A PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL LEARNING IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

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While social learning is gaining in momentum among chief learning officers, chief talent officers, and heads of human resources, there are a number of barriers to adopting social learning for an organization. To implement social learning, one has to understand the larger trends affecting the changing workplace, as well as key barriers that prevent the adoption of social learning inside the organization.

MEGA TRENDS AFFECTING THE CHANGING WORKPLACE

Three mega trends are having a huge impact on organizations:

1. the increased use of social networking
2. the growth of workplace mobility
3. the explosion of video-based traffic on the web

Taken together, these shifts increase organizations' interest in building more open, collaborative, and social cultures.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Social networking is the most popular online activity. According to PsychologyDegree.net, social networking has not only taken over our time but also changed how we communicate and relate to others. Each day social network users are amassing more than 1.2 million updates and spending one in five minutes of time on social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

What's more, every 24 hours more than 250 million photos are shared with an average of 245 friends. Social networking has gone from a "Millennial activity" to one that is widespread across all demographic age segments.

In many respects we are all becoming Digital Natives! The implication is that employees will increasingly expect to bring their digital lives to the workplace and to use their employers' internal social networks for working, learning, and communicating.

WORKPLACE MOBILITY

Workplace mobility is becoming the norm for many organizations. Thanks to advances in technology, work no longer needs to be tethered to time or place. Telework Research Institute refers to this trend as the shifting of the word "work" from a noun to a verb, as in "telecommuting" or "workshifting." Since 2000, federal employees have been encouraged to telework to the maximum extent possible—though only 5.2 percent do. The administration's proposed budget calls for a 50 percent increase in telework, with more than two dozen federal, state, and local laws in process aimed at encouraging this practice.

No doubt that that cultural issues remain, such as judging a worker's productivity based on "face time" in the office. But the growth of mobile devices has boosted interest in workplace mobility. According to a survey conducted by the telecommunications firm Ericsson, there will be more mobile devices than people by 2017. Ericsson predicts 9 billion mobile subscriptions, while the U.S. Census Bureau says the global population will be 7.5 billion that year.

What's more, TechCast, a virtual think tank based at George Washington University, forecasts that 30 percent of the employees in industrialized nations will telework two to three days a week by 2019. And TechCast estimates that the market for products and services related to workplace mobility will reach $400 billion a year.

VIDEO-BASED TRAFFIC

The explosion of video-based traffic is here to stay! According to Cisco's annual Visual Networking Index, 80 percent of the traffic on the Internet will be video-based by 2015. Last year, video comprised the majority of consumer Internet traffic for the first time, making up 53 percent of all uploads and downloads.

By 2015, video traffic will more than quadruple. Cisco estimates that when we account for peer-to-peer video sharing, the Internet will be made up of nearly 80 percent video content. By 2015, 1 million minutes of video—the equivalent of 674 consecutive days of viewing—will cross the Internet every second, and the community of online video users will double to more than 1 billion people.

UNDERSTAND BENEFITS & BARRIERS OF SOCIAL LEARNING FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

These mega trends can pave the way for companies to build a more open, collaborative, and social organization. The first step, however, is to understand both the benefits and barriers of building this more open and collaborative workplace.

As part of the Social Learning Boot Camp, Future Workplace has surveyed this topic with hundreds of attendees and found a number of common themes as to the perceived benefits and barriers, as well as a call to define precisely what social learning is to our business leaders.

Figures 1 and 2 show the range of benefits and barriers.

FIGURE 1 - BENEFITS
What are the benefits of leveraging social learning in your organization?

- Improve knowledge sharing
- Improve engagement
- Improve ability to find experts
- Increase speed of innovation
- Increase productivity

FIGURE 2 - BARRIERS
What are the barriers to leveraging social learning in your organization?

- Culture not ready
- Fear of security leaks
- Lack of manager understanding
- Employee confusion
- Perceived productivity loss

What is interesting to note is that productivity can be perceived both as a possible benefit and a possible barrier depending on the perception of the executive. Also interesting is that since Future Workplace has been surveying our attendees at the Social Learning Boot Camp over past year and half we have seen culture become the top barrier surpassing issues such as security, and confusion over exactly what social learning is inside the organization.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS AND IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL LEARNING

In consulting with many organizations on their social learning strategy, we have found five ways to move the social learning agenda forward: These include:

Identify the business problem to be solved and the key executives who will embed social and collaborative ways of working into the workflow of their teams. In the case of Unisys, their CEO and senior leadership team were the first to become active in their intranet, called Inside Unisys. They saw the business benefits for the entire organization, as well as an opportunity to increase the productivity of a particular group—the sales team.

Communicate the hard business benefits of bringing social networks into the enterprise—not just the soft ones of increasing knowledge sharing. No one will be moved to better understand social learning if you simply tout the knowledge sharing benefits. Instead, focus on sharing hard business benefits, including the potential for increases in employee productivity, enhancements in finding

information to solve a business issue, and improvements in time to market a new product or service. Focus on sharing performance results of the impact of social business in the workplace. For example, The Social Economy report authored by McKinsey Global Institute found that knowledge workers (that's you and me) spend 37% of our work week reading and answering email while looking for answers to our business needs. This totals 650 hours a year. Most importantly according to McKinsey research, social technologies, when used within and across enterprises, have the potential to raise the productivity of knowledge workers by 20 to 25 percent. So, far from being a distraction, using social tools in the workplace can be a boon to productivity. But it's our job to communicate this to the organization.

Create social media literacy training programs so everyone understands how to share knowledge in a safe and respectful manner. If you closely examine the list of commonly mentioned barriers to social learning, you will find confusion over just what it is and how to be "social" in the organization. One of the ways a growing number of organizations are addressing this is by developing social media literacy programs. This is already happening at broad range of companies and industries from Intel, Dell, and Cisco to Adidas and PepsiCo.

Be clear on metrics early in the process. These metrics should focus on hard business measures, such as decreasing the time to competence for key roles, increasing ability to find experts in the global enterprise, the

capacity to increase employee productivity and clarity of purpose in using social tools inside the organization. One of the key deliverables is to agree as a team on what the current state looks like prior to measuring the impact of using social and collaborative tools inside the organization.

Define new roles inside the learning function. These start with identifying and training an online Community Manager who will manage the online communities that will be created as a result of adopting social business. Think of the Community Manager role as a mix of Web 2.0 power user along with editorial skills, online moderation skills as well as community engagement.

Implementing social learning for business results is just like any other new initiative—it starts with the development of a business plan, an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and a plan of action to identify early use cases where leveraging social collaboration will result in delivering business impact to the organization.

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