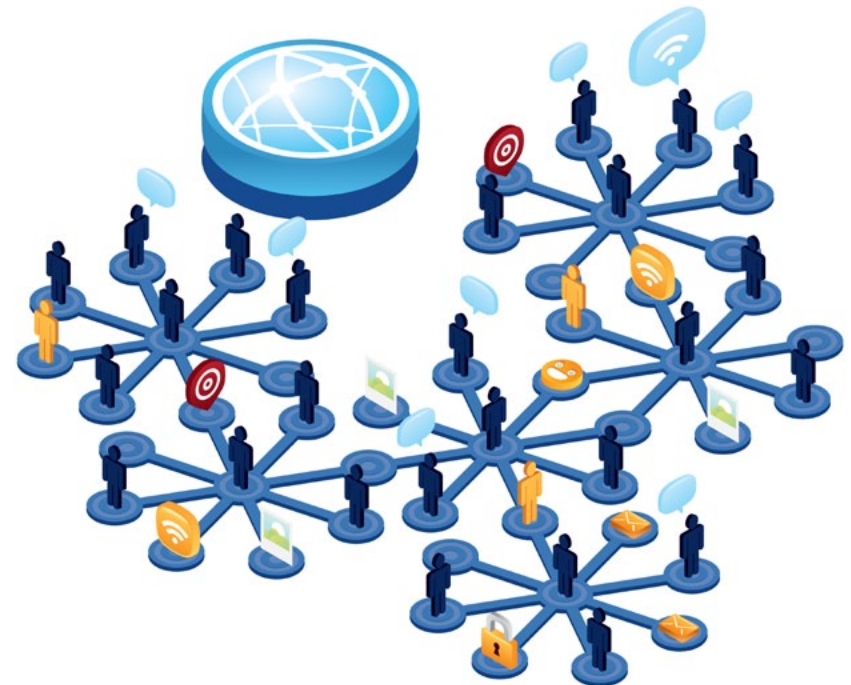
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achieve a level of granularity with each learning theory and will also enable us to apply the right technology to a very specific learning objective. This is very similar to a technology mash-up, which doesn't try to re-invent each component in a monolithic structure.

If we can harness and package a nimble set of technologies that work well together and are suited to their individual tasks at the same time, we're going to generate a lot of learning in the cloud and with other Web 2.0 models. This, in turn, will boost performance considerably in the coming years. ■■





Duncan Lennox is a passionate technologist dedicated to bridging the gap between technology and the real world. As co-founder and CEO of Qstream, a learning technology company spun off from Harvard University, Duncan strives to map out strategies and solutions that allow technology to be leveraged in new and unique ways.

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Social Media and Mobile Technology — Improving Learning Access and Engagement

by Duncan Lennox

I'm a big fan of social media tools and mobile technologies, and I believe that they have a role to play in learning. But we have to keep in mind that they are just that: tools and technologies. And when they are properly applied, they can help us get a job done.

Inappropriate uses of these tools and technologies, however, or a lack of understanding when it comes to their strengths and weaknesses, both generally and in a learning context, can do more harm than good.

In my view, there are two critical ways that social media tools and mobile technologies can help: improving access and improving engagement.

Smartphones are a great example of a technology that can obviously improve access by enabling a truly anytime, anywhere learning experience; but they will only be effective if the learning was designed to accommodate the advantages and limitations of the device. "Death by PowerPoint" on an iPhone is even more excruciating than on a PC or in a classroom.

Improving engagement is the less obvious but, in my view, higher impact opportunity. Leveraging social networks to allow

a more personalized group experience (e.g. reading comments from colleagues you know as opposed to everyone taking a course) and game mechanics such as points, leader-boards and incentives to drive participation can be powerful.

“Improving engagement is the less obvious but, in my view, higher impact opportunity.”

One of the positive examples of social media learning that I often cite is how innovative companies are using Twitter to have conversations with their customers.

Twitter has three critical elements that combine to make it very different from other communications tools — simplicity, immediacy and informality. The ability to monitor and respond to Tweets directed at your organization by customers, as well as the Tweets being discussed by them, is powerful. And the overhead to participate is so low that it's creating access to feedback that would otherwise be invisible and unavailable to a company.

Put another way, these are conversations that haven't simply moved from an alternative communications form, such as email, or even a support call on the phone; they simply wouldn't be happening without Twitter, and

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“Turning to mobile technologies, I don’t think they lend themselves particularly well to extended learning activities.”

smart companies are capitalizing on this and seriously engaging their customers in this very new way. Less-smart companies tend to use Twitter more as a tool to talk at customers and spew traditional marketing-speak. But the good thing is that Twitter exposes a lack of authenticity much faster than most other communication forms.

Turning to mobile technologies, I don’t think they lend themselves particularly well to extended learning activities. That said, if we can create better access and increase engagement, I believe we can drive far more discrete learning events. Learning is increasingly moving from occasional long events (a classroom lecture or a self-paced traditional online course, for instance) to more frequent and shorter events (five minutes of questions per day, but everyday, for example).

Of course, this isn’t a binary situation, where it must be one or the other; instead, it’s a blend of event types and lengths, but with a consistent shift over time away from “long but few” to “short but often.”

From an economics point of view, this also lines up very well with the reality of many workforce populations, such as a distributed sales force; these are the kinds of environments where we are seeing the shift to mobile learning happen first.

It’s very interesting to note the generational influences here.

We provide access to learning via a broad range of delivery options—from email, desktop browsers and RSS to newer avenues such as Facebook apps and smartphone apps. And our user population is distributed across the board—from 18-year-old college students to experienced professionals close to retirement.

We expected to see a clean split, with users under 30 opting for delivery options like Facebook and smartphones, and older populations skewing toward email and the Web. To an extent, this is what we see; but we’ve been surprised by how much usage across the board there’s been of Facebook and smartphones. So, while Twitter definitely skews younger and is poorly understood by older generations, Facebook and smartphones are being embraced across the user spectrum.

Our primary goal is to provide the options and let the individual user decide; and our experience has been that the shifts in technology are happening too fast to do it any other way. It’s very hard to predict which option a given user will pick, and the rise of Web 2.0 and changing consumer expectations has significantly lowered the tolerance for not having choice. This means that users are far less likely to accept your options if they don’t include the one they want.

As a result, this places a much greater burden—in terms of time, cost and support—on the organizations delivering the learning; and it will increasingly mean that they need to look to vendors who

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“Any discussion about digital learning today has to involve Apple.”

can handle delivery across these multiple platforms. It's not sustainable for a learning organization or IT department within an enterprise to manage the development and support of all these platforms themselves, or even manage a multi-vendor strategy.

Any discussion about digital learning today has to involve Apple. We have to credit Steve Jobs and his team with inventing the modern smartphone. And, like many of the greatest products, including Twitter, the iPhone's simplicity and elegance are part of its power. Unlike Twitter, however, the iPhone was perhaps the most intuitive computer-like device ever created — until the release of the iPad.

Looking ahead, I think in primary, secondary and higher education, the iPad will probably have a huge impact on formal learning, because of the immersive experience it can create. But in the enterprise, and with informal learning especially, the iPhone and its brethren, such as Android, will be game-changing when paired with learning that's designed to take advantage of their unique characteristics. ■■





The founder of Clark Aldrich Designs, a boutique education company, Clark Aldrich is a global education thought leader and one of the top educational simulation designers in the world.

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Simulations Generate More Organizational Learning than Social Media

by Clark Aldrich

We have two forms of social media today. The first social media encompasses blogs, wikis and podcasts. The second social media includes Twitter and Facebook. For the most part, companies seem to focus on the first social media.

Then there are mobile devices which are increasingly becoming a way of accessing knowledge; but it's very hard for organizations to create iPad apps and control distribution. I love the iPad as a knowledge tool, and it's a great goal to have businesses learn by using them; but right now, it's just a goal.

Games and simulations are a different story, however. They're interesting because they help drive confidence and conviction within an organization. This is a magical combination when it comes to learning. Games and simulations result in learning that sticks and has impact. They help employees develop greater awareness of situations, which is a real opportunity. It's always fascinating to watch people act how they would normally act, but in a game or simulated environment and then see the reactions that follow. Everybody gains a lot of knowledge that way.

One of the best simulations I've seen came from the Center for Army Leadership, which

helped improve the interpersonal aspects of being a soldier. This is obviously essential as the Army tries to shift from a chain-of-command structure to a more collaborative environment.

Simulations like this have lasting value. Akin to riding a bike or swimming — you never forget what you learn. That is simply not the case with social media, where the short-term knowledge gain is fleeting and we really don't remember what we've learned. We consume the information and discard it. But the nice thing about social media is that the trust in the person who provides the information lingers and lasts over the long term.

“ Games and simulations are a different story, however. They are interesting because they help drive confidence and conviction within an organization.”

That said, one of the greatest barriers to increased learning from social media within organizations today is lack of trust. The first instinct many people in a company have is “don't do it” — don't use Facebook during work; don't use an open wiki either. It won't be

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“ I see great amounts of knowledge in the workplace being imparted through simulations. ”

good for your career. These suspicions are most pronounced among the younger employees, and it's a problem we'll have to overcome if we're going to enrich and enhance learning through social media in the enterprise.

In the meantime, I see great amounts of knowledge in the workplace being imparted through simulations. From my perspective, they are definitely aligned to what matters. ■■





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Social Networking for Learning: We Shall Overcome Cognitive Dissonance

by Darin Hartley

Social networking. No longer trendy. Now, business-critical. And companies large and small use it to facilitate marketing, sales, customer support, employee/client readiness and related business processes.

But the social networking surround is continually morphing; and the diversity of platforms and tools can be daunting, even to those who experiment with new technologies regularly. This is exacerbated by the fact that with any "new" set of technologies, there tends to be some cognitive dissonance about their potential value and the human and organizational factors required to realize their full return.

For example, think about when email was first introduced. Many people were fraught with doubt, angst, and uncertainty over it. I was a part of two different companies when this revolutionary technology emerged and, looking back, the maelstrom (pun intended) around its implementation was, well, comical.

Similarly when the Internet and Web browsing were introduced, as well as that new-fangled "e-learning," there was plenty of gnashing of teeth. So much promise. Imagine learning through a connected worldwide network of computers right from your cubicle. Of course, we soon learned that same worldwide network of computers parsing learning

content could also be a conduit for games, jokes, inappropriate content, and other time wasters. Organizations were confounded.

“Social networking. No longer trendy. Now, business-critical.”

To implement or not to implement? Our latest adventure in cognitive dissonance is related to the recent explosion of social networking. When used appropriately, it has the power to help individuals and organizations drive value in real time via learning, information sharing, crowdsourcing, crowdscience, etc. And, as we've seen recently in the Middle East and elsewhere, it has the power to connect watershed movements to empathizers, and, ultimately, empathizers to the world.

However, echoes of ghosts (not so long) past have arisen. Companies are fearful of employees loafing, socializing, or wasting company time. But the truth is sluggards have existed since the dawn of time and long before Facebook or Twitter. In other words, no login required.

Since the late 1990s, I've noticed trends toward self-service and on-demand learning. Social networking technologies are the perfect enablers for this continued and increasing need for informal,

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“ But this fear-driven dissonance today can be overcome through skill development in the area of social learning. ”



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readily-accessible knowledge and business intelligence. Furthermore, social networking allows people to share knowledge with others. And, I believe, it's the sharing of information that speeds the creation of new ideas and value within organizations.

Within this social networking surround, what is the responsibility of the learning professional? The overwhelming amount of information and content available today — much of it irrelevant to our jobs — makes it imperative for today's learning professionals to evangelize and implement new and better ways for learners to quickly access and share the right information at the right time.

The dissonance around this for most learning professionals has several facets. 1) Leveraging social learning feels like giving up some of the control that people in the learning business often have had and like to exert. 2) If we allow everyone else to provide content and enable learning through non-formal tools ... what will we do? 3) As a learning professional, I don't think I know enough about the systems to feel comfortable in using them to enable learning. These can all be true, even though, fundamentally, we realize social networking at its core is about sharing and gathering information, just-in-time, and from trusted sources.

This is the next epic mind shift for learning organizations: Overcoming the cognitive dissonance of social learning inside organizations, so that these systems can be implemented and leveraged for greater organizational good.

If you're engaged in this struggle now, or want to try to implement social networking and social learning systems in your organization, consider the following tips for smoothing the dissonance along the way:

- Make the business case for learners to a business champion.
- Showcase examples of successful social networking and learning in other companies and, if possible, in your industry.
- Create a list of core technology requirements and identify potential technology offerings that map to them.
- Engage your IT team.
- Pick a pilot project and implement the social networking and learning for a specific initiative and logical set of participants.
- Review pilot results, make adjustments, and implement on a larger scale, as appropriate.

It's critical to remember that most new technology that brings (or forces change) is met with anxiety and resistance inside organizations, even the most progressive and enlightened organizations. This has always been the case. And it will continue to be the case.

But this fear-driven dissonance today can be overcome through skill development in the area of social learning.

And let's not forget that skill development is something we know a fair bit about — after all, it's one of our profession's core competencies. ■■



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How the New Social Learning Helps Business

by Tony Bingham

Innovative technologies and collaborative tools enhance and enrich learning in organizations in multiple ways.

First, they allow learning to be accessed when and where it's needed. Whether it's a "just-in-time" scenario that provides a customer with timely information, or a similar scenario that allows an employee to use commuting time to "learn on the go," learning becomes richer, more convenient, and more useful.

Employees can literally tap into a worldwide network of experts when they have a question, and they can work together, regardless of boundaries dictated by time or geography.

When learning is more dynamic and timely, relevant, and easier to consume, the organization benefits by having a workforce that is smart, skilled, responsive, and ready to succeed in a highly competitive global economy.

In my book, "The New Social Learning," there are several case studies of organizations that have incorporated these tools and have seen a positive impact on their business.

One is TELUS, the communications company based in Canada. They have transformed their learning function with the use of collaborative tools and digital technology.

One of the most interesting things they do is use video. For example, field technicians carry video cameras with them, and, if they encounter a particular problem or situation for which they need assistance, they'll shoot some video, feed it back to company headquarters, and within a short amount of time they'll have answers from other employees on how to solve the problem. The videos are highly practical, not highly produced, and have made significant improvements in the training and effectiveness of field technicians.

“ When learning is more dynamic and timely, relevant, and easier to consume, the organization benefits ... ”

A completely different example that's also included in my book comes from the CIA. Imagine an organization that is known for secrecy, and for which security is paramount, embracing collaborative technology. But that is just what the CIA did with its Intellipedia (wiki) platform. This tool enables agents around the world to share knowledge, tips, and ideas with each other to help advance the CIA's work.

Looking at this globally, I think digital technologies provide both substantial learning and knowledge that has momentary value.

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“Social media is a tool, not a solution.”



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Take a smartphone for example. Let's say I'm commuting to work and want to see how bad the traffic is. I can call up Google Maps and see what the road conditions are so I can plan the best route. That is momentary knowledge that is very helpful (especially if you live in an area with terrible rush hour traffic!). I can also download some podcasts to that same smartphone and listen to them while I'm commuting to work. Perhaps it's a Webinar or lecture I'm listening to that is telling me about a new product that I'll be selling. That is substantial learning that is going to help me do my job. The same technology enables both.

It's fair to ask if there's a difference in depth of learning with social media. But I think it depends on the topic and the learner. Social media is a tool, not a solution. It enhances the learning toolbox, yet there will always be a need for traditional avenues of learning.

I think that adopting these new technologies may be inherently easier for people in the millennial generation who have grown up using them, but I also believe that we are getting to a point where the generational lines are quite blurred when it comes to adoption of these tools. Indeed, according to some recent statistics, Baby Boomers are the fastest growing users on Facebook.

ASTD asked this very question in our research report, "The Rise of Social Media." The findings indicate that people across generations see the value of social media and think companies should use it more. Younger generations

may be getting more value out of the tools initially, but all generations see the value. The implementation of these tools in the workplace provides a great opportunity for organizations to work across generations, encouraging those who are tech-savvy, and perhaps younger, to mentor those who have less experience with technology.

My favorite digital technology breakthrough for learning is the mobile device, because it gives you the ability to learn anywhere and connect to virtually anyone. When all is said and done, I believe that mobile learning will transform our profession.

Recent statistics from the 2010 Tomi Ahonen Almanac estimate that there were five billion cell-phone subscriptions worldwide at the end of 2010. To me, that says the opportunities for m-learning are limitless. In addition, IDC estimates that more than 35 percent of the workforce will be considered mobile workers by 2013 — that's about 1.3 billion people. Finally, when you consider the fact that the millennial workforce prefers mobile phones over any other personal technology, I think it's clear that mobile learning is an area of vast promise and potential for learning and development as we move further along in the 21st century. ■■



Sam Herring is co-founder and President of Intrepid Learning. He leads the company's operations, consulting, market development and major account management functions. He is currently Chairman of ASTD's Board of Directors, and is recognized as a "Who's Who" training industry thought leader by Training Industry Inc.

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Conclusion—A Technology Renaissance for Learning

by Sam Herring

We are clearly experiencing a technology renaissance that is creating exciting possibilities for learning and its ability to transform individuals and organizations.

Our contributors in this special report have highlighted the impact of key trends, such as social media and other user-contribution technologies; the explosion of new and unfettered access to mobile devices; and the increasing "gamification" of work and life.

They have also pointed to new opportunities, including access to deeper analytics of learner behavior; enhanced access to learning experiences; heightened speed and instancy of learning; new possibilities for learning in groups and through immersive multimedia learning experiences; and the ability of social and collaborative solutions to solve the "long-tail" enterprise learning challenge.

But aside from the numerous benefits that stem from the learning applications of these technologies, is there an overarching takeaway? Is there something afoot that is fundamentally changing in enterprise learning today?

Yes.

I believe we are entering a new era of learning. And, as each of our contributors notes in a different way, we are beginning to truly focus on, understand, and enable the self-directed learner. We also have a wonderful set of solutions that can be thoughtfully utilized to help individuals learn from others amid the course of daily work routines.

The concept isn't new.

Indeed, Lombardo and Eichenger's 70/20/10 model has been with us for two decades. The difference is that we now have the tools that enable innovative approaches to learning outside the classroom in ways that complement, extend and grow upon the foundation of formal learning events.

“I believe we are entering a new era of learning.”

Our contributors make it clear that success with new learning technologies does not come without barriers. They note the importance of understanding organizational culture — is it open, collaborative and supportive of experimentation? And they also emphasize the importance of understanding your typical learner's experience with social and collaborative technologies.

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“ Our contributors’ enthusiasm is contagious, and there’s little doubt that they believe we are experiencing something new, something powerful and transformative.”

Interestingly, they reject the concept of a “generational divide” as a false barrier and an ineffective stereotype. This conclusion is supported by research from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, which shows that social network site visits for Internet users age 74 and older have quadrupled between 2008 and 2010, from 4 percent to 16 percent. (<http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Generations-2010.aspx>)

Our contributors’ enthusiasm is contagious, and there’s little doubt that they believe we are experiencing something new, something powerful and transformative.

One of our writers cautions us, however, to be prepared for the challenge of rising learner expectations and increased demand for choice across a range of learning experiences. That said, it’s important to remember how easy it can be to get started; and how ready learners are to embrace new approaches and experiment with new designs.

Just consider the example of the Peace Corps in Senegal, for instance. With limited budgets and resources, volunteers are leveraging free and low-cost applications and mobile devices, creating valuable learning experiences with video, and forming their own communities of practice.

Taken together, efforts like these are transforming the lives of millions of people. But they also represent a very exciting moment in enterprise learning, because they’re driving tangible business and organizational results through far-reaching experimentation, creativity and innovation. ■■

