

SOCIAL IS SUPER:

HOW ONLINE LEARNING CAN EMBRACE THE

70:20:10 MODEL



SOCIAL IS SEXY: 11 REASONS WHY YOU NEED AN INFORMAL LEARNING STRATEGY

Believe it or not, today's best learning experiences aren't happening in the classroom. They're happening out there in the world, as individuals take new information on board in a variety of different contexts. At this very moment in time, somebody is learning that standing on a garden rake leads to a great deal of pain. And they learned this without opening a single workbook. That's the magic of informal learning.

There are a few different definitions of informal learning. For convenience's sake, let's just say that it's learning that happens outside of the traditional sphere of education. It's the learning that occurs once you've left the classroom or closed your textbook. Informal learning happens when learners start setting their own learning objectives. They drive the experience.

Studies have shown that **70-90% of learning happens informally on the job**. That's the lion's share. Let's break it down a bit further:

70%

of workplace learning happens 'on-the-job'.
(via experience)



20%

workplace learning happens by watching others.



10%

of workplace learning happens through formal training.
(classroom events, eLearning etc)



This is what's known as the **70:20:10 framework of learning**. If you don't have an informal learning strategy in place to help support and promote this process, then your training programmes aren't going to pack much punch. As if that isn't impetus enough, here are eleven more reasons to get social:

1. DRIVE INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL:

What's your organisation's most important asset? Your people and the network of information contained within them. As the **EIM Institute** notes, 'The value to the organization of such a knowledge repository is almost incalculable'.

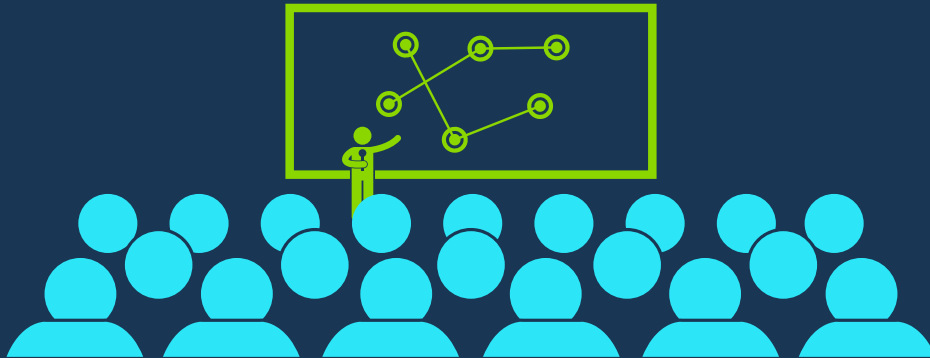
According to **Babcock**, **Fortune 500 companies lose roughly \$31.5bn a year by failing to share knowledge**. We can empathise, having once lost 50p down the back of a sofa. Still, providing the proper support for informal learning within your organisation can help you to fight back.

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2. CONTINUOUS LEARNING EXPERIENCES:

Formal learning experiences all have a beginning and an end. At some stage, you'll be ushered out of the lecture hall. Your 'How to Code for Dummies' textbook will end at some stage. Conversely, **informal learning has no predefined end-point**. It can expand to cover any necessary ground whenever the need arises. Informal learning experiences expand and evolve as circumstances change and events unfurl.

If your learners are an ambitious bunch, they won't want the learning experience to end. Supporting an informal learning approach can help you to keep that ball rolling.



3. PROMOTE INNOVATION:

A **survey from Deskmag magazine** recently found that improved teamwork, collaboration and knowledge sharing spurs creativity and confidence. Indeed, 71% of those questioned suggest that they were more creative because of their team-orientated environment.

4. ENGAGE YOUR TEAM:

Sharing drives engagement. A **Harvard study** has found that sharing triggers the reward centres in our brain and can even trigger the release of dopamine. Researchers found that there was a larger amount of 'activity' in the reward region of the brain when subjects were able to share information with friends and family members, than there was when they were forced to keep the information to themselves.

The study concluded that sharing (on social media) can give us the same pleasure that food, money and sex does. More than that, however, supporting an informal learning approach can help to foster a 'we're all in this together' culture that can lead to increased levels of motivation and drive among team-mates.



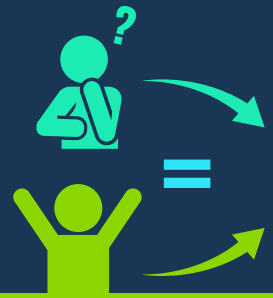
5. INFORMAL LEARNING IS EFFECTIVE:

The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that by 'fully implementing social technologies', organisations can raise the productivity of their employees by '20 to 25 percent'. Imagine if you were able to squeeze that much more out of your team. That'd be like adding an additional thruster to Concorde.

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6. FORMAL LEARNING IS (SOMETIMES) INEFFECTIVE:

Ebbinghaus' forgetting curve shows that if we don't contextualise information, we forget it within an hour. Yikes. We like to think of our brain as a giant pink sponge, but in truth, it's a leaky sieve. Luckily, embracing informal learning can help you to turn that forgetting curve upside down. By providing your team with more opportunities to practise, discuss and contextualise the information you'll soon increase retention.



7. AUTONOMY SPARKS MOTIVATION:

We'll leave this one to Daniel Pink: "Carrots & Sticks are so last Century... For 21st century work, we need to upgrade to autonomy, mastery and purpose". Here's the link to his **TED Talk**.

8. INCREASED FLEXIBILITY:

Collaborative tools of all shapes and sizes are helping to facilitate the move towards a telecommuted workforce. As this happens, business can expect to strip back a significant chunk of their operating costs. In fact, according to **ZDNet**, 28% of UK workers would accept a lower salary in return for flexible working privileges.

There are benefits to having a mobile workforce too. A **Kcom survey** recently revealed that 72% of global businesses say that flexible working practises increases employee productivity.

9. IT'S THE FUTURE:

An **Econsultancy report** found that collaboration tools would be important to 86% of organisations by 2015. We assume that the remaining 14% are a bunch of fun-hating hermits!

10. EMPLOYEE RETENTION:

Teamwork, collaboration and knowledge sharing helps to foster an exciting and engaging workplace culture. We're more likely to stick around in an environment where we feel like we are still developing and learning from our peers. As the **American Psychological Association** note, 63% of us stick with our current organisation because we feel 'connected' with it.

11. SAVE MONEY:

Points one-through-ten prove that informal learning is effective. It's driven by your learners and like a nightmarish tapeworm, it doesn't end. It's motivational. And it works wonders for your organisational wallet.

Think of the savings you could accrue across your business. As the McKinsey Global Institute notes, the average employee spends an estimated 20% of their time looking for internal information or tracking down colleagues who can help with specific tasks. On the flip-side, **a searchable record of knowledge can reduce the time that employees spend searching for company information by as much as 35%**. That will leave them with more time to do the things that really impact your bottom line.

What's more, information transparency leads to better decisions. Having all your information sunning itself out in the open helps your team to make informed judgements and to create business growth.



AND ISN'T THAT WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT?

SIX SURE-FIRE SIGNS YOU'VE CREATED AN INFORMAL LEARNING STRATEGY

Understanding the distinction between formal and informal learning has never been more important. While formal training experiences are easy to understand and embrace from an organisational perspective, **they also only account for 10% of your workforce's overall knowledge intake**. Informal learning experiences make up the remaining 90%, but they're often untameable beasts that organisations struggle to capture and control.

Formal learning experiences are like a glass of water. They're small, refreshing and crystal clear. They have a starting point and a finishing line. Informal learning experiences, on the other hand, are like a vast ocean. They're all-encompassing, immensely powerful and somewhat difficult to comprehend. Who knows what awe-inspiring creatures and creeping-things lie in their depths?

To help you understand what informal learning is and how it works, we've created the following checklist. If your current learning process checks off all six boxes below, then you're smack-bang in the middle of an informal learning experience. Congratulations!

1. IT'S CURRICULA FREE

Traditional learning experiences are mercilessly prescriptive. You're told what you're going to learn and you follow preset curricula and guidelines until you reach the predefined end point. You're on a single-track instructional journey. You're drip-fed nuggets of information that you *need* to know, not the stuff you *want* to know.

You'll probably hear about things like learning objectives, learning goals, guided learning hours and the like. But with informal learning, these concepts are tossed casually out the window. Informal learning is able to break free of formal learning's fetters to embrace a gloriously unorganised, off-the-cuff learning approach.



2. IT HAPPENS OUTSIDE OF TRADITIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Formal learning experiences typically happen within designated learning environments. These may include schools, colleges, universities, classrooms, online learning platforms and the like. They're grounded in a physical or virtual location of some kind. Informal learning experiences, on the other hand, aren't rooted in place. They can happen anywhere. You could be in the middle of the ocean. You might be tucked up in bed. You could be down the pub, chatting away with your chums. If there's a chance to learn from observation, experience or social transfer, there's a chance for informal learning.

3. IT CAN HAPPEN AT ANY TIME

Because formal learning happens in fixed locations, it also happens at a preset time. You might be told to head to Room 101 at 9am to learn how to conquer your biggest fear. Informal learning opens the door to a more flexible approach. With an informal learning strategy, you're ready to learn anywhere and at any time. It's learning without restraint. You're free to learn whenever you want, not when you're told to.

SIX SURE-FIRE SIGNS YOU'VE CREATED AN INFORMAL LEARNING STRATEGY

4. IT NEVER ENDS

You've probably heard the phrase, 'you never stop learning', or 'you learn a new thing every day'. These soundbites sum up the continuous nature of informal learning. These experiences have no predefined start points and they have no preset end points. They're immortal. You could (if you wanted to), engage in a learning experience that never ended.

That may sound intimidating to some. But instead of peering into a Nietzschean pit of despair, your learners should be overjoyed. No matter what they do, they know that there are plenty more learning experiences under the sun and that there's always room for further professional development. It's up to the learner to draw a line underneath their experience and move onto a different topic or activity. This openness provides the opportunity for learners to engage in deep information dives that formal training experiences just aren't able to cater for.

5. THERE ARE USUALLY NO PRE-ASSIGNED SUBJECTS, TESTS OR ASSIGNMENTS

Informal learning experiences are (by their very nature) unorganised and unregulated, so they're also difficult to quantify. To some extent, these experiences happen outside of anybody's control. How could you possibly test that? What reports are you going to produce to demonstrate how effective your informal learning strategy is? Asking somebody to tell you the return-on-investment of their social learning strategy is a bit like asking them to tell you which of their kids they love the most.

This is an issue that plagues informal learning. Still, given that it accounts for a whopping 90% of all learning experiences, it's important that we search for the answers, rather than relying on traditional training approaches to produce the goods.



6. IT'S SELF-LED

Schools have teachers. Universities have lecturers. Organisational learning initiatives are led by instructors or trainers. Informal learning experiences, on the other hand, are led by the individual who is undertaking them.

Think about the last time you got lost in a Wikipedia wormhole. There was nobody standing over your shoulder, telling you which links to follow and what to read. You simply studied the bits that you were most interested in and went on a voyage of discovery that was completely driven by you. That's what made it an informal learning experience.

To put this all in perspective, think about how you learned to ride a bike. You didn't follow a preset curriculum. The learning experience didn't happen in a classroom. There were no tests. You knew you were able to ride your bike because you were able to get from point A to point B without flipping over your handlebars.

But your learning experience hasn't stopped yet. Each time you hop on a bike you become incrementally more adept. You learn to ride in various conditions, inclinations and environments. There's always something new to learn and it's up to you to drive that experience. That's the gift of informal learning.

23 WAYS TO MAP AN INFORMAL LEARNING STRATEGY TO YOUR ONLINE LEARNING SOLUTION:



HOW DID YOU LEARN TO SWIM?

Did you read 'Swimming for Dummies'? Did you watch YouTube tutorials and TED Talks on the topic? Did you study Michael Phelps' biography? Did you complete a series of tests and assessments before dipping a toe in the water?

Probably not. You were probably pushed in at the deep end (quite literally) and forced to learn via experience. Acknowledging this reveals a lot about how we learn and how we take on board new information. It also gives credence to the 70:20:10 framework of learning.

This is a framework that can generate fierce debate. In fact, just the other week, **Charles Jennings** and **Craig Weiss** were trading blows on Twitter about whether 70:20:10 was applicable to the wonderful world of online learning.

We believe it is. In fact, we've come up with 23 ways to implement and support **informal learning strategy** within an online learning environment. Some are quicker and easier than others. We've also endeavoured to split these initiatives into the relevant section of the 70:20:10 framework.

LET'S GET THIS PARTY STARTED!

70%: LEARNING VIA EXPERIENCE



Some would have you believe that online learning approaches are, by their very nature, hyper-formalised, structured learning experiences. But it doesn't have to be this way. There are tools out there that give your learners opportunities to play, explore and drive their own training experiences.

1. Whilst rigid learning pathways (or '**Levels**') have their place in the L&D landscape, there's also something to be said for self-led learner exploration of training portals. If you load up your Learning Management System with content and let your learners loose on it without providing a predefined journey for them, then you're essentially indulging in an informal online learning programme.
2. Any online learning solution worth its salt should provide a risk-free environment for learners to experiment in.
3. Scenario-based eLearning helps learners to make decisions and apply their learning in a number of different contexts.
4. Learning games and simulations offer experiential learning opportunities. They're also surprisingly **easy to configure**.
5. Asking learners to upload case studies to their learning portal is a great way to use previous experience to drive learning. Everybody has a camera nowadays, so we recommend asking your team to create short video segments describing how they've implemented the training material within their day-to-day role.

Learning methodologies like '**The Discovery**
6. **Method**' use learners' previous experience to drive their training. The Discovery Method can store learners' data inputs throughout an eLearning course, tracking their experiences and requesting analysis when appropriate.

23 WAYS TO MAP AN INFORMAL LEARNING STRATEGY TO YOUR ONLINE LEARNING SOLUTION:

20%: LEARNING FROM OBSERVING OTHERS

Online learning works particularly well for this segment of the 70:20:10 framework, as it opens up communication channels across your organisation, promotes easy collaboration and provides ample visibility for your subject matter experts. Here's how you can help promote observational learning with your online solution:

1. Encourage learner-to-learner communication through an organisational social stream.
2. Provide opportunities for learners to communicate with one another via a Live Chat (on an individual or group basis).
3. Better still, you should encourage your learners to communicate with each other and build networks around specific subject matter. We call this phenomenon, '**Insight Groups**'.
4. Permit learners to share useful resources on your organisational social streams. This could be anything from a video or a document, to a link or a useful infographic.
5. Facilitate the creation of learner blogs and wikis.
6. Introduce a mentor/buddy system across your learning portal.
7. Offer opportunities for your learners to become 'Subject Matter Experts'. Better still, provide your SMEs with a platform to share their knowledge.
8. Your learners should be able to view and answer Frequently Asked Questions. These answers should be visible to other learners.
9. Run and monitor team-based learning initiatives throughout the learning platform. For example, why not offer a reward to the first team to successfully complete 'Assessment X' with a 100% score?
10. Provide a platform that allows your learners to recommend content to other learners.
11. Most online learning systems provide opportunities for managers to offer feedback to members of their team. This can be a key driver within an informal learning strategy.



10%: FORMAL TRAINING

Even a super-basic, out-the-box, no-frills Learning Management System will help you cover off this section of the 70:20:10 framework. The formal elements of online learning include:

1. The delivery of eLearning units and video-based learning content to your learners. As you would expect, this can all be reported on.
2. Pushing resources, materials, links, etc. to your learners through an online learning portal.
3. Setting your learners assignments to complete and then upload to their learning portal for marking.
4. Structuring the learning experience by creating courses, curricula and fully-fledged pathways for your learners.
1. Asking your learners to complete a variety of 'Tests', 'Assessments' and 'Quizzes' through their online learning portal. This is a great way of getting information to stick. For bonus points, set your assessments up to automatically push new learning content to respondents whenever they get a question wrong.
2. Running webinars/virtual labs. This can be done through your Learning Management System (if the functionality is available), or through webinar tools like WebEx or GoToMeeting.

7 ESSENTIAL SOCIAL LEARNING FEATURES YOU NEED ON YOUR LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:

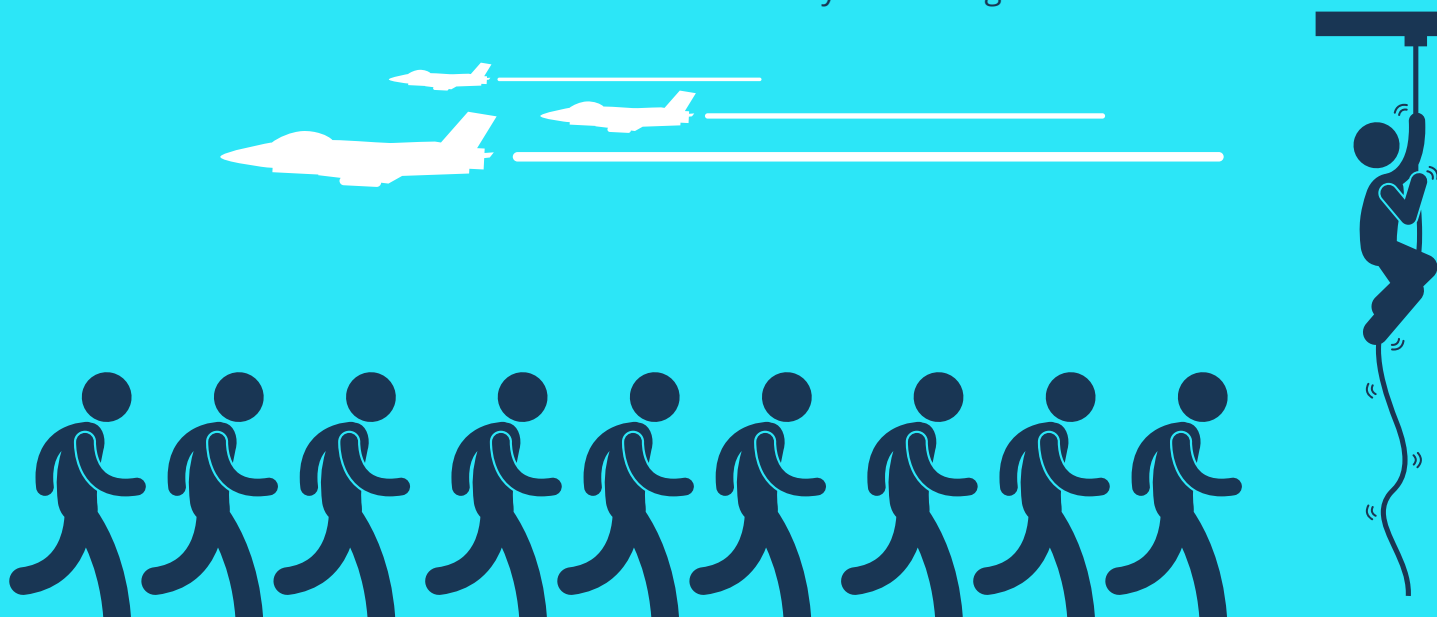
Being in charge of your organisation's training initiatives and learning roll-outs can be a lonely job. Even if your chums call you, 'Miss Filofax', because of your organisational genius, there's still only so much you can do. The very nature of your job means that you have a task list as long as a football pitch, and that deadlines are approaching thick and fast.

Before long, even the world's most astute learning & development professionals start blasting ABBA's 'SOS' and sending makeshift Batman signals into the sky. There's a reason why Doctor Who never travels alone. Sherlock Holmes has a super-powered intellect, but he still relies on John Watson for support. As an online learning superhero, you need a Chewbacca to provide support for your Han Solo.

Luckily, you're not alone. You have an army of helpers ready to do some heavy lifting. Who are we referring to? Why, your learners of course! In a formal training course, your learners turn up, absorb information and check out. It's a one-way relationship. You've created an army of vampire learners who leech information from your training content and then fly off into the night.

But with an informal learning strategy, this entire dichotomy is flipped on its head. Your learners don't just take in information. They share information and collaborate with other learners. In fact, they drive the entire learning experience.

Still not convinced that a social learning solution is right for you? Here are three stats that should have the lone wolf within you running in fear:



- Trainees increased their performance by 22% through 'deliberate reflection and sharing lessons with others'.
- **(Source: A Harvard study)**
- 88% of employees prefer a collaborative work-culture than a competitive one.
- **(Source: an Intelligence Group study)**
- 80% of those surveyed said 'working with people they like is highly motivating'
- **(Source: a Glassdoor study)**

Social learning really *is* super learning! Now you just need the right tools to make it happen. With that in mind, we've drawn up a list of seven absolutely *essential* social features that any learning platform needs. Let's get social!

7 ESSENTIAL SOCIAL LEARNING FEATURES YOU NEED ON YOUR LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:

FEATURE #1: LIVE CHAT

Live Chat is the communication method of choice for learners longing for instant gratification. If they have a question, or need help right away, they can view a directory of 'available' learners and get in touch immediately. There's no sitting around waiting for somebody to see your post and get back to you. Your learners are talking directly to people who can help them by sharing content recommendations, solving learning challenges together and providing encouragement whenever it is needed.

FEATURE #2: SOCIAL STREAM

A social stream, or 'timeline' is crucial to any informal learning strategy. We'd go as far as to say that it's what pulls the whole affair together. This stream should display news, announcements and updates from learners. Because it's visible to all learners, it's a great place to share some of your learner's key achievements.

Think about it. If Batman knows that Robin has picked up an award for completing 'Vigilantism 101', he's going to be keen to dive into the content himself.



FEATURE #3: GROUPS

Live Chats are good because they're instantaneous. Social Streams are good because of their visibility. Groups, on the other hand, can be effective because of their focused nature.

Instead of trying to create discussion areas covering the length and breadth of your training programme, we recommend that you create distinct groups, each focused on different criteria (e.g. training topics, job roles, experience levels). This provides your learners with an opportunity to have better discussions with the right people at the right stage.

FEATURE #4: TEAM-BASED LEARNING & LEADERBOARDS

Encouraging teamwork is a great way to drive learner engagement and improve the ROI of your training regime. Collaboration drives completion and teamwork can produce impressive results. To make this work on your LMS, you'll need to build a team structure into your platform. You'll also need a leaderboard system in place that's capable of tracking team activity.

Once that's all set up, you can take things to the next level by offering group rewards to the best performing teams. Days out or team lunches are a good fit here.

7 ESSENTIAL SOCIAL LEARNING FEATURES YOU NEED ON YOUR LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM:

FEATURE #5: EXPERTS AREA

Knowledge transfer is a major issue within organisations of all shapes and sizes. Throughout your business, you'll have a variety of different subject matter experts acting as knowledge silos. You need a solution that allows your learners to tap into what your SMEs know.

If you're trying to improve your team's customer service skills, then there's no reason not to unleash your secret weapon: your organisation's best and brightest customer service operator. If Jimmy is a lauded customer service veteran with more than 30 years of experience to his name, then he deserves a suitable knowledge-sharing platform. He knows your business, the problems your team are likely to face and the best possible solutions. It would be foolish not to provide him with visibility on your online learning solution.

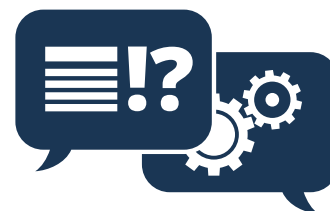
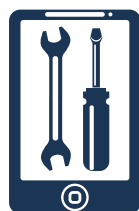
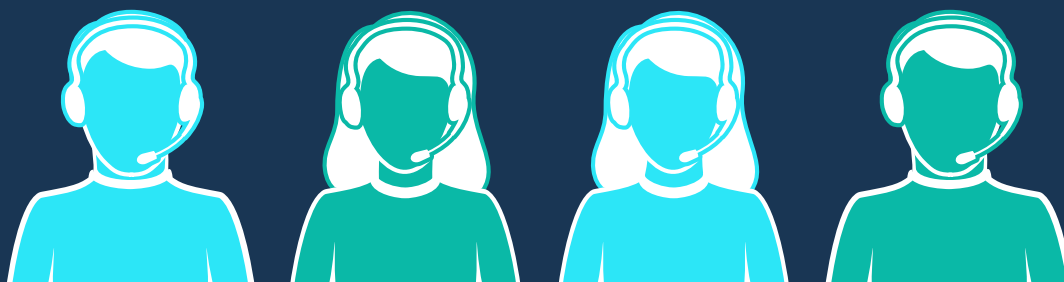
You're essentially giving your learners an opportunity to learn from the very best.

FEATURE #6: SOCIAL Q&A

Throughout the course of a learning initiative, the same questions are likely to arise again and again. That's why FAQs are a common part of any training programme. They provide a repository for all the important stuff that your learners need to know.

A Social Q&A area takes things to the next level, by actively encouraging learners to participate in the question and answer process. They're rewarded (with points and badges) for asking good questions and offering good answers. The up-voting system also allows the very best answers to rise to the top of the thread. This is crowdsourcing at its most effective.

The more you get your learners thinking about the training content in a variety of different contexts, the more information they'll embed in their long-term memory.



FEATURE #7: SURVEYS

Unless you're a powerful mind-reader, it's not always easy to figure out what your learners want. But there's no need to do any guesswork. A good survey tool can help you get answers to important questions. Want to know which type of content your learners enjoy the most? What content you should release next? What features your learners feel are missing from their Academy? Ask away and get meaningful data to help you make important decisions.

THE NEUROSCIENCE OF SOCIAL LEARNING

We spend a lot of time **talking about how social learning** is one of the keys to an effective, engaging training strategy. We often **bombard you with stats proving that social learning works**, but let's delve a little deeper into the reasons why it works.

A lot of very clever people have dedicated their lives to understanding the inner workings of our brains. We've gathered together some of the very best research to help you better understand the neuroscience of social learning!

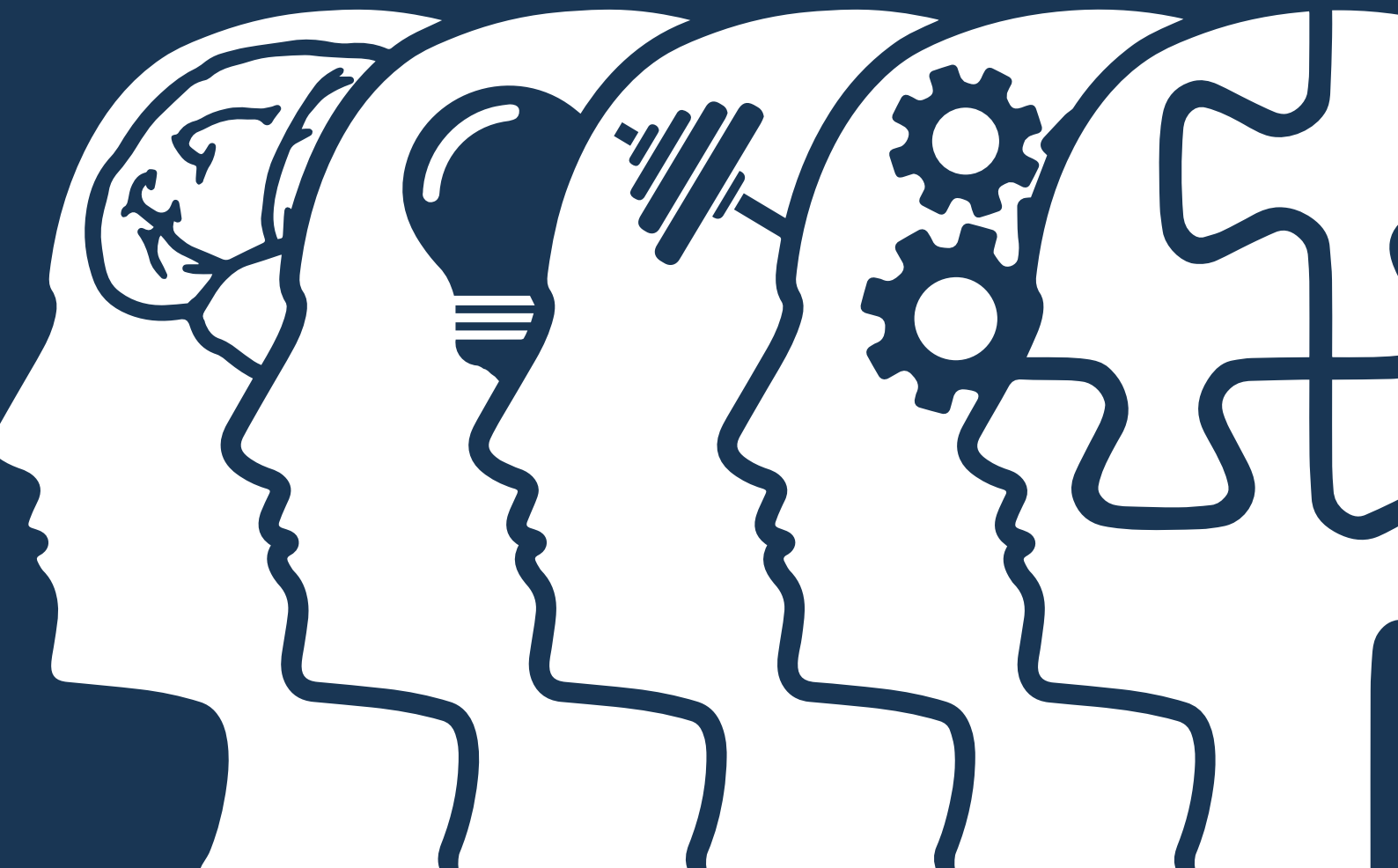
SOCIAL NEEDS

A growing body of research is showing that our need to connect socially with other people is as basic as any other survival need. In fact, **UCLA professor Matthew Lieberman has challenged Abraham Maslow and his famous hierarchy of needs**, placing social needs at the bottom of the pyramid. This makes them more essential than food and water!

He explains how our brains have been evolving for millions of years to turn us into the social creatures we are today. That's why creating social connections in learning can have such an impact. To our brains, it simply feels more natural than learning on our own.

There is also a clear link between emotions and learning. **Emotions are handled by the brain's prefrontal cortex**, and the same area is used for our memories. In fact, our working memory has been shown to be impaired by negative emotions, such as fear and anxiety.

Psychologist Daniel Goleman says that by building social and emotional learning programmes, we can pave the way for more effective learning. Building caring relationships with teachers and other students increases the desire to learn, which sounds perfect to us!



THE NEUROSCIENCE OF SOCIAL LEARNING

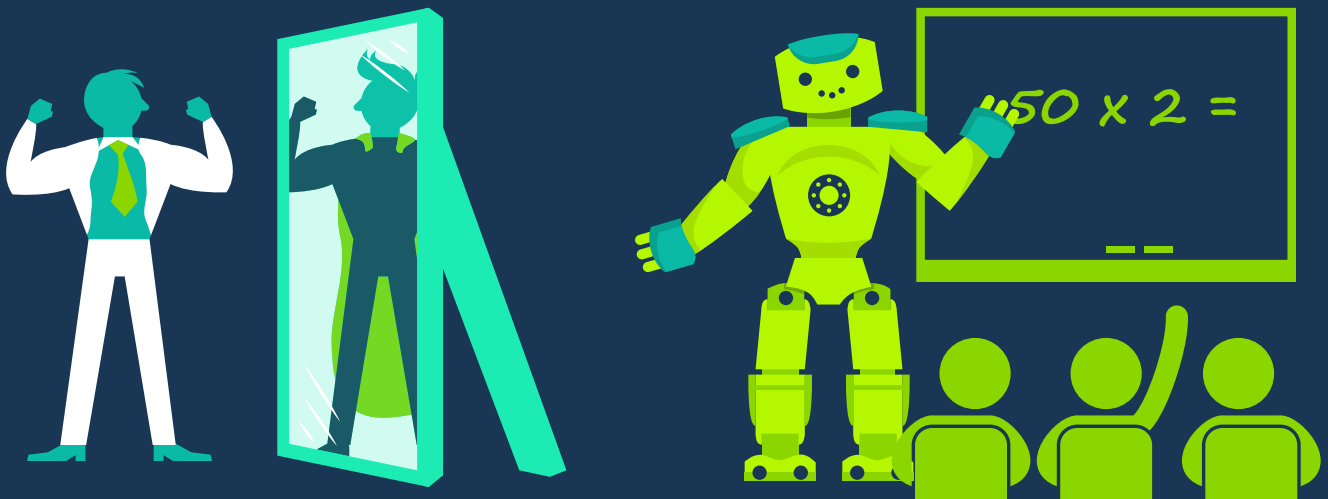
MIRROR NEURONS

In the 1990s, a scientific breakthrough was made when 'mirror neurons' were discovered in the brains of monkeys. These neurons fire as the monkey watches the actions of another. So, for example, by watching another monkey (or human) use a hammer, it will start to learn how to use it itself. (For a great, lively summary of mirror neurons, [watch this TED talk by neuroscientist Vilayanur Ramachandran](#))

Since then, it's been endlessly debated whether these mystical neurons are also present within the human brain, and the issue has become one of the hottest topics in all of neuroscience!

Later studies have actually shown that **newborn babies are able to imitate the body movements of other people**. This can happen as early as 40 minutes after birth, meaning that before an infant even sees its own face in a mirror, it is able to mirror the behaviour of other humans.

If mirror neurons do in fact exist within our own brains, then it would help explain why we find it so easy to learn from other people, observing and mirroring their actions.



LEARNING SOCIALLY

What we've learned so far is perhaps best summed up by the words of Psychology professor Louis Cozolino – [**"The brain is a social organ."**](#)

The modern human brain's primary environment is our matrix of social relationships. By building close personal relationships, we can stimulate positive emotions, neuroplasticity, and learning.

Cozolino also notes that while our brains have evolved to pay attention to other people, we find it much more difficult to analyse ourselves. So by discussing topics with others, we're able to empathise and consider it from completely different viewpoints, helping us be more critical and develop a more robust understanding.

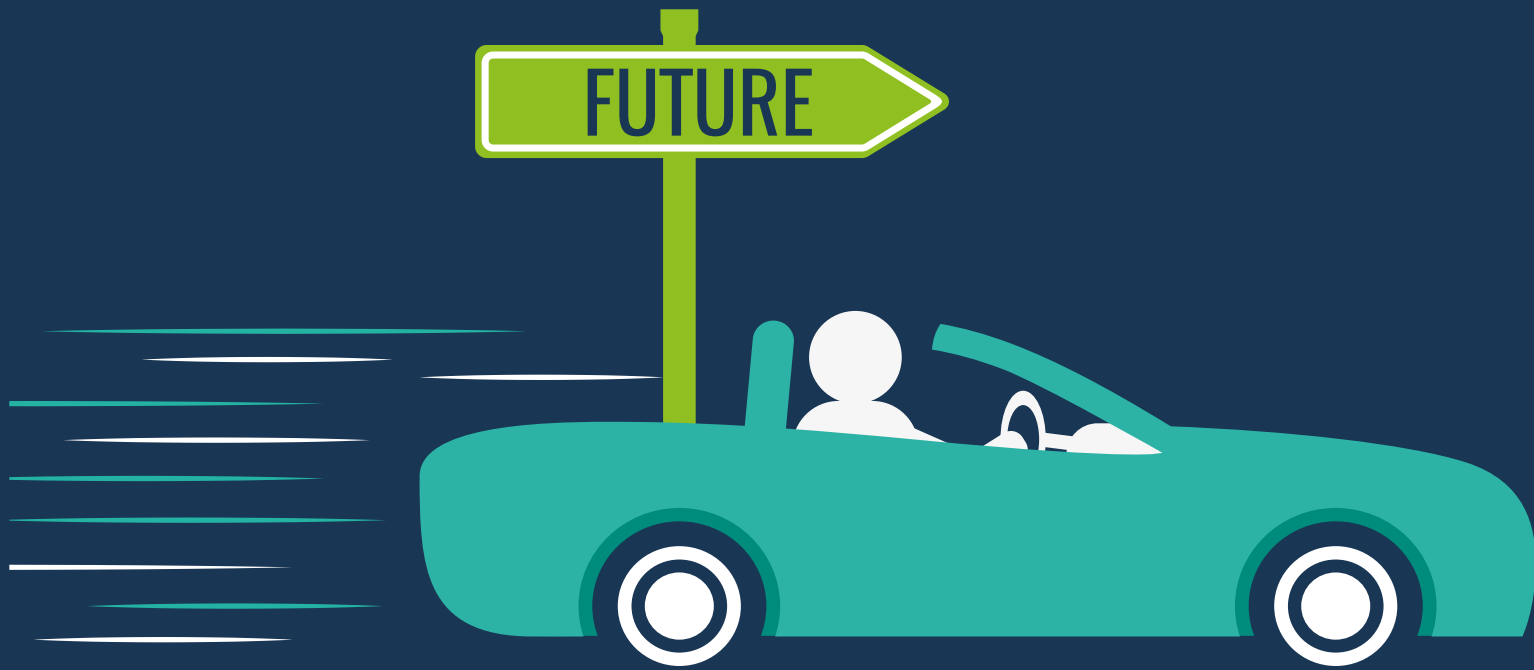
Finally, **studies show** that if you try to use a robot to teach people, their willingness to connect with and learn from it will increase as you give it more social-like behaviours.

You can think of the LMS as a robot – lifeless and emotionless. But as you populate it with real people and facilitate social networking, your learners will find themselves much more willing to use the system for learning!

A 5 STEP GUIDE TO HELP YOU SPREAD SOCIAL LEARNING THROUGHOUT YOUR ORGANISATION:

Change rarely comes easy, even if it's change for the better. That's why we frequent the same restaurants, order the same foods and take part in the same conversations, again and again. Staying within your comfort zone is... well... comfortable. It's like you're a prisoner within a well-guarded pillow fort of your own construction.

Shifting from a traditional learning programme into one that embraces social learning best practise can be intimidating. But that doesn't make such a move any less essential. It's like realising for the first time that the car you've been driving can go higher than second gear. It's intimidating to go that little bit faster, but it can also be thrilling. You'll also end up where you're trying to get to that little bit faster.



MILLENNIALS AND THE WORKPLACE OF THE FUTURE

The good folks at Bunchball suggest that 89% of millennials want their workplace to be social and fun. That sounds about right to us. How many folks really want their work life to be lonely and boring? By 2020, millennials will form 50% of the global workforce. By 2030, millennials will make up 75% of the global workforce. This suggests that organisations will increasingly have to embrace social solutions in order to meet their demands.

This is particularly true within the learning and development sphere. After all, the 70:20:10 framework of learning tells us that only 10% of learning happens as a result of formal training. The remaining 90% is made up of experiential learning (70%) and social learning, i.e. learning from observing others (20%).

This just goes to show: providing learners with social learning tools and an opportunity to share their experiences is vitally important. It's what works best from a learning and development perspective and it's what your workforce wants.

But then there's the whole change issue. Getting your team to take its social learning medicine is not without its difficulties. Even if you're leading a supremely open-minded workforce, it doesn't hurt to provide further encouragement to tempt them into action. With that in mind, we've created a list of FIVE top tips for incentivising social learning within an online learning platform.

A 5 STEP GUIDE TO HELP YOU SPREAD SOCIAL LEARNING THROUGHOUT YOUR ORGANISATION:

1. ACHIEVEMENTS:

Game mechanics are essentially online learning's very own Mr Motivator, even if they don't go around sporting a delightful spandex jumpsuit and bandana combo. An example of one of these motivation-boosting game mechanics is 'Achievements'.

Achievements are virtual rewards that selected audiences can receive for fulfilling certain criteria. We've listed some examples below, contrasting examples of achievements in video games with real online learning achievements we use on the Academy LMS.



VIDEO GAME ACHIEVEMENT

Collect 12 Griffin Feathers

Get 50 Headshots

Play the Game for 10 Hours

Get a Perfect Score of 100

ONLINE LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT

**Respond to 12 Posts
on the Social Stream**

**Rate 5 Pieces of
eLearning Content**

Ask an Expert a Question



If utilised properly, achievements should instil a sense of pride among your learning elite, which can then drive further social activity. On the other hand, setting unrealistic, or pointless achievement goals (for instance, 'Watch this 30-minute-long video 10 times'), is a recipe for frustration.

We've also found surprise or 'fun' achievements to be remarkably effective. One of the most lauded examples of this on the Academy LMS is the 'Early Bird' achievement, which learners can receive for logging onto the platform between 2am-7am. Whilst we don't encourage late night/early morning learning binges, this achievement does act as a great conversation piece.

A 5 STEP GUIDE TO HELP YOU SPREAD SOCIAL LEARNING THROUGHOUT YOUR ORGANISATION:

2. EXPERT STATUS:

Michael Gazzaniga, a renowned neuroscientist, once noted: *'When you get up in the morning, you do not think about triangles and squares and these similes that psychologists have been using for the past 100 years. You think about status. You think about where you are in relation to your peers.'*

Amen. Applying a level structure to your learning platform, or a unique 'status' to individual learners, can be a great way to reward your social champions. Do you have a 'Sales Sage' within your business? What about a Customer Champion? Or a Marketing Magician? If you're using the Academy LMS, or another fully-loaded social learning tool, you'll be able to grant these learners 'Expert' status.

This provides them with increased visibility and recognition, which should help to keep their pride-levels topped-up. This will help you to cut the attrition rate of your brightest and best and will give your other learners a focal point for any questions they have relating to particular topics. That sounds like a win-win to us!



3. GROUPS, XP AND LEADERBOARDS:

Learning works best when it's delivered with pinpoint focus. You wouldn't tip a bucket of information over a learner and hope that some of the important stuff sticks. Learning happens around certain specific topics and at various experience-levels, because the more relevant it is to the learner in question, the better chance it has of enduring.

It's a lot easier to manage the flow of knowledge throughout your organisation, if you have (for example) learning groups for 'Sales Presentations', 'Creating Proposals' and 'Territory Management', rather than simply having a super group for 'Sales'. This facilitates more focused and downright better conversations. Your learners are no longer fumbling around in the dark. They've got clearly lit information silos that they're able to tap into at any point.

On the Academy LMS, we take things a step further by incentivising group activity. Individual learners earn 'contribution points' for sharing content, answering questions and picking up 'Likes' on their posts. In other words, they're rewarded for the quantity *and* quality of their contributions.

But the fun doesn't stop there. The more points they earn, the higher up the group's 'Top Contributor' board they appear. As a result, learners are incentivised to share their knowledge and Admins are quickly able to see who the experts are within various subject matter areas. Neat, huh?



A 5 STEP GUIDE TO HELP YOU SPREAD SOCIAL LEARNING THROUGHOUT YOUR ORGANISATION:

4. MANAGER BADGES:

Back in 2009, a Towers Watson report found that a 'strong manager performance' in 'recognising employee performance increases' staff 'engagement by almost 60%'. That's no small sum. As such, it's important that your social learning tool provides an opportunity for manager feedback and praise.

There are numerous feedback options available on the Academy LMS, including 'Manager Praise Badges'. This functionality lets managers bequeath their learners with personalised virtual rewards. When they see one of their team members actively engaging with their social learning programme (by sharing some great extracurricular learning content, for example), managers are now able to reward them with a unique badge and a personalised message.

This kind of personal touch from a person of hierarchical importance lets your learners know that they're doing the right thing. More than that, however, it lets them know that their actions are being recognised by those in positions of power.

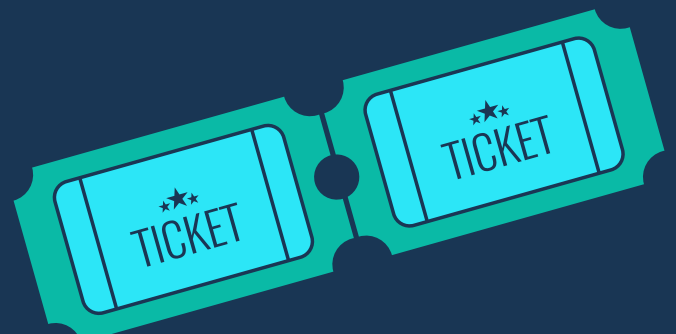


5. REWARDS:

Virtual rewards like 'Badges' and 'Achievements' are all well and good (in fact, they're brilliant), but let's not forget about real world rewards. In fact, one of the quickest ways to generate intellectual capital within your organisation is to create a meaningful rewards package (usually combining gamification and real world rewards), for those who are willing to share information.

Vouchers, coupons and tickets to events all work well, but you don't need to break the bank to reward your learners. Check out [this post](#) for some ideas to help you put together a compelling rewards package on a tight budget. Soon enough you'll have created an army of social champions champing at the bit to collaborate with each other.

From that point on, your social learning programme will be unstoppable.



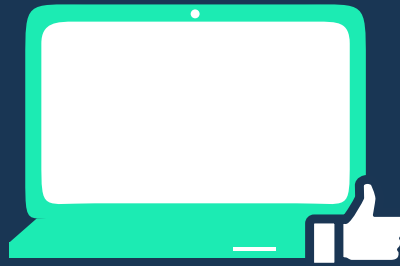
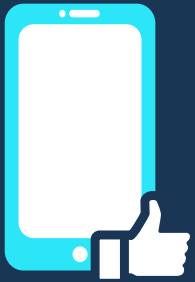
7 WAYS TO SAVE YOUR LEARNING PROGRAMME USING SOCIAL MEDIA:

Here's something to mull over: Facebook's 'Like' button is hit 5 billion times a day. 500 million tweets are sent every 24 hours. During that same stretch of time, 70 million photos are sent through Instagram. Social media has cured our idle thumbs for good.

Some people see social media as the ultimate time-wasting device. But what if all the hours we spent on these networks were channelled into beneficial experiences that furthered our own professional development? If you're able to wade through all the food pictures, relationship updates and trolling, then you'll soon stumble across a wealth of informative content.

In most cases, setting up a social media profile is completely free and it's accessible from a wide variety of devices. As such, social media tools can be used as a cost-effective means to support an organisational blended learning programme, or embellish your online learning initiatives.

As millennials take up more space within the global workforce, the demand for social and collaborative tools is only going to grow. With that in mind, we've formulated SEVEN top tips to help you utilise social media to facilitate informal learning, discussion groups and increased knowledge transfer.



1. USE FOCUSED FACEBOOK OR LINKEDIN 'GROUPS':

Group tools make it easier to connect with specific sets of people, whether they happen to be family members, friends, colleagues or fellow learners. Why not provide your learners with their own space to share their knowledge? They could use these groups to ask and answer questions and share updates, photos and documents with other group members. To take things to the next level, why not offer small rewards to the posts that receive the most 'Likes'.

2. USE A TWITTER #HASHTAG TO FOCUS THE CONVERSATION:

Unlike Facebook and LinkedIn, all user generated messages ('tweets') are limited to 140 characters. This rather limits the scope of any discussion around particular learning topics. Still, that's plenty of space for sharing important resources like images, videos, websites and documents. Better still, Twitter's hashtag indexing system will make all your learning content immediately searchable. Simply tag all relevant tweets and that content will be easily accessible by your whole team (and anybody else who knows the hashtag). Are you ready to make your learning content go viral?



7 WAYS TO SAVE YOUR LEARNING PROGRAMME USING SOCIAL MEDIA:

3. USE A BLOG TO HELP YOUR LEARNERS SHARE CASE STUDIES:

Blogs aren't just a place to talk about what you've been eating that day. They can also be used to further group learning. After all, they're a naturally reflexive tool. They're a bit like a modern day diary – they can be used as a record of achievements or as a means of collecting together interesting and relevant materials.

We recommend using a blogging tool to encourage your learners to share case studies that detail the effective application of training content to their day-to-day work experiences. This will help your learners to reflect upon and promote the training materials that are important to you as an organisation.



4. GET ORGANISED WITH A COLLABORATIVE CALENDAR:

Social learning requires collaboration. It's handy then, that there are so many social tools out there that provide open calendars! Here learners can share their schedules, organise meetings and create events that will help progress their learning programmes. This is incredibly convenient if your learners need to collaborate on assignments or host discussion groups and Q&As. As the administrator, you can also add scheduled classroom or webinar training events to their shared calendar so they don't miss a second of the action.



5. CREATE NEW YOUTUBE STARS:

Blogging is all well and good, but it's not a patch on video-blogging. According to the Pew Research Centre, the percentage of adults posting videos online doubled between 2009 and 2013. We're increasingly using video to discuss the topics that are important to us.

We're not suggesting that you need to transform your learners into the next Zoella, Jenna Marbles or PewDiePie (if you haven't heard of these people, then congratulations!). We can't all be stars. But we can all (most of us, anyway) embrace video and move towards creating more compelling content. This is a medium that will allow your learners to express their creativity and connect with one another on a deeper level.

Many of your learners will have a webcam on their computer, or a camera on their phone, so creating a series of video blogs might be easier than you think. If you can pull it off, your learners will get a real kick out of watching each other explain concepts, share top tips and provide detailed case studies relating to their training material.



Subscribe

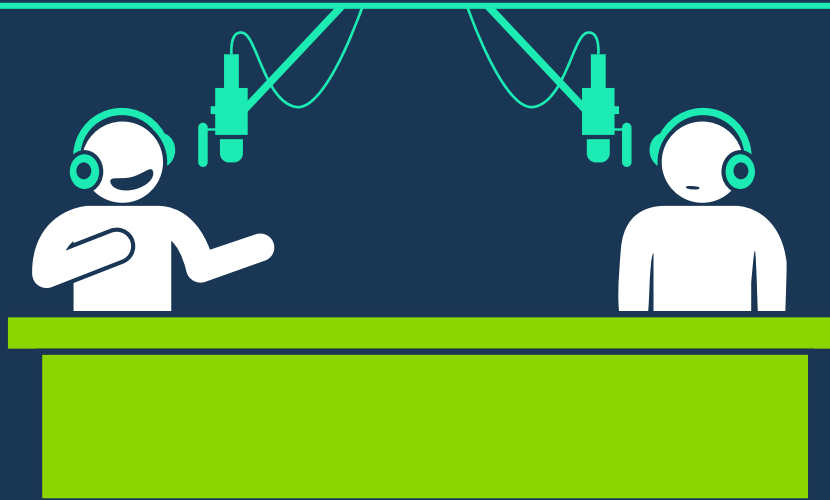


7 WAYS TO SAVE YOUR LEARNING PROGRAMME USING SOCIAL MEDIA:

6. SAY IT WITH A PODCAST:

Unless you happen to own a recording studio, creating a podcast can be an intimidating process. Despite this, you're still only a cheap microphone and a few 'How to...' guides away from becoming an iTunes legend. Once you're set up, you have a wealth of opportunities ahead of you. Why not record group discussions and release them as podcasts so that they can be revisited on later occasions? Why not interview subject matter experts within your organisation and release a podcast of the conversation?

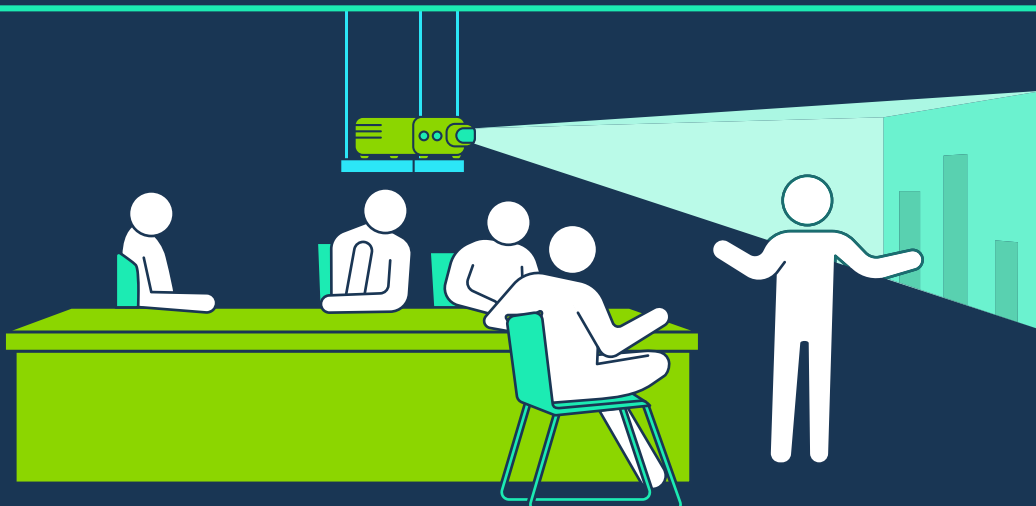
Podcasts are useful because they expand your team's opportunities to learn. Listening to a podcast is a relatively passive experience. You can listen to a podcast whilst on your daily commute, when you're pumping iron down at the gym, or when you're washing dishes. If the conversation is interesting and engaging enough, they can be hugely beneficial for your learners.



7. SHARE IT ALL ON SLIDESHARE:

A good number of your learners will have put together a presentation or a slideshow before. For many of us, this is a part of working life. SlideShare is a tool that takes this process to the next level by encouraging us all to share our presentations.

You can imagine what this means for your learners. They now have an opportunity to share collections of images, infographics, important stats and even case studies in a visually appealing format. They don't have to be PowerPoint Picassos. If the content they're sharing is informative, it will find an audience.



5 WAYS TO MAXIMISE ROI WITH SOCIAL LEARNING

Chances are that you're not delivering training to just one person, though if you are then we really admire your dedication to them!

With all of these learners working their way through your wonderful content, it's only natural that they'll want to be able to shout out about how amazing it is. Giving your learners the means to communicate and collaborate will let them discuss their learning and think about it in ways they may not even have considered.

But is it really worth enabling social learning? Well, actually it's the perfect way to squeeze a lot more out of your training programme, and get a soaring return on your investment! Here are a few of the ways social learning can maximise your return:



1. BUILD A TRAINING COMMUNITY

Did you know that your organisation is packed full of Subject Matter Experts? Most of these are unsung heroes, and their expertise is going largely to waste... But with social learning you'll be able to tap into this goldmine of knowledge, and share the wealth!

If John from Accounts wants to know more about the company's lead generation efforts, he can simply strike up a conversation with Susie from Marketing. The perfect person to answer any question is always within reach, providing an endless scope for learning!

2. GET MORE TRAINING FOR YOUR BUCK

Once your training community is now a hive of activity, everyone will be able to learn from each other. But the real beauty is that they'll be able to continue learning from each other even after they've run out of content to consume!

You'll be able to keep your content creation costs at the same level, but it will spark discussions among your learners. This won't cost you any extra, so even though your investment doesn't increase, the return certainly will!

5 WAYS TO MAXIMISE ROI WITH SOCIAL LEARNING

3. SLASH ENGAGEMENT COSTS

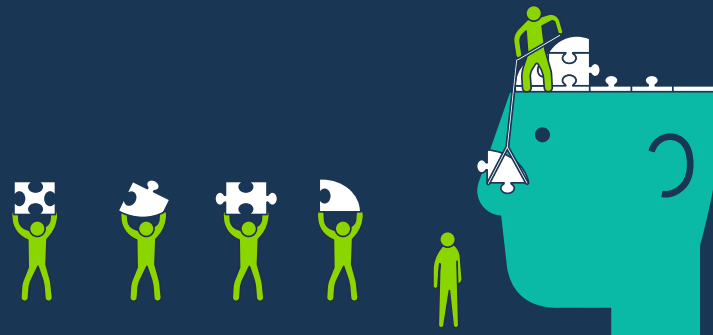
So, your training community is up and running, and everyone is talking about your learning programme. Well done!

With so much buzz around it, there's no chance of people forgetting about your programme anytime soon. This means you don't need to spend as much time and money trying to drag learners back through engagement campaigns. So you minimise your investment while maximising your return!



4. MAKE TRAINING STICK BETTER

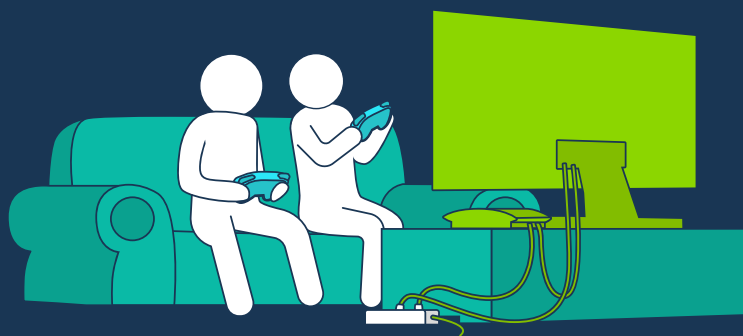
By enabling your learners to discuss their training, it will stick in their minds much more effectively. This means that they'll be able to put it into practise in the workplace, and you'll start to see a much greater return on your total investment!



5. TRY A SOCIAL LEARNING GAME

Social learning and games go together like strawberries and cream. In fact, **an international study in 2009** found that people who play prosocial games go on to exhibit helpful behaviour towards others back in the real world.

So if you can encourage people to play learning games together, you might just start to notice stronger bonds and teamwork forming around the office. And once your workforce is properly in sync, there's nothing they won't be able to accomplish!



WHAT'S THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL LEARNING?

Learning alone is fine, but it gets much better when we do it together. Thankfully, as our technology improves, so too does our ability to interact with one another. That means that the future should see us having many more opportunities to learn alongside our peers!

We've put on our forward-thinking caps and considered a few of the things we might expect from the future of **social learning**. It might be many years still until we see some of these, but others might be closer than you think.



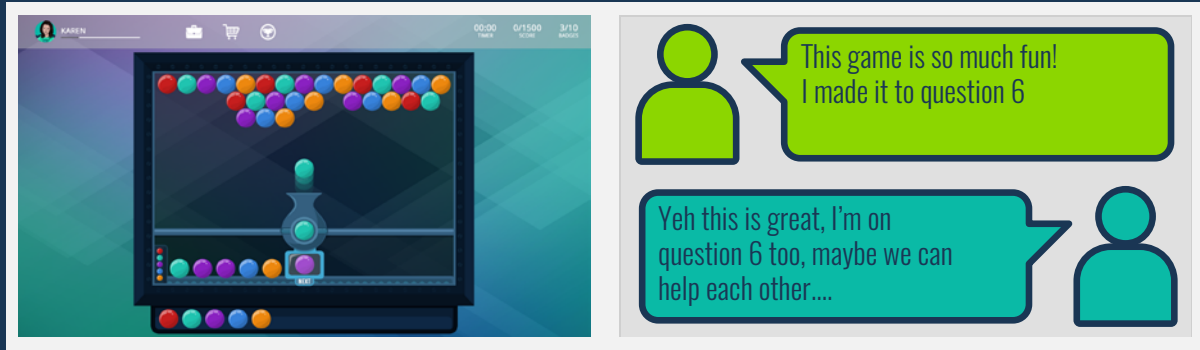
VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

Virtual reality is rapidly becoming something real. The technology has finally hit a point where it's starting to work properly, and now the investment is flooding in. So in the coming years, we can expect to be wearing VR headsets as we play games, explore art and architecture, and even as we learn. And of course, it's the implications it could have on learning which are exciting us the most!

We're already able to create online learning communities, using **an LMS** for example. But with VR technology, we'll be able to create shared virtual environments, where learners can interact with one another using personalised avatars.

This will be a fantastic way to bring people together, particularly for big, global companies who have staff dotted around all around the globe. Being able to virtually 'meet' colleagues they wouldn't otherwise have contact with will offer them an unprecedented ability to share ideas and discover completely new ways to approach their training!

WHAT'S THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL LEARNING?



SOCIAL LEARNING GAMES

It's no surprise that we've always got our eye on games and **gamification!** These continue to become more and more important in the world of learning, and we don't see this slowing down any time soon.

And as the use of games becomes more widespread, it's likely that it will overlap more and more with social learning.

So we can look forward to more collaborative games, where it's impossible to win without a concentrated team effort. Learners will have to share the information available to them in order to progress, encouraging a culture of knowledge sharing throughout your organisation.

Again, expect to see VR coming into play. So our learners might find themselves inside a virtual world as their avatars. This added level of immersion will help them embed the teamwork skills they develop in the game, and apply it back in the real world.

EVERYONE'S AN EXPERT

We touched on this above, but the future of social learning will see more emphasis being put on developing cultures of knowledge sharing.

Most organisations designate certain people as subject matter experts. These are the people who know more about their specialist topic than anyone else, and who should be your first point of call whenever you have a question.

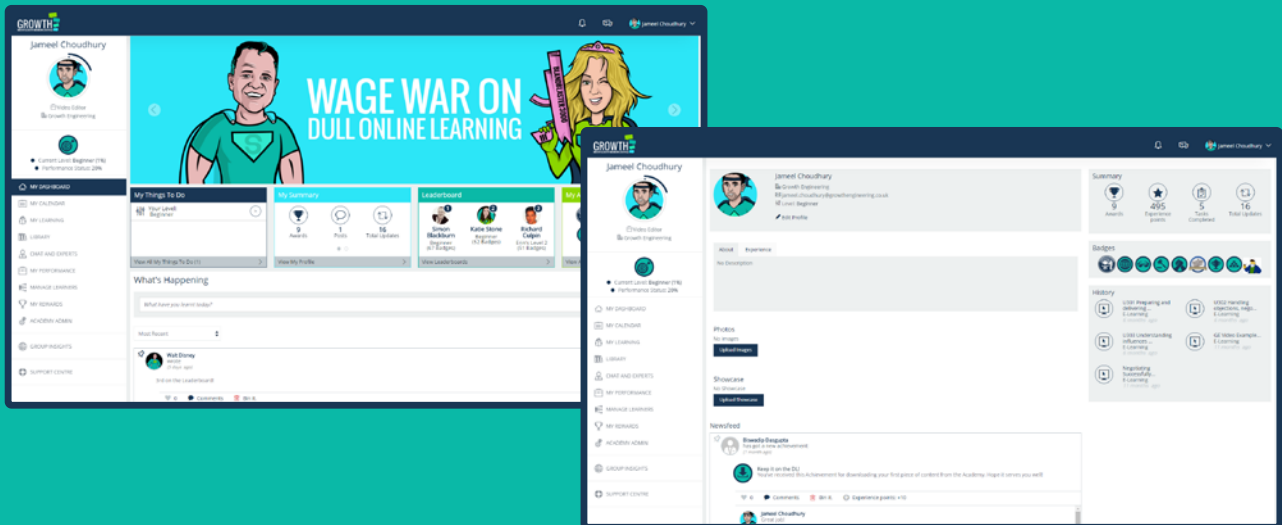
But why not take this further? Approach absolutely anyone in an organisation and you'll find at least one thing that they know better than anyone else. With all of this expertise flying around, you just need to be able to tap into it as and when you need it.

As the technology improves, so too will our ability to pair up experts with whoever needs their help. A learner will be able to broadcast their question to the whole organisation. The perfect people to answer will get notified that something is being asked, and they'll be able to swoop in and save the day!



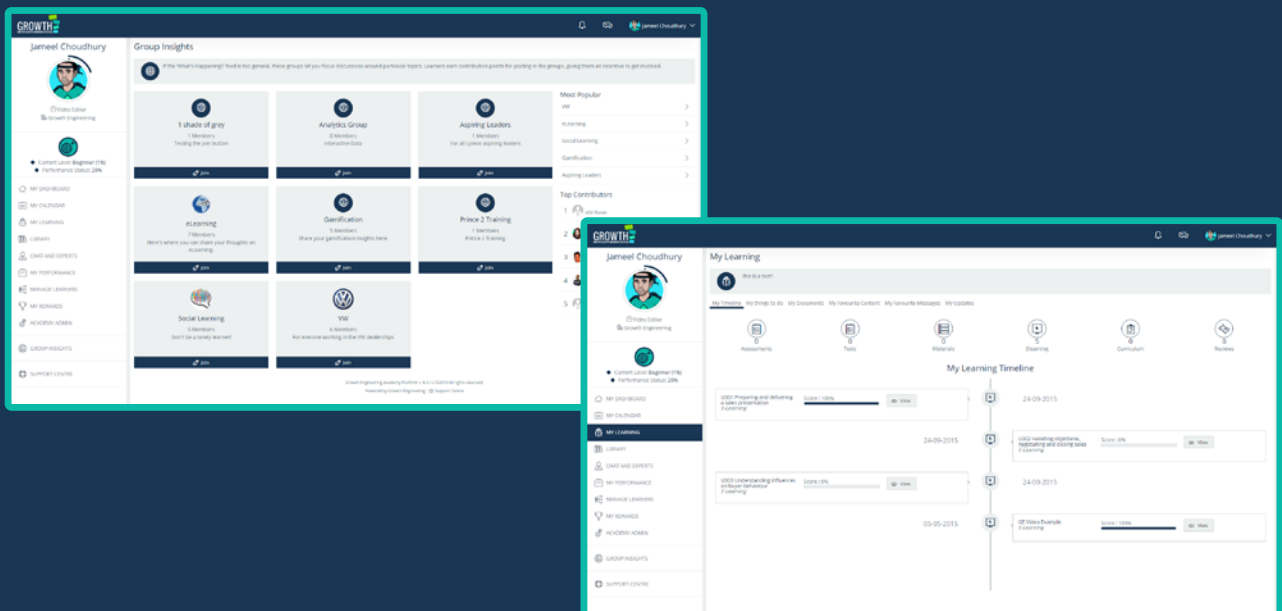
CONCLUSION

So there we have it. Mastering social learning is the key to success on your online learning platform. The more you share, the better information sticks. Information usually leaks out of organisations like water through a leaky sieve, but knowledge sharing solutions help to stem the tide whilst social learning plugs the gaps.



Before you know it, you've created a genuine, bona fide 'Learning Culture' choc full of 'Aha!' moments. Congratulations: the battle has been won!

Our Academy LMS is a social learning paradise, capable of providing elite levels of support for your **informal learning programme**. Social features include: Learner Profiles, User Updates, Social Timelines, Leaderboards, Live Chat, The Experts Area, Insights Groups and more.



Why not embark on an informal learning experience of your own?

**CLICK HERE TO SIGN UP
FOR AN INFORMAL TOUR**