

Chapter 85

Keeping It Social: Transforming Workplace Learning and Development through Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The rapid change and competition in the business world is fundamentally challenging the workplace. Consequently, organizations have begun to adopt a continuous learning philosophy which has resulted in a rise in both formal and informal learning. As social media penetrates our everyday lives, organizations and human resource development professionals are looking at how to leverage social media tools to enhance workplace learning and development. Using such tools also fits in with current initiatives to move learning to a more employee-centered learning. This chapter explores a number of social media tools that can be used to enhance workplace learning and development. First, social media definitions in the workplace context are provided and discussed. This is followed by a discussion on challenges associated with the use of social media for workplace learning and development. A framework of social media effectiveness, grounded in the learning and training processes, is proposed in the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has exploded as a category of online discourse with people creating content, sharing, bookmarking, and networking at a significant rate. With statistics showing that in 2012, Facebook was hosting 14.2% of the world's population and Twitter users were sending 340 million tweets per day (Cheston, Flickinger, &

Chilsom, 2013). Harnessing social media potential for workplace learning and development has been touted as a breakthrough across the learning spectrum (Baird & Fisher, 2005; Nafukho, Muyia, & Graham, 2010; Zhao, & Kemp, 2012). Training courses which were traditionally seen as the way for teaching or educating in the workplace are no longer sufficient for delivering ongoing learning and development goals. The focus now

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is on more flexible ways to achieving learning and development goals (Cifford, & Thorpe, 2007). For example, Cross (2007) argued that workers learn more in coffee rooms than in the classroom, underscoring the fact that social networks have become the new coffee rooms. In this era where technologies can support different learning needs, the workplace currently faced with many challenges can use social media tools to enhance learning and development of their employees.

Social Media

Social media has been defined from different perspectives. According to Dabbagh and Reo (2011), Social media is a twenty-first century term used to define a variety of networked tools that emphasize aspects of the Internet as a channel for communication, collaboration, and creative expression. Social media applications therefore allow users to converse and interact with each other by creating editing and sharing new forms of textual, visual and audio content (Selwyn, 2012). Others see social media as the media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible scalable techniques (Wagner, 2011). Social media is seen as having the ability to harness the power of the collective actions of online user communities rather than individual users (Shirky, 2003). Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, web logs, social blogs, micro blogging, wikis, podcasts, pictures, video, rating and social book marking (Tyagi & Tyagi, 2012). The key characteristic of all these social media practices is that of mass socialization (Shirky, 2003). They allow people to collaborate, actively create content, generate knowledge and share information online, both asynchronously and synchronously (Grosbeck, 2009).

The use of social networking has rapidly gained momentum over the past few years. For

example, statistics show that 76.4% of Americans in the age group 18-24 and 57.3% in the age group 25-34 use social media (Chou, Hunt, Beckjord, Moser, & Hesse, 2009). Because of their ease of use and rapidity of deployment, they offer the opportunity for powerful information sharing and ease of collaboration. Because of their ease of use, speed and reach, social media is changing and setting trends and agendas in topics that range from politics to environment and technology. The use of *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, *MySpace*, *Pinterest*, *Wikis*, *Blogs*, *Academia.edu*, *Research Gate*, *Google Scholar*, *Podcasts* and *Twitter*, just to name but a few, have not only been embraced regionally and nationally, but globally as well (Skeels, & Grudin, 2009; Zhao, & Kemp, 2012). These social media platforms have not only grown in size, but in importance as well. Amidst these technological developments, many workplaces and learning and development professionals now find themselves expected to catch up with this world of social media applications. In addition, educators and learners have to learn to learn and work virtually (Nafukho, Muyia & Graham, 2010). In order to succeed in today's hyper connected environment, organizations need to adapt to and integrate social media tools not only around their business strategy, but also around their learning and development functions. These social media are seen to have an emerging role to transform learning and development at the workplace. The question is how organizations and learning professionals can use social media to enhance workplace learning and development. Educators are also challenged to learn to use technology to engage learners as a strategy to promote learning (Nafukho, 2009).

Workplace Learning and Development

While there are many ways that employees learn in organizations, workplace learning focuses on

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