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State of Social Learning in the Enterprise

Examining the drivers, challenges and positive outcomes behind social learning technology adoption and use

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Introduction

The current atmosphere of industry disruption is changing the way we work. The challenge to update and adapt learning processes in response to disruption drives the need for more employee collaboration than ever before. It even gives employees greater incentive to work, teach and learn as a team to achieve common goals. Organizations are thus using a blend of learning modalities to reach as many employees as possible.

One such modality is social learning. While it isn't a new concept, modern technology allows social learning to be implemented in an organized manner across the enterprise. Leading organizations are using social learning technologies to transform the workforce into what they need it to be: agile, nimble and able to tackle disruption head-on.

While the intent to implement social learning technologies is high, many organizations struggle with employee adoption. How do organizations formalize the social learning construct? To answer this and other questions, the Human Capital Media Research and Advisory Group — the research arm of *Chief Learning Officer* — partnered with Adobe for the 2019 *CLO Social Learning Survey*. We found that while organizations are trying out many different initiatives under the wider umbrella of social learning technologies, they often run into challenges with employee adoption. Something will need to change to get the workforce on board, as the benefits of successful adoption are plentiful and include better teamwork, communication and collaboration across the enterprise.

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Methodology

For the 2019 *CLO Social Learning Survey*, we surveyed members of the *Chief Learning Officer* Business Intelligence Board, made up of learning leaders and others in the learning and development, human resources and talent management spaces. The survey was entirely online and opt-in. Respondents did not have to answer each question, and all answers were aggregated to preserve anonymity. Nearly 500 respondents (494) shared their thoughts with us.

What exactly *is* social learning? On the survey, we defined **social learning technologies** this way:

Social learning technologies enable social interaction and collaboration during the learning process and may include blogs, discussion forums or wikis. This list isn't exhaustive — social learning is a wide umbrella and allows organizations to pull and curate informal learning from many different sources (see sidebar).

Examples of social learning technologies

- Communities of practice
- Discussion forums
- Facebook-style employee profiles
- Idea engine
- Idea management software
- Internal blogs
- Online shared workspaces
- Secure instant messaging
- Social learning embedded within the LMS
- Twitter
- Video
- Video channels
- Wikis and other collaboration tools
- Workspaces

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Summary of key findings

- Most organizations (61.3%) currently use social learning technologies.

- The top drivers for using social learning technologies are to create and support a culture of learning and encourage collaboration at the organization.

- Nearly half of all organizations (48.4%) that use social learning technologies for employees also use them for their customer communities.

- The top challenge to implementing successful social learning programs is a lack of employee adoption (54.3%).

- Top outcomes realized through social learning include learner compliance efficiency, employee retention and greater collaboration among cross-functional groups.

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Social learning technology adoption is high

The popularity of social learning is on the rise, as organizations diversify their learning mix, moving away from complete reliance on formal in-person training to include more informal learning methods, such as virtual, video or mobile learning. Today's rapid pace of change in the professional world demands more flexible options for learners so they can learn faster and better. One way to enable this is via social learning.

In today's hyperconnected, always-on world, organizations have mostly bought into social learning technology. Among survey respondents, a majority (61.2%) use social learning technologies already (Figure 1). Further, 22.9% are evaluating social learning and plan to implement within the next 12-18 months. Clearly, adoption is very high.

Figure 1:
Has your organization adopted social learning technologies into its learning strategy?

61.2%
Yes/to some extent

22.9%
Not yet, but we plan to in the next 12–18 months

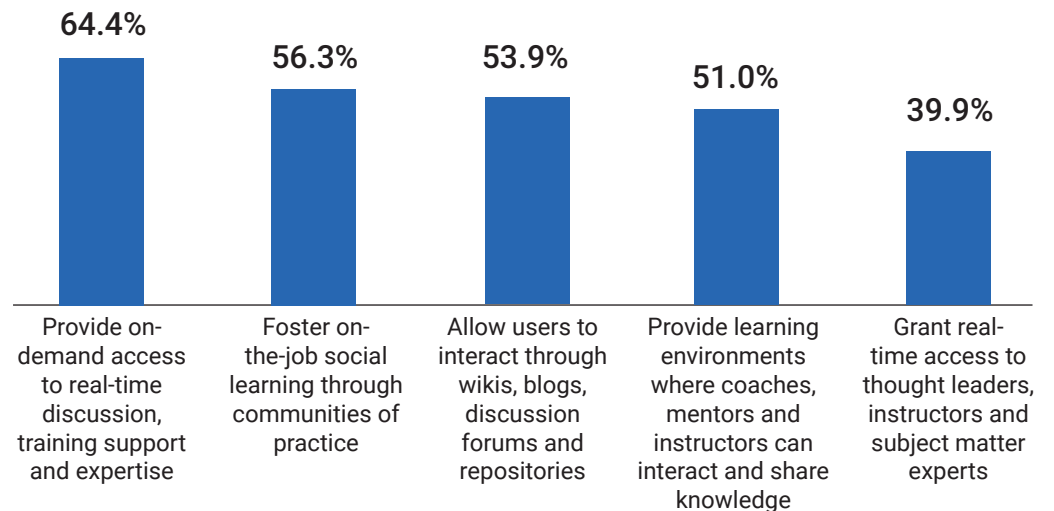**15.8%**
No, and we have no plans to
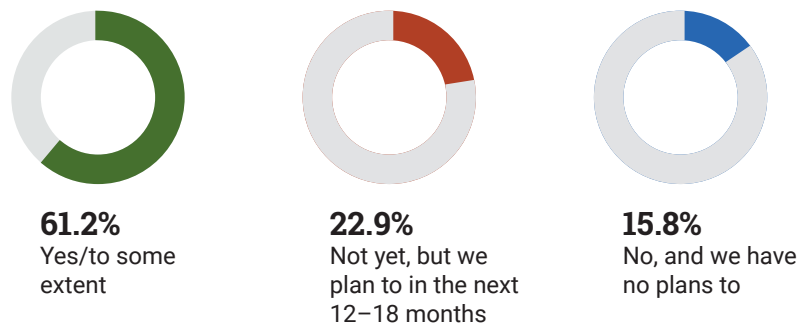
What workplace factors have driven organizations to adopt wider use of social learning? The largest single factor is the need to leverage micro pockets of expertise across the organization. On the survey, nearly eight out of 10 respondents (79.3%) identified this factor as either moderately or critically important in their decision to drive adoption. Other important factors include the need to increase employee engagement (78.1%) and an increasing focus on innovation within the organization (75.7%).

What are the reasons for such high adoption? Popular use cases include the drive to increase employee engagement. Organizations also need open communication among all employees and are adopting social learning technologies to drive this free and quick exchange of ideas (Figure 2). These use cases fully support leveraging expertise across the organization to build a culture of learning and collaboration.

Figure 2:
At your organization, what are social learning technologies used for?

64.4%	56.3%	53.9%	51.0%	39.9%
Provide on-demand access to real-time discussion, training support and expertise	Foster on-the-job social learning through communities of practice	Allow users to interact through wikis, blogs, discussion forums and repositories	Provide learning environments where coaches, mentors and instructors can interact and share knowledge	Grant real-time access to thought leaders, instructors and subject matter experts

Social learning technologies support a culture of learning

What do organizations hope to accomplish with social learning implementation? We've seen what organizations use social learning *for*. But what's the motivation? Among survey respondents, top motivations for using social learning technologies are to create and support a culture of learning at the organization and to encourage collaboration and innovation (Figure 3). This is supported by the types of social learning organizations want most to adopt (discussion forums, communities of practice).

Figure 3:
Top motivations for using social learning technologies

73.8%	52.4%	36.9%	36.2%
To create and support a culture of learning at our organization	To encourage collaboration and innovation	To increase transfer of learning to the job	To create communities of practice within the organization
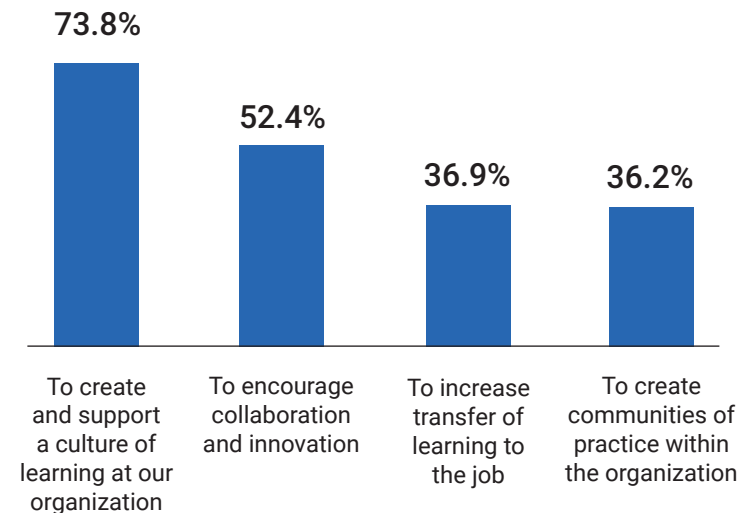
Is there a correlation between motivation and fit? Are the programs assigned to social learning the ones organizations feel are best suited to the modality? The types of programs that leaders say are the best fit for social learning technologies are leadership and executive development, on-boarding, career development and product knowledge (Figure 4). Through employee development, organizations can build trust and expertise in their workforce, resulting in better collaboration among everyone, from the line level to the C-suite.

Figure 4:
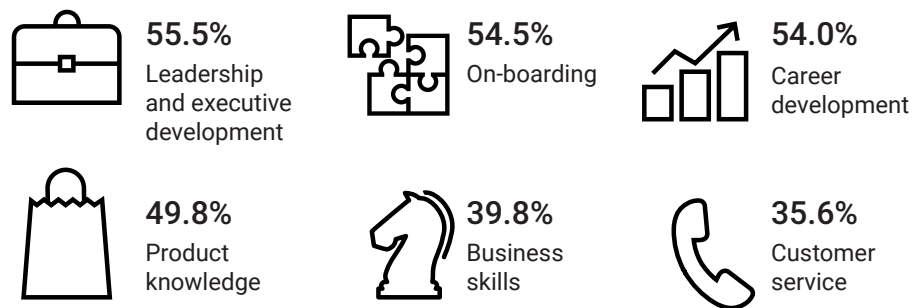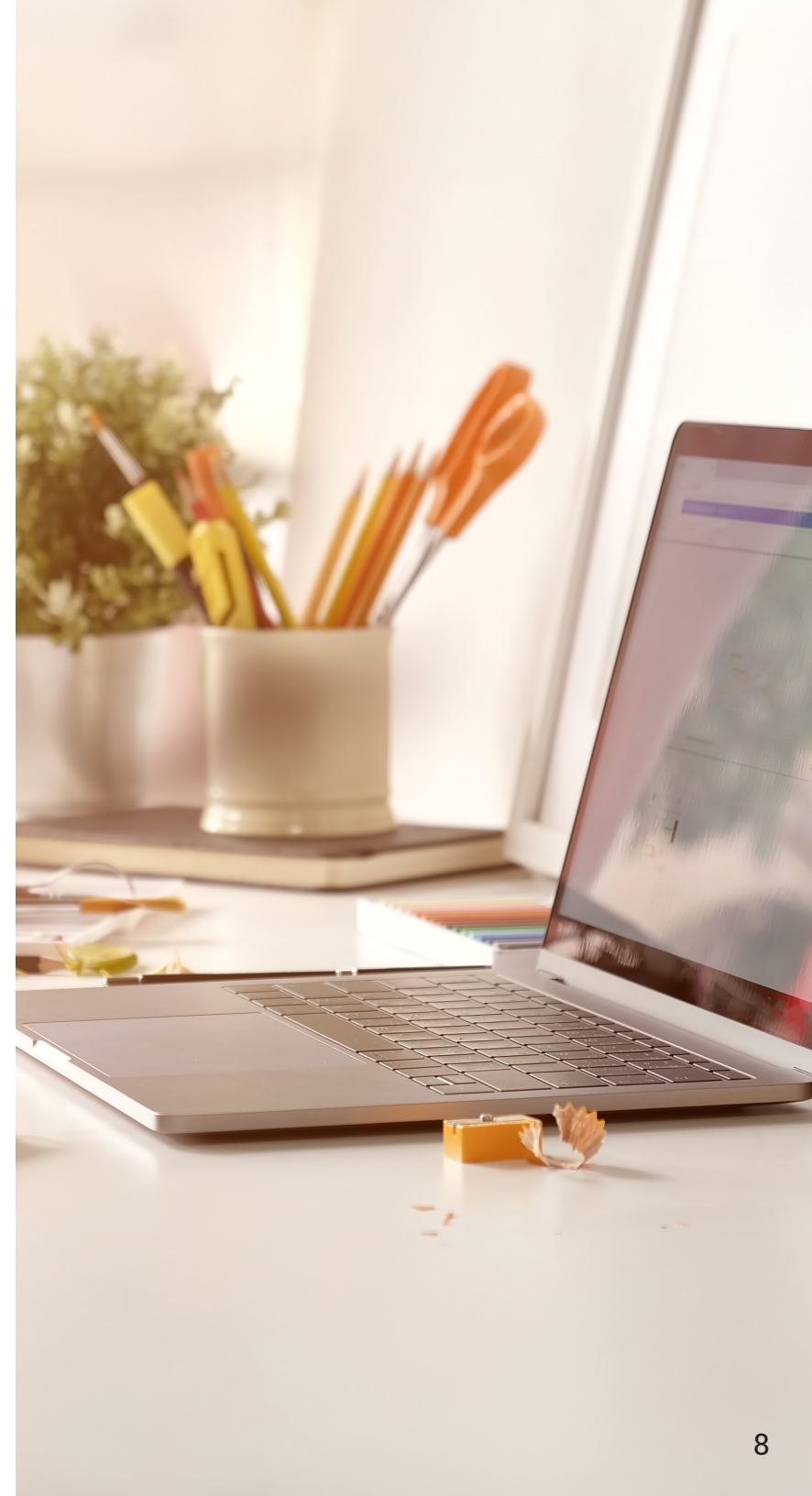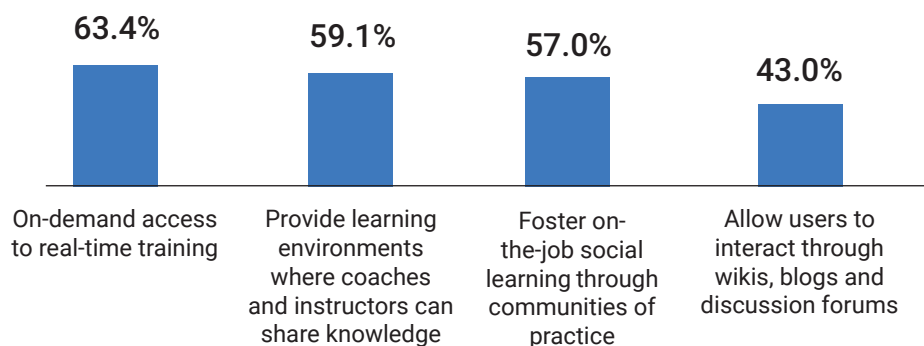Learning content best suited for using social learning technologies

55.5%
Leadership and executive development

54.5%
On-boarding

54.0%
Career development

49.8%
Product knowledge

39.8%
Business skills

35.6%
Customer service

Figure 5:
At your organization, what are you planning to use social learning technologies for?

63.4%	59.1%	57.0%	43.0%
On-demand access to real-time training	Provide learning environments where coaches and instructors can share knowledge	Foster on-the-job social learning through communities of practice	Allow users to interact through wikis, blogs and discussion forums

Social learning technologies support the extended enterprise

That learning is delivered to internal workforce members is a given. However, many organizations are increasingly delivering training to the extended enterprise. Does this also hold true with social learning technologies? In short: yes. Nearly half of all organizations (48.4%) use social learning technologies in their customer communities. Other extended enterprise members to benefit from this type of training include volunteer networks and alumni employees (Figure 6).

Figure 6:
Organizations using social learning technologies to support extended enterprise members

Customer communities	Volunteer communities	Suppliers	Alumni employees
48.4%	34.1%	18.3%	15.9%
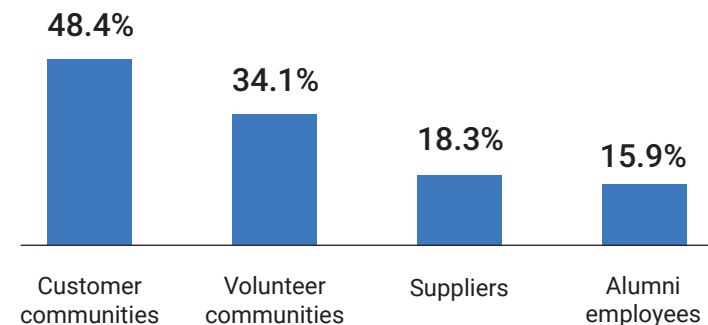
Why do organizations push learning to members of the extended enterprise? Nearly a third of survey respondents (32.7%) believe that customer education as a learning content type works really well when delivered through social learning technologies. Providing social learning to customers is one way to easily educate and engage a large group about new and existing products or services.

Q: At your organization, what has been the least successful use of social learning technologies?

A: "All — still struggling for adoption • actively contributing — a lot of staff are observers rather than contributors • creating interactions between non-geographically co-located employees • not completely understanding the potential of social learning and therefore not utilizing to its fullest."

— *Survey respondents, open comments*

Organization adoption is high, but employee adoption remains a challenge

We've seen how organizations are committed to implementing social learning technologies. However, the question remains: Are they successful in their efforts to disseminate this throughout the enterprise? Where do they struggle? What are examples of challenges and obstacles organizations face as they push for the increased use of this modality?

Generally, organizations have done the heavy lifting of convincing executives that using social learning is the right thing to do. However, many encounter roadblocks regarding employee uptake. By a wide margin, the top challenge is adoption of social learning technologies by employees (54.3%). Other top challenges include the difficulty in measuring the impact of social learning (37.8%) and leadership buy-in about the value of social learning (34.1%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7:
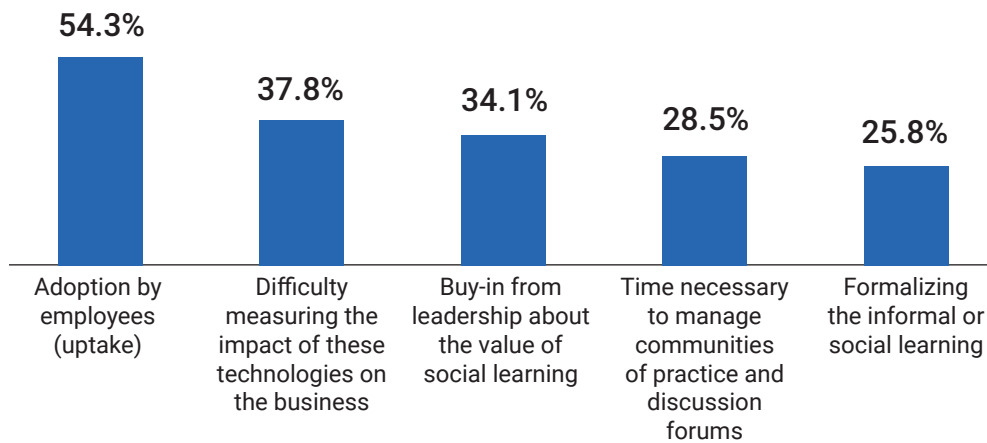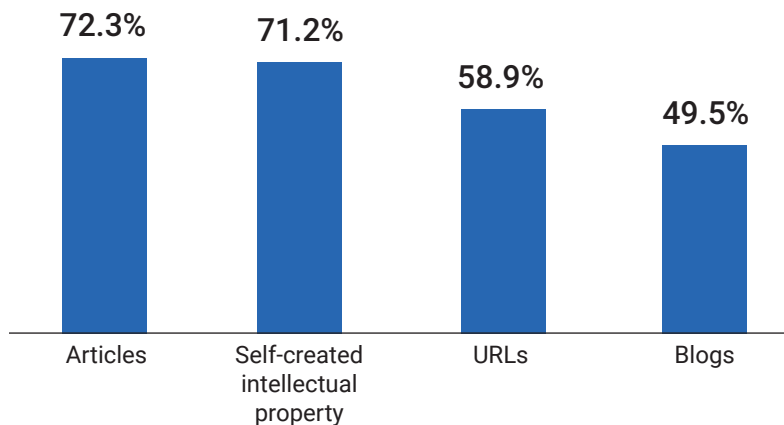**Top challenges when implementing social learning technologies**

54.3%	37.8%	34.1%	28.5%	25.8%
Adoption by employees (uptake)	Difficulty measuring the impact of these technologies on the business	Buy-in from leadership about the value of social learning	Time necessary to manage communities of practice and discussion forums	Formalizing the informal or social learning

Figure 8:
Formats used as part of social learning

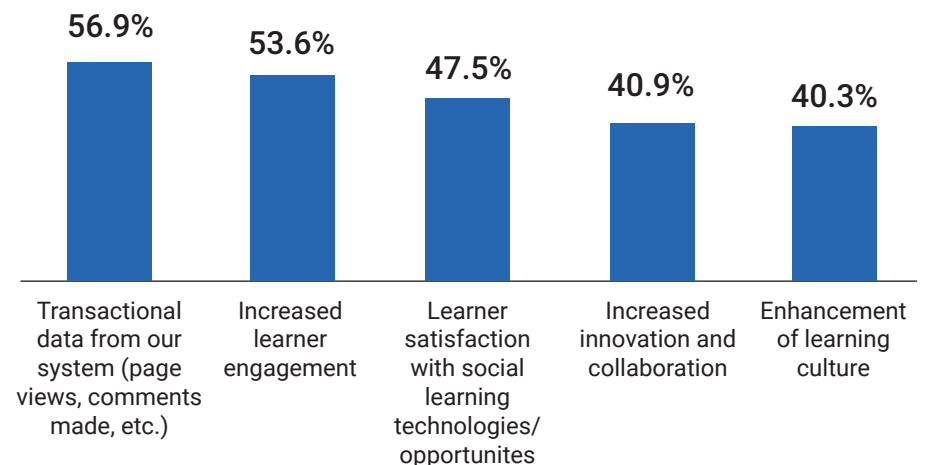|			
72.3%	71.2%	58.9%	49.5%
Articles	Self-created intellectual property	URLs	Blogs

Greater communication and collaboration are top outcomes of social learning technologies

In the end, how do organizations measure the impact of their adoption of social learning technologies, and what have they seen in the data? Organizations assess and capture a variety of metrics to understand the effect social learning technologies have on the enterprise. From easily capturable transactional data to harder-to-quantify metrics surrounding culture improvements, organizations track these and more in their efforts to understand social learning's ROI (Figure 9). Outcomes realized through social learning include learner compliance efficiency and employee retention, and greater collaboration among cross-functional groups.

Figure 9:
Metrics used to assess the impact of social learning technologies

56.9%	53.6%	47.5%	40.9%	40.3%
Transactional data from our system (page views, comments made, etc.)	Increased learner engagement	Learner satisfaction with social learning technologies/ opportunites	Increased innovation and collaboration	Enhancement of learning culture

Q: At your organization, what has been the most successful use of social learning technologies?

A: "Allowing users to contribute to content and share best practices, tips, their own learnings • connecting, particularly newer recruits, into the overall community • user-generated content like quick how-to demos • cascade of technical solutions within the organization from one to many • communities of practice and on-demand crowdsourcing."

— *Survey respondents, open comments*

Q: What results has your organization seen, if any, in improving learning culture and/or innovation using social learning technologies?

A: "Faster learning, increased knowledge share and documentation • better cross-collaboration • awareness has increased dramatically • learners feel and say it is much better than standard techniques • better engagement, spirit and curiosity • improvement in retention rates, enhanced onboarding, integration of new leaders and improved time to competence."

— *Survey respondents, open comments*

Conclusion

As organizations look to increase internal communication and collaboration, they're turning to social learning to help them achieve their goals. Many organizations also use social learning technologies to help them solve for the following: to create and support a culture of learning at their organizations, encourage collaboration and innovation and increase the transfer of learning on the job.

By adopting social learning technologies, organizations can deliver learning across the enterprise while at the same time also facilitating greater collaboration and sharing of ideas across geographically dispersed teams. Technology shall be the key to drive higher employee adoption of social learning. User-generated content and curation will enable scale without compromising on quality, and that will allow organizations to leverage subject-matter experts from disparate geographical areas to share their expertise with peers and eventually create a culture of collaboration. Those organizations that have already seen success with social learning technology implementation and use report increased knowledge transfer, more cross-collaboration and faster speed to competence.

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Social learning technologies are becoming one of the largest trends in today's L&D landscape, yet much must be done to bridge the gap between intent and adoption. While social learning often achieves organizations' stated goals about agility and collaboration, without technology-driven employee adoption, it will only remain a wish. Leadership has been convinced of social learning technologies' practical applications. Now, HR and L&D leaders must do what they can to convince employees of its benefits and provide a platform that can simplify usage and drive engagement.

"We tried incorporating a couple of social learning technologies into our organization about seven years ago and they did not take root — the community did not adopt/ find value in them. We have not revisited these and other opportunities in five years.

It is time to think about trying again."

— Survey respondent, open comments

Introducing Social Learning in Adobe Captivate Prime LMS

Adobe Captivate Prime LMS allows learners to share their expertise with peers in the form of web-based or user-generated content posted on topic-based discussion boards. These topics can be tied to existing or new skills, and other learners interested in similar skills can follow these boards to learn and even contribute to the topic, akin to a social media platform. With the Content Curation feature, assign experts to review content posted by learners and approve or disapprove based on its appropriateness. You can also set the system to approve all learner content.

Interested in seeing a demo or learning more about social learning in Adobe Captivate Prime? Contact Adobe at captivateprimesales@adobe.com.

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For inquiries, contact Sarah Kimmel, vice president: skimmel@humancapitalmedia.com.

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