

Social Learning Unleashed

BY JEANNE C. MEISTER AND KARIE WILLYERD



Reinvented, redefined and reimagined, social learning has the potential not only to shape tomorrow's enterprise, but also to powerfully enhance workforce performance.

Victor Restrepo, a technical sales professional at Sun Microsystems, completes sales training during his 90-minute commute each day from New Jersey to New York City. He simply searches Sun's Social Learning eXchange (SLX) for videos from his peers, who share best practices on how to sell a particular product or service, and downloads them to his iPod Touch.

"In the past, I had to flip through about a hundred slides of a marketing presentation to learn about a new product or service. Now I just download the highest-rated 10- to 15-minute-long videos from salespeople who actually sold the product," Restrepo said.

Analogous to a corporate YouTube, SLX allows Sun employees to record and post any type of content, from documents to videos, which can be viewed on anything from a desktop computer to Restrepo's iPod.

Welcome to the new world of learning, where answering the question, "How are you helping me learn?" may be the secret to competitive advantage. According to a 2003 study by Peter Lyman and Hal Varian from the University of California at Berkeley, knowledge is now doubling every three years, and the interval for doubling appears to be getting even shorter. As if that weren't enough, analyst firm IDC reported in a recent study that knowledge workers spend on average 2.3 hours per day — 25 percent of work time — searching for critical job information.

For a growing number of companies, the way to help employees keep their skills up to date is social learning — collaborative, immediate, relevant and presented in the context of an individual's unique work environment. The heart of social learning is usually a social computing platform that includes many of the capabilities of social networking sites that employees use outside of work, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to tag, rate, comment and network. Sun's platform is just one example of how companies are reinventing and reimagining learning on the job.

Enterprise 2.0: Social Networking Inside the Company

Social learning has its roots in "enterprise 2.0," first defined by Carl Frappaolo and Dan Keldsen in a report written for the Association for Information and Image

Management as "a system of Web-based technologies that provide rapid and agile collaboration, information sharing, emergence and integration capabilities in the extended enterprise."

In 2006, Andrew McFee, associate professor of Harvard Business School, expanded the definition to include capabilities known as SLATES, an acronym for:

- **Search:** Allowing users to search for other users or content.
- **Links:** Grouping similar users or content together.
- **Authoring:** Including blogs and wikis.
- **Tags:** Allowing users to tag content.
- **Extensions:** Recommending users or content based on profile.
- **Signals:** Allowing people to subscribe to users or content with RSS feeds.

Increasingly, companies are looking to enterprise 2.0 as a vehicle to create a new way of working, learning and communicating in the global workplace. The benefits of enterprise 2.0 include:

- **Fostering innovation:** Cerner Corp. developed an internal corporate social network, dubbed uCern, as a way to decrease the time from adoption to discovery of new products and services. Cerner employees use uCern to brainstorm with each other and customers to solve problems quickly and propose new services for the global marketplace.
- **Increasing productivity:** Océ, a printing company based in the Netherlands, introduced micro-blogging tool Yammer and reported increased knowledge sharing among the sales force that led to the elimination of duplicated efforts. Think of this as knowledge management 2.0, allowing employees to share knowledge but also add commentary about what works and what doesn't — all in less than 140 characters.
- **Driving greater collaboration:** With 17,000 internal blogs and 53,000 employees on Social Blue, IBM's version of Facebook, and 500,000 participants in the company crowdsourcing jams, IBM's social media usage has become big business. As of

DATA POINT

IBM has 17,000 internal blogs, 53,000 employees on its internal version of Facebook, and 500,000 participants in company crowdsourcing jams who have helped develop 10 incubator businesses with the potential of reaching \$100 million.

IN PRACTICE THE LAUNCH OF PLANET BLUE

Jeanne Meister interviewed Allison Anderson, manager of learning and development and leader of Intel's learning and development community of practice, about Intel's enterprise social networking platform, Planet Blue.

Jeanne Meister: What did you have to do to justify your investment in Planet Blue?

Allison Anderson: As far as the investment goes, we look at it as the total percentage of our IT budget. In this case, we spent less than 1 percent of the budget. Our social computing program manager worked with finance to come up with a model that recognizes the soft metrics of the implementation (i.e., improved performance by teams using Planet Blue) rather than a straight dollar-based ROI.

One of the early users of Planet Blue was a team in our sales and marketing area. They were able to use Planet Blue to more easily generate new ideas for cost savings. In this case, one of the ideas generated provided an immediate return on investment that covered the entire cost of Planet Blue.

JM: How many communities existed before the launch of Planet Blue?

AA: Before Planet Blue, we had a fragmented social computing landscape. We had a blogging community and over 200 separate wikis, but we didn't have a global infrastructure for bringing it all together. We didn't have any way of counting the number of communities that existed because they were run off of many different platforms.

JM: How many have grown since the launch?

AA: We launched Planet Blue in March 2009, and we just recently saw community No. 1,000 created. By November of 2009, we had over 87,000 contributions and over 4 million visits. These communities cover such areas as recent college graduates, volunteer instructors, learning and development professionals and career development alumni.

As an enterprise tool, the communities on Planet Blue go well beyond the field of learning. We also have technical

forums, product engineering groups, departmental groups and project-focused groups.

JM: What does it take to start a community? Is there training?

AA: Starting a community is as simple as filling out an electronic form. We support our community managers by using the tool itself and practicing peer support. We are developing new training materials and plan to implement training sessions in 2010. Some groups take this even further. Our sales and marketing group, for example, developed what they call Digital IQ training for their employees.

JM: Does anyone monitor communities?

AA: There is no one that is reading all of the posts and policing the content. Community owners are responsible for keeping tabs on a community and resolving or escalating issues that come up. Within Planet Blue we also have ambassadors. These are Intel employees who ensure the communities meet their goals and that members act in accordance with our standard code of conduct guidelines. We expect employees to communicate just as they would in e-mail, on the phone, in a conference room. For the most part, we believe in the idea of self-policing.

JM: If you are a leader of a community, is this a part of your performance reviews and management?

AA: This really depends on the community. For example, I've been leading my community of practice for almost 10 years. It has always been in my performance review.

JM: Are there any incentives for folks to join a community and participate early on? Do you think this is important? Why?

AA: Incentives are critical. The ones we value most are those that are directly related to increasing each employee's performance, such as ensuring increased channels of communication, providing faster access to answers and more easily accessing a network of peers.

Overall, we believe the most important benefit is for participants to see the business value in a community. They must be able to answer "what's in it for me." **CLO**

2008, IBM's jams identified 10 incubator businesses with the potential of reaching \$100 million.

OneCA: CA's Journey to Implement Enterprise 2.0

In 2008, Brad Samargya, CA's chief learning officer, was tapped by the executive leadership team to improve the company's ability to execute on strategy by increasing employee productivity and speed of innovation. Executives wanted to make CA a great

place to work and saw enterprise 2.0 as a way to deliver. Armed with this vision, Samargya pulled together a cross-functional team representing human resources, education, IT, legal, internal marketing and communications to implement enterprise 2.0.

"There really is no other role in the company outside of HR that is global, supports all business units and cares about people enablement," Samargya said.

“Also, implementing enterprise 2.0 is a change management initiative, and this is an area where I have a lot of personal experience. I believe CLOs should own this type of initiative — either by becoming responsible for implementing it or creating a sandbox for employees to interact and learn.”

Previously, CA had many separate IT applications and no single place for employees to search and find colleagues who had skills they needed to add to their team. OneCA, the CA brand of enterprise 2.0, operates much like a corporate version of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube all combined into one platform powered by Microsoft SharePoint.

OneCA allows employees to:

- Create a professional profile with photo, skills and network.
- Post an activity stream.
- Build a network.
- Follow colleagues.
- Collaborate.
- Aggregate information with tag clouds.
- Conduct a search for people across the global workforce.
- Join a community of practice.
- Tag and rank articles, ideas, discussions, documents and media content.
- Subscribe to internal and external content.

Catherine Connolly, CA senior director of global education, is responsible for encouraging employees to use OneCA to network, collaborate and learn from peers. She said her job is to drive adoption of OneCA by building top-down and bottom-up “viral” participation and involvement among the global workforce.

“The secret to our marketing program is to find and train a community of ambassadors,” Connolly said. “These are CA employees who are already using Twitter, Facebook and YouTube in their personal lives and as CA employees they now have a chance to use the corporate social network. We started with 100 ambassadors whose job is threefold: promote OneCA and its benefits at their leadership meetings, be active in a OneCA community and recruit at least 10 other people to populate their personal profiles.”

Ambassadors, or as Connolly calls them, “super-users,” create buzz for the network, such as by using company-supplied video cameras to create short videos that finish the phrase, “One thing that OneCA will do for me is”

“We believe ambassadors trained in the power of social media can generate enthusiasm for a new way of working within the company,” Connolly said.

There are a host of new skills and roles that evolve from a company’s adoption of enterprise 2.0. Some of

these include:

- **Social media strategist:** Responsible for resources, processes, teams and return on investment.
- **Community manager:** Builds a community of active participants by recruiting and supporting members of the community and introducing comments, questions and content to spark new conversations.
- **Digital media specialist:** Makes learning entertaining and delivers it in small nuggets via multiple devices.
- **Community moderator:** Audits activity in a community and moderates the flow of conversation — a lighter version of the community manager.
- **Ambassador:** A promoter or advocate who connects communities and works between multiple communities to ensure adoption and a flow of knowledge across the enterprise.
- **App and widget developer:** Provides platforms to allow learners to be able to customize access to knowledge and learning portals to deliver what they need, when they need it.

Launching Enterprise 2.0

Here are 10 guidelines to consider in creating, organizing and planning the rollout of an enterprise 2.0 initiative.

1. **Get senior executives to lead by example.** A good way is to have a wiki set up for the work group, and each time an executive sends out a message to the team, provide a link to the wiki. Blogs are another excellent way to have senior executives lead by example.
2. **Build enterprise 2.0 into the workflow.** Rather than building a community supported by a social platform around extracurricular interests, ensure that the way people get work done relies on going to the platform. If the call center has a knowledge center, the social community and the knowledge center need to be combined. People need fewer places to go, not more.
3. **Develop and seed new communities with content through community managers.** Social learning communities are not a case of “if we build it, they will come.” Communities need to be kick-started by recruiting members, seeding the community with content, building performance incentives to contribute and introducing thought-provoking conversation starters.
4. **Consider creating communities as a follow-on to formal training.** Wherever there are cohorts, the ability to connect and support can be enabled by social learning platforms. There are many things to learn when starting with a new company or after promotion to a new management role. The ability to connect

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tion at 40 percent. Interestingly, only 9 percent of respondents thought that increasing training sales was a top benefit.

Do Learning Portals Improve the Learner Experience?

In a recent survey of roughly 300 CLOs, analysts at research firm IDC found that about 60 percent of CLOs believed learning portals had a positive impact on their organizations, compared with 4 percent who believed they had a negative impact. The remaining 35 percent felt they had no impact.

According to Kelly, learning portals allow for greater success during searches and provide a more accurate way to find relevant content. Being able to shorten the time and increase success during the search process is inevitably better for the learner and the enterprise.

“Positive experiences mean people use the system more often,” Kelly said. “More use creates better results and experiences.”

Do Learning Portals Lower the Cost of Training?

In the Training Industry Inc. and Expertus study, when asked, “What was the primary factor supporting funding for the launch of your learning portal(s)?” respondents listed several factors that played a role in the approval process.

Anticipated cost reduction was among the most frequent responses. Other responses included:

- Centralized and consistent training repository.
- Customer or learner demand.
- Easy access to self-paced e-learning.
- On-demand and just-in-time training.
- Ability to reach a large global workforce and partners.
- Ability to track learning usage and the status of compliance training.

Respondents to the survey also indicated that informal learning technologies save money versus formal learning. Learning portals reduce costs by delivering more e-learning to global audiences and the larger marketplace, thus reducing the need for expensive instructor-led training.

Are Learning Portals Ready For Prime Time?

Yes and no. A portal that truly makes an impact in an organization is more than just a training Web site. It requires thoughtful structure and commitment to results. It's unlikely that the 93 percent of learning organizations that say they utilize a learning portal have achieved one that addresses all of the challenges outlined above.

However, if built and maintained properly, research and expert testimony indicate that portal technology will have a welcome home in many organizations. In an age when informal, social and collaborative learning are critical to success; training adoption and accessibility are always of utmost importance; costs continue to be an issue; and a less disruptive learning experience is demanded by learners, portals just may deliver. **CLO**

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with others on the path to competence can accelerate performance while providing emotional support.

- 5. Err on the side of creating an open culture.** Allow as much learner access to communities as possible so that knowledge can pass virally across the organization.
- 6. Create ambassadors to be evangelists.** Online communities will not develop spontaneously. Implementing social learning requires change management just like any other new initiative. Ambassadors can lead the change and advocate for implementation.
- 7. Trust employees to self-monitor.** With internal corporate social learning platforms, users authenticate and gain access by using their real names. This is not the world of anonymous contribution like the wild, wild Web. The reputation capital of the employee is at stake, and nearly all employees will recognize that and act professionally. Those who don't will be ousted by others in the community.
- 8. Train employees on how to use social media responsibly and actively contribute.** Intel has a complete curriculum on how to best represent the company via social media. In addition, knowing how to author engaging content, build viral videos and create a blog or Twitter following can help employees act as ambassadors for their company, their function or their community of practice.
- 9. Link participation in enterprise 2.0 to performance management.** Employees will one day be evaluated to some degree on their reputation capital. Encouraging people to add to the body of knowledge ensures that key information or knowledge is not lost as turnover occurs. Starting with a goal to contribute to a community is one easy way to integrate performance management with social learning.
- 10. Focus on incentives that link to increases in employee performance.** While prizes and contests may be fun for the launch, employees must see value in improving their performance and productivity in order to sustain usage of a social collaboration site.

As all of us continue to use Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter in our personal lives, we will bring a set of digital expectations to our employer. These expectations will shape how and where we learn, network and collaborate on the job.

“Human beings are social creatures — not occasionally or by accident but always,” wrote professor and consultant Clay Shirky in his book *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. “Sociability is one of our core capabilities and it shows up in almost every aspect of our lives as both cause and effect.”

Let's use 2010 as the year to reinvent, redefine and reimagine learning for the organization. **CLO**

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