Chapter 63

Web 2.0, the Individual, and the Organization:
Privacy, Confidentiality, and Compliance

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the issues that can arise when professionals employ Web 2.0 social networking technologies in service of their professional development by way of informal learning. Issues around privacy, confidentiality, and compliance are discussed and possible actions organizations and individuals can take are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Web 2.0 social networking tools are increasingly used by individuals to connect with each other while at work and on their own time about work. Frequently, these social networking tools support informal learning in service of professional development. Beers and Burrows (2007) use the term Web 2.0 to refer to "a cluster of new applications and related online cultures that possess a conceptual unity only to the extent that it is possible to decipher some significant socio-technical characteristics that they have in common" (para 1.3). Not only do Web 2.0 social networking tools offer unprecedented access to employees by employees for informal learning goals, the role Web 2.0 social networking tools play in contemporary

workplaces is redefining the relationship between the individual and the workplace.

What began with pagers and early mobile telephones–used to connect workers to their workplace in times of need–has evolved into a mutually ubiquitous presence: via the Internet, the worker and the workplace both can be accessible 24/7. The benefits of this constant access are many, especially in critical industries like medicine and emergency response fields. What of the emerging issues for both organizations and individuals?

This chapter will explore the issues around the Web 2.0-based relationship of the individual and the organization, particularly issues of privacy, confidentiality, and compliance in an effort to contribute to the ongoing conversation about working in the cloud. Specifically, this chapter

will seek to give shape to these issues and attempt to identify what is working as well as focus on what work needs to be accomplished as the ever-expanding array of Web 2.0 social networking tools continues to become part of the daily practice of work and learning. Working in the cloud, or cloud computing, means that information and tools reside outside of the local, personal computing devices people use. Wang, von Laszewski, Younge, He, Kunze, Tao, and Fu (2008) provide an early definition of cloud computing: "A computing Cloud is a set of network enabled services, providing scalable, QoS guaranteed, normally personalized, inexpensive computing infrastructures on demand, which could be accessed in a simple and pervasive way" (p.3).

As we put this information out into the cloud, what are the near and far consequences of having it there for ourselves or even our social networks? This chapter explores the issues that can arise when professionals employ Web 2.0 social networking technologies in service of their professional development by way of informal learning. Issues around privacy, confidentiality, and compliance are discussed, and possible actions organizations and individuals can take are presented.

THE LANDSCAPE OF INFORMAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CLOUD

What is meant by informal professional development in the cloud? This section presents a brief overview of this concept as well as establishes definitions for privacy, confidentially, and compliance, as they will be used in this chapter.

Informal Learning and Professional Development

Informal learning is an essential part of how humans learn. Eraut (2004) defines informal learning as:

…learning that comes closer to the informal end than the formal end of a continuum. Characteristics of the informal end of the continuum of formality include implicit, unintended, opportunistic, and unstructured learning and the absence of a teacher. In the middle come activities like mentoring, while coaching is rather more formal in most settings (p. 250).

Learning that happens by way of casual social interaction can be considered informal. Informal learning can be an unintended result of casual social interaction, or informal learning can be intentional on the part of the learner. For example, when we are cooking in the kitchen with our children, we are not just spending time together, they are learning–how to measure, that ovens should be pre-heated, that the mixer should be off when adding dry ingredients, and so forth. At work, we learn informally by seeking out information and knowledge, perhaps by looking over completed documents and comparing them to our own efforts.

Professional development is just that–developing the professional in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. From schools to industry to the military, workers are often required to participate in continuing education in order to maintain their positions. In most work settings, formal professional development or staff development initiatives originate from the organization or an ancillary, approved provider, but these formal setting are not the only way in which professionals are developing themselves. Informal learning–learning without a teacher in an unexpected way–plays a role as well. At its most simple, workers who ask questions of more experienced colleagues and learn more than they anticipated are engaging in informal professional development. Web 2.0 technologies have expanded access–enlarging the pool of people with whom professionals can interact and engage in formal learning.

Traditionally, informal learning has not received a lot of organizational support. In 2008, ASTD and the Institute for Corporate Productivity

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