

Foreword by Daniel H. Pink

Author of New York Times bestsellers Drive and A Whole New Mind



**The
NEW
Social Learning**

A Guide to Transforming Organizations Through Social Media

Tony Bingham and Marcia Conner

More Praise for *The New Social Learning*

“Campfires and coffee machines have always embodied a secret sauce for informal learning and cultural richness, and social media has magnified that potential exponentially. Bingham and Conner have written a smart, useful guide for understanding both the possibilities and the pitfalls of this new and increasingly significant part of our world. Distinct from all the pop-culture commentary about the likes of Twitter and Facebook, this is a refreshingly sophisticated and studied analysis of what’s really valuable in this arena and how to make the best use of it. A great handbook for our times.”

David Allen

Author of *Getting Things Done* and *Making It All Work*

“Most workplace learning occurs not in the classroom, but through ongoing, daily social interactions with others. This new book from Bingham and Conner, complete with dozens of real-life examples and case studies, shows the myriad ways smart organizations are leveraging new technologies and strategies to support and sustain social learning at work.”

Jane Bozarth

Author of *Social Media for Trainers, From Analysis to Evaluation,*
and *Better than Bullet Points*

“Want to thrive in today’s world of constant change? Then read this book—a book of evocative stories about the power of social learning in organizations but these stories apply to us as individuals just as well. Read and enjoy and then adopt its wisdom.”

John Seely Brown

Independent Co-Chairman, Deloitte’s Center for the Edge

Former Chief Scientist, Xerox Corporation

and Director of Xerox Palo Alto Research Corp (PARC)

Co-author of *The Power of Pull: How Small Moves,*

Smartly Made, Can Set Big Things in Motion

“*The New Social Learning* is an absolutely fascinating exploration into how social media can change and is changing the workplace into knowledge organizations. Read this book! Your future success may depend on it.”

Marshall Goldsmith

World-renowned executive coach

Author of *The New York Times* best-sellers *Mojo*
and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

“This book is both inspirational and at the same time pragmatic, as it explains how the new social learning can transform the workplace. Learning managers should be excited by the new possibilities of harnessing social media to facilitate social learning in their organizations.”

Jane Hart

CEO, Centre for Learning & Performance Technologies (C4LPT)

“Enterprises around the world are recognizing that the way we work in a globally integrated business world is changing. This book is wonderfully written with practical advice on how to create a culture that can thrive in this environment by taking a people-centric approach to how we collaborate to get things done. While the internet and social tools can augment an individual's abilities, the stronger focus in this book is on how networks of individuals can redefine the way people learn and work together to foster a more flexible, collaborative, and participative environment. We are already seeing organizations that are embracing these changes outpace their competition.”

Kristen Lauria

Vice President, Marketing & Channels

Lotus & Websphere Portal

IBM

“Finally, here is a book that extends the use of social media to the complex world of training and development. Bingham and Conner leverage their combined knowledge of organizations large and small to provide concrete strategies that will help your employees learn with greater speed and ease.”

Alexandra Levit

Author of *New Job, New You: A Guide to Reinventing Yourself in a Bright New Career*

“Leaders making the greatest impact these days are open and relationship-oriented and support a culture of sharing while also maintaining command. This book provides an invaluable roadmap for how learning and social technology can accelerate that transformation.”

Charlene Li, Author, *Open Leadership: How Social Technology*

Can Transform the Way You Lead

Co-author, *Groundswell*

“As business leaders, we’ve been buzzing about the benefits of social media: keeping up with the rapid rate of change and the speed of innovation, knowledge sharing, informal learning, and employee engagement to name a few. We already know why we want social media. Conner and Bingham have finally told us how. They link clear business challenges to social media concepts without fixating on a particular tool. In a sea of social learning theory, this book provides business application for business results.”

Anthony Loyd

Global Head, Learning & Development

Diversey, Inc.

“Learners are increasingly turning to social networking to share expertise and enhance the learning process. Tony Bingham and Marcia Conner provide a brilliant perspective on how organizations can design and harness the power of social learning.”

Elliott Masie

Chair, The Learning CONSORTIUM

“In *The New Social Learning*, Bingham and Conner lay out a compelling case for learning’s dramatic transformation and a roadmap for companies trying to harness it. This book is an obvious read for learning professionals and a smart read for the enlightened senior executive who is interested in creating a true learning culture.”

Kevin Oakes
CEO, Institute for Corporate Productivity, Inc. (i4cp)

“This book shows how social media turns learning moments into an ongoing conversation where people can learn nonstop.”

Garry Ridge
President & CEO, WD-40 Company

“In *The New Social Learning*, Tony Bingham and Marcia Conner provide a compelling case for embracing social media tools and strategies that make it possible for everyone to learn from everybody, anytime and anywhere. Rich with examples and perfectly timed, this eye-opening book is a must read for anyone involved in creating high-value learning for the knowledge-rich and increasingly digital workplace.”

Marc J. Rosenberg, PhD
Consultant and educator in learning and e-learning
Author of *Beyond E-Learning*

“Learn from those adopting a new way of working: with people at the center.”

Susan Scrupski
Executive Director, The 2.0 Adoption Council

“If you’re interested in engaging stories, practical advice, and ideas on how to advance social learning in your organization, this is the book for you. Bingham and Conner meet you wherever you are in the journey and pragmatically offer everything from the theoretical underpinnings of social learning to how to use Twitter for customer support. Social learning is here now, and this book is an essential read for anyone in the learning profession.”

Karie Willyerd
Co-founder, Future Workplace

The New Social Learning

The New Social Learning

A Guide to Transforming Organizations Through Social Media

Tony Bingham and Marcia Conner

Foreword by Daniel H. Pink



Alexandria, Virginia



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Contents

Foreword by Daniel H. Pink.....xiii

Introductionxvii

Acknowledgments.....xxi

The New Social Learning Playground Rules 1

1 The 36,000-Foot View..... 3

 The Workplace Has Changed.....4

 What Is the New Social Learning?.....6

 Moving Theory Into Practice..... 10

 Why Is This Happening Now?..... 11

 Is This Learning?..... 19

 How to Respond to Critics 22

 The Next Level 26

 Informing Decisions 27

2 Paving Online Community Roads..... 33

 Community Capabilities..... 35

 Communities Face Forward 37

 Make a Case for Online Communities 40

 Respond to Critics 48

 Recommendations..... 51

3 Share Stories Around, Up, and Out..... 57

 Pictures Make Progress..... 61

 Social Media Is Compelling 63

 Make a Case for Media Sharing 64

 Respond to Critics 70

 Recommendations 72

4 Microsharing for a Healthy Culture 77

 Burst Forward 83

 Edu-Tweet 85

 Respond to Critics..... 96

 Recommendations 99

5 Growing Collective Intelligence..... 103

 Increase Collective IQ..... 109

 Share for Our Time..... 112

 Break with the Past 116

 Respond to Critics 119

 Recommendations 121

6 Immersive Environments Refine Learning..... 125

 Get Together Virtually 129

 Out-of-This World Experiences 133

 Respond to Critics 141

 Recommendations 143

7 Connecting the Dots at In-Person Events..... 147

 Growing Together 150

 Speaker, Teacher, Audience, Student..... 151

 Takeaway 156

 Respond to Critics 159

 Recommendations..... 160

Afterword.....	165
Appendix: Governance	169
Notes and Resources.....	173
About the Authors	183
About ASTD	185
About Berrett-Koehler	186
Index	187

Foreword



One afternoon in the early 1990s, I found myself at a meeting in my boss's cavernous office when one of the organization's computer support guys showed up to demonstrate a new-fangled technology called instant messaging. I'd never seen IM before, but I was intrigued—so I volunteered for the demo.

My boss settled in front of his computer. I stationed myself at another computer just outside the office. And away we went—typing and tapping a silent conversation in real time.

“Wow,” I shouted to the others back in the room. “Very cool.” And when I returned to the meeting, I offered—unsolicited, of course—my thoughts on what we'd just witnessed.

“This could be big,” I said. “Instant messaging is going to be incredibly useful for the deaf and hearing impaired, who can't just pick up the phone and talk to someone. It's not something most people will use much, but for that slice of the population it's amazing.”

Today, nearly two decades after instant messaging has become a part of everyday communication around the world—when literally tens of millions of people with perfectly good hearing are IM-ing right now—there's a moral to this tale: Sometimes we miss the point.

That's especially true of technology. In business terms, most people—myself included—think of Twitter, Facebook, and other social media as tools for *marketing*. But now that I've read this smart and incisive

book, I realize that I might be as wrong about that as I was about that other young technology back in the early 1990s.

As Tony Bingham and Marcia Conner show in the pages that follow, the deepest, most enduring impact of social media might be on *learning*.

There's a certain intuitive, forehead-slapping logic to that insight. Of course! In so many ways, learning is a fundamentally social act. From circle time in kindergarten, to study groups in college, to team projects in the workforce, sociability has always greased the gears of learning.

But now wikis, multiplayer games, and social networking have taken that truth and vaulted it to new heights. "Our inherent drive to learn together can be facilitated through emerging technologies that extend, widen, and deepen our reach," Bingham and Conner write. These innovations, they argue, "enable a new kind of knowledge-building ecosystem with people at its core."

The New Social Learning is a terrific guide to that emerging ecosystem. It will give you a set of core principles—"playground rules," as the authors call them—to help you navigate it. And with examples that range from Best Buy to Intel and from Deloitte to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, it will show you how social media can improve the way you recruit talent, engage employees, and build a workforce's capacities.

Social learning isn't a replacement for training and employee development. But it can accomplish what traditional approaches often cannot. For instance, this new, technology-enabled approach can supplement instruction with collaboration and co-creation and, in so doing, blur the boundary between the instructor and the instructed and enhance the experience of all. It can leave a "digital audit trail" that reveals the path of a learning journey and allows others to retrace it. It can re-energize your conferences and retreats by providing a backchannel of feedback and questions. It can bring far-flung employees together into new communities in which they can not only learn from one another, but also fashion new offerings for customers. In short, social media can change the way your company works. As the authors put it, "Once you move away from the push of information to the pull of learning, you liberate creative powers in your people."

It's exciting when two of the most respected names in training and development come together to produce a work like *The New Social Learning*. When you read this book, you'll learn something—and, I'm convinced, you'll share its many insights.

But what you might share most of all is that Twitter, Facebook, and their social media kin aren't all about marketing. They're equally, if not more so, about learning. This book helped me understand that and avoid missing the point of a new technology once again. It can do the same for you.

Daniel H. Pink
Washington, D.C.
June 2010

Introduction



Beyond the hype, buzzwords, and entertainment value of reconnecting with old friends, people in organizations across the globe use social media to collaborate and learn. Emerging technologies enable a new kind of knowledge-building ecosystem with people at its core.

Classic business models presume that relevant information is created and shared either through management or training. But classic isn't enough: There's too much to know and make sense of, too little time to gain perspective, and information changes too fast to dispense. A virtual water cooler becomes a gathering place to share ideas and ask questions beyond the limits of formal organizations, company meetings, or classrooms.

Our inherent drive to learn together can be facilitated through emerging technologies that extend, widen, and deepen our reach. More so than any other technology, social media allows us to embrace the needs of changing workplace demographics and enables people of all ages to learn in ways that are comfortable and convenient for them.

Today, networks of knowledgeable people, working across time and space, can make informed decisions and solve complex problems in ways they couldn't dream of years ago. By bringing together people who share interests, no matter their location or time zone, social media has the potential to transform the workplace into an environment where learning is as natural as it is powerful.

Although most writing about social media focuses on how to use it for marketing, we believe there's a larger story to tell. This book is for people who are specifically interested in how social media helps people in organizations learn quickly; innovate fast; share knowledge; and engage with peers, business partners, and the customers they serve.

We came together to write this book because the topic matters deeply to both of us even though we come to the subject from unique vantage points.

Tony leads a large professional association whose members help organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage by building the knowledge and skills of their people. He is committed to helping executives and the training and development community align learning with the strategic priorities of the organization and to ensure they have the tools to build the capability of the workforce to achieve growth and success. And, as a result of years spent working in the technology sector, he has a personal passion for the power that collaborative tools have to create big change.

Marcia is a partner at a fast-moving firm that provides thought leadership, research, education, and advice on leveraging emerging digital strategies. She refines product strategies and market positions, while facilitating a cultural shift to prepare organizations to adopt social media, removing barriers in their path to success. With a long history in the workplace-learning field, often inside large enterprises, she brings a collaborative perspective to industries that seek to do more than just inform.

We wrote this book for senior executives, managers at all levels, and the people rising quickly to those posts. Rather than simply address leaders focused on education delivery models, trainers thinking about instructional design, or even technologists fascinated by tools, we explore the application of social media in all aspects of talent management: recruitment, engagement, retention, capacity, and capability. We look at the power of social learning and share compelling stories from companies that validate the value of collaborative technologies to elevate and accelerate business and employee impact.

The opening chapter addresses the trends reshaping the workplace, the challenges and opportunities these shifts create, and how the new social learning provides the flexibility and perspective required in times of change.

Each subsequent chapter focuses on one social media category and its application. Every chapter also tackles the business challenges these emerging practices can overcome and how to address critics as you wade into the social stream, providing recommendations on how you and your organization can begin to put these approaches to work. While we address technology, we recognize that the specific tools in use today may have changed dramatically by the time you read this book, so we've created a complementary website—<http://thenewsociallearning.com>—where you can learn more about the applications you may want to try. On that site, we also offer step-by-step “getting started” guides because readers will come to the topic with varying interest and levels of knowledge.

Although each chapter builds on the one before it, beginning with the broadest approaches and then narrowing in on more specific methods, we encourage you to read the first chapter and then skip to any other chapter that intrigues you, weaving your way back.

It is our hope that with a broad view of social media's power to transform your organization, you will garner wide participation and facilitate meaningful conversations, finding yourself ready to move forward with deeper understanding, concrete examples of success, and a renewed energy to learn.

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The NEW Social Learning Playground Rules

1. No loitering in the playground areas. The value is in participation and engagement.
2. The playground is for people of all ages.
3. Only people interested in having influence are allowed on the premises.
4. Abusive, spammy, or intolerant behavior is not tolerated. Sarcasm, debate, and challenging and calling out bull are welcome, though.
5. If you feed pigeons, be warned they may poop on you.
6. Keep excessive cussing, name calling, and partisan politics away from the pool.
7. Enjoy life offline to stay interesting online.
8. The right to be heard does not include the right to be taken seriously.
9. Be patient, above all, with yourself.

Failure to obey these rules can result in missing an unprecedented opportunity to learn with smart, interesting people across the globe.

The 36,000-Foot View

When I look back over the past few years, I see the evolution and the growth of a program, of an organization, and of a community. I see learning. I see dynamic interaction among experts in social and online media and those involved in the creation and conveyance of intelligence. It's time to expand that conversation, to talk about innovation beyond tools—to talk about innovation as an art, as a behavior, and as a necessity for survival and progress. Growth and adaptation are part of a journey, one that cannot be successful if taken alone. And so we come together.

—Geoffrey Fowler

Editor-in-Chief, The CIA World Intelligence Review (WIRe)



Load the boat.”

The phrase played over and over in his head while he boarded the plane.

As he took his seat, uncertainty ate at him, distracted him, turning the plane’s cabin into one large noise. He was tired but had work to do. A couple chatted continuously in the seats behind him. It would be a long flight.

He unpacked his carryon, then let his head fall back, eyes closed. The meeting had been tough. He knew what he had to do to rebuild the business and with it his job. And he had to begin before tomorrow morning’s meeting. In his mind, he started loading the boat.

He'd first heard the phrase at the university hospital where his wife had been cared for, and he'd asked a resident what it meant. "It means you're not alone. If you have a problem, if you need help, if you need to learn something new, there's a team of people you can call on at any time." Over the course of his wife's treatment, he'd watched the medical team use every means they had to stay in touch with people they trusted, the team they'd built. These people learned in real time in real-life situations. They saved lives; they had saved her life. Maybe their approach to collaboration could save his business, too.

He had all the tools. He had his team. He'd done the work. He was well informed, but something was still missing.

When he started to load the boat in his mind, the noise of the plane disappeared. His fear and uncertainty dissipated. As the plane settled in, the Dave Matthews Band played through the earbuds his daughter had given him before the flight. He read email and watched a short video clip. Then he used the plane's wireless connection to check email and scan his social net. What he had to do turned into what he wanted to do. He had found his rhythm.

The computer screen danced in front of him. His fingers became an extension of his mind. His smartphone and laptop worked together as his fingers flew. What felt heavy before seemed weightless at 36,000 feet.

Tweets and texts flooded in from his worldwide team about the board members' perspectives, making it clear where his energy needed to take him. He filled in the missing piece of the presentation. He shared with his team, and he found his voice. He knew he'd succeed.

Load the boat. Instantly recall what you've been trained to do and put it to work. Learn as you do. Engage instead of escape. Thrive instead of survive. This is social learning at its best. Noise turned into music. Colleagues turned into collaborators. A symphony. The next day a board member said it best: "Pure music."

The Workplace Has Changed

At this moment, your people are already learning with social media. They have already begun to reach out and connect in new and powerful

ways. The question is, will you come along? Do you want to play a part in what and how they learn? Or do you want to try to stop them? Will you restrict them or free them to do the work you hired them to do? The work you do *with* them?

Workplace learning is a competitive advantage for every company. People need to learn fast, as part of the ebb and flow of their jobs, not just on the rare occasion they are in a class. Senior leaders urgently want to provide their people with something vibrant, effective, and cutting-edge to support their nonstop learning—something that will ensure that competitive edge.

As organizations search for ways to increase profits, save money, and compete, lighter and friendlier tools have become available to help them excel. These social media tools are changing the way people work, usually bypassing formal training altogether.

Fundamentally, this book is about how people learn socially, often but not always with technology. This book is not a plea to reorganize the training department or turn it into the social media team, although some of you may decide to do that. We will show how people in organizations can work together more effectively across departments with their employees, partners, and customers, aided by social media in the stream of work. We will show how this approach imbues learning into the essence of work and how it makes learning a valuable, ongoing process.

We don't focus on the tools here. They change fast, and we have set up a website where the details about the technologies can stay fresh. Visit the site at <http://thenewsociallearning.com>. There you can contribute to the conversation and locate up-to-date information.

We encourage you to use this book to discover how social media tools facilitate learning, how they might be leveraged to extend and expand your interactions with colleagues, and how to use them to create something vibrant. As Chris Brogan, one of the top bloggers in the world, coauthor of *Trust Agents*, and author of *Social Media 101* says, "Focus on connecting with the people, and the tools will all make sense."¹

Social learning is a fundamental shift in how people work—leveraging how we have always worked, but now with new tools to accelerate and broaden individual and organizational reach.

What Is the New Social Learning?

To understand social learning, we must first understand social media. Social media is a set of Internet-based technologies designed to be used by three or more people. It's rarer than it sounds. Most interaction supported by technology is narrowcast (one to one), often with a telephone call or an email message; niche-cast (one to small groups), for instance using email distribution lists or small-circulation newsletters; or broadcast (one to many), as in large-scale online magazines or a radio show.

Social learning is what it sounds like—learning with and from others. It has been around for a long time and naturally occurs at conferences, in groups, and among old friends in a café as easily as it does in classroom exercises or among colleagues online who have never met in person. We experience it when we go down the hall to ask a question and when we post that same question on Twitter anticipating that someone will respond.

While social media is technology used to engage three or more people and social learning is participating with others to make sense of new ideas, what's new is how powerfully they work together. Social tools leave a digital audit trail, documenting our learning journey—often an unfolding story—and leaving a path for others to follow.

Tools are now available to facilitate social learning that is unconstrained by geographic differences (spatial boundaries) or time-zone differences (temporal boundaries) among team members.

The new social learning reframes social media from a marketing strategy to a strategy that encourages knowledge transfer and connects people in a way consistent with how we naturally interact. It is not a delivery system analogous to classroom training, mobile learning, or e-learning. Instead it's a powerful approach to sharing and discovering a whole array of options—some of which we may not even know we need—leading to more informed decision making and a more intimate, expansive, and dynamic understanding of the culture and context in which we work.

The new social learning provides people at every level, in every nook of the organization, and every corner of the globe, a way to reclaim their natural capacity to learn non-stop. Social learning can help the pilot fly more safely, the saleswoman be more persuasive, and the doctor keep up to date.

For a long time, many of us have known learning could transform the workplace. We longed for tools to catch up with that potential. Only recently have changes in corporate culture and technology allowed this eventuality to unfold.

Clay Shirky, who writes about web economics and teaches new media at New York University and author of *Cognitive Surplus*, points out, “Prior to the Internet, the last technology that had any real effect on the way people sat down and talked together was the table.”²

At its most basic level, new social learning can result in people becoming more informed, gaining a wider perspective, and being able to make better decisions by engaging with others. It acknowledges that learning happens with and through other people, as a matter of participating in a community, not just by acquiring knowledge.

Social learning happens using social media tools and through extended access and conversations with all our connections—in our workplaces, our communities, and online. It happens when we keep the conversation going on a blog rich with comments, through coaching and mentoring, or even during a workout at the gym.

Social learning is augmented by commercial tools, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, and wikis, and with enterprise applications and suites of applications including Socialtext, Socialcast, Newsgator, and Lotus Connections. With some custom development, learning also can grow on enterprise social platforms such as IBM WebSphere Portal Server, Microsoft Sharepoint, SAP Netweaver Portal and Collaboration, and Oracle’s Beehive.

Don’t conclude this is all new, though. Social software has been around for almost 50 years, dating back to the Plato bulletin board system. Networks such as CompuServe, Usenet, discussion boards, and The Well were around before the founder of Facebook was even born. Only technology enthusiasts used those systems, though, because of clunky interfaces that didn’t readily surface or socialize the best ideas.

*Prior to the Internet,
the last technology that
had any real effect on the
way people sat down
and talked together was
the table.*

The new social learning is enabled by easy-to-use, socially focused, and commercially available “Web 2.0” tools and “Enterprise 2.0” software that move services, assets, smarts, and guidance closer to where they

*Training often gives
people solutions to
problems already solved.
Collaboration addresses
challenges no one has
overcome before.*

are needed—to people seeking answers, solving problems, overcoming uncertainty, and improving how they work. They facilitate collaboration and inform choices on a wide stage, fostering learning from a vast, intellectually diverse set of people.

These new social tools augment training, knowledge management, and communications practices used today.

They can introduce new variables that can fundamentally change getting up to speed, provide a venue to share spontaneously developed resources as easily as finely polished documents, and draw in departments that previously hadn’t considered themselves responsible for employee development at all.

Social tools are powerful building blocks that can transform the way we enable learning and development in organizations. They foster a new culture of sharing, one in which content is contributed and distributed with few restrictions or costs.

Most of what we learn at work and elsewhere comes from engaging in networks where people co-create, collaborate, and share knowledge, fully participating and actively engaging, driving, and guiding their learning through whatever topics will help them improve. Training often gives people solutions to problems already solved. Collaboration addresses challenges no one has overcome before.

The new social learning makes that immediate, enabling people to easily interact with those with whom they share a workplace, a passion, a curiosity, a skill, or a need.

The new social learning allows us, as Stowe Boyd who first coined the term *social tools* and has been working for two decades observing how they affect business, media, and society puts it, “[to grow] bigger than my

What It's Not

Another way to think about the new social learning is to compare it with what it is not.

- ◆ **The new social learning is not just for knowledge workers.** It can empower people who work on shop floors, backstage, on the phone, behind retail counters, and on the battlefield. It is not your corporate intranet, although features of social learning may be included there. Document management, calendaring, blogs, and online directories may contribute to learning socially, but they are often task oriented rather than community oriented.
- ◆ **It's not at odds with formal education.** Students often use Twitter as a back channel for communicating among themselves or with instructors. Teachers can also use social media before and after classes to capture and share everyone's ideas.
- ◆ **It's not a replacement for training or employee development.** Training is well suited for compliance, deep learning, and credentialing. Formal development programs are still needed to prepare employees to progress through the organization. Social learning can supplement training and development in the classroom or online. It complements training and covers knowledge that formal training is rarely able to provide.
- ◆ **It's not synonymous with informal learning,** a term often used to describe anything that's not learned in a formal program or class. The broad category of informal learning can include social learning, but some instances of informal learning are not social—for example, search and reading.
- ◆ **It's not a new interface for online search,** which could only be considered social because other people developed the content you discover. Finding content with a search engine does not involve interpersonal engagement—a hallmark of social learning.
- ◆ **It's not the same as e-learning,** the term used to describe any use of technology to teach something intentionally. That broad category can include social tools and, if it's organized using an online learning community such as Moodle, can be quite communal.
- ◆ **It's not constantly social in the same way a party is.** Often people are alone when they are engaged and learning through social tools. The socialness refers to the way interaction happens: intermingling ideas, information, and experiences, resulting in something more potent than any individual contribution.

head. I want to create an idea space where I can think outside my mind, leveraging my connections with others.”³

Moving Theory Into Practice

A “social learning theory” was first put forward in 1954, standing on the shoulders of John Dewey and drawing on the budding fields of sociology, behavior modification, and psychology applied to understanding and changing conduct.⁴ Ideas from social learning theory informed the thinking of later learning theorists, including Albert Bandura who wrote in 1977, “Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling.”⁵

The early focus of social learning theory was learning socially appropriate behavior by imitating others, which is only a small aspect of how social learning is used in practice today. Given the recent explosion of means for people to learn socially and the vast array of topics that can be learned from others, it’s unfortunate what was called social learning had such a limited scope. Recognizing this, there will be times we shorten “the new social learning” to “social learning” here and in our work elsewhere to describe the broader issues and opportunity now available. Social learning is modeling, observation, and so much more.

Social constructivism is the theory of knowledge that seems to best describe how people learn together, whether in person or online. When you engage with people, you build your own insight into what’s being discussed. Someone else’s understanding complements yours, and together you start to weave an informed interpretation. You tinker until you can move on.

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget laid the groundwork for this approach by challenging the behaviorist notion popular in the 1950s that people were passive recipients of external stimuli that shaped how they behaved.⁶ Instead, Piaget conducted many experiments to demonstrate that people are active participants in their learning. They interpret what’s around them based on their unique current understanding of the world, and then they continually modify their understanding as they encounter new

information. Piaget's discoveries eventually led to the concept and practice of discovery learning for children and the use of role-play and simulation for adults. Active participation is the key in both cases.

This set the stage for Peter Berger's and Thomas Luckman's *social construction of reality*, which led to the prominence of social constructivism.⁷ We are social creatures. If we play an active role in creating our views of reality, then the groups we participate in also contribute. Our reality is shaped by our social interactions. These exchanges provide context—socially scaffolding what you have already learned with what another person has learned and so on. This generates a virtuous spiral, socially generated and built and more powerful than any one participant could create individually.

In a world of rapid change, we each need to garner as much useful information as possible, sort through it in a way that meets our unique circumstances, calibrate it with what we already know, and re-circulate it with others who share our goals.

The new social learning leverages online communities, media sharing, microsharing, content collaboration, and immersive environments to introduce people to ideas in quick bursts, when it suits their workflow, without a big learning curve, and in a way that more closely mirrors how groups interact in person.

Social constructivism has become timely because work has for so long focused on what's known. To triumph today, we must now understand new information and complex concepts—what hasn't been known before and is often more complicated than one person can figure out alone.

The 21st century mind is a collective mind where we access what we know in our friends' and colleagues' brains. Together we can be smarter and can address ever more challenging problems. What we store in our heads may not be as important as all that we can tap in our networks. Together we are better.

Why Is This Happening Now?

The convergence of three key trends accelerates the need for social learning. Although some of these trends have been observable for decades, their influence compounds.

Three Converging Workforce Trends

- ◆ Expanding opportunities for personal connection
- ◆ Emerging expectations from shifting workforce demographics
- ◆ Increasing reach of customized technology

Expanding Opportunities for Personal Connection

We have always been social creatures. We have been naturally driven to communicate, converse, and share with one another since our ancestors came into being. This is part of our survival mechanism as well as our natural preference. Our ability to converse and share with one another has always been expanding.

When people on the farm worked with their neighbors, putting up a barn or exchanging wheat for corn, they shared information about a harvesting technique or a new recipe. They created and sustained social capital—the stock of social trust, norms, and networks developed through a flow of information and reciprocity drawn upon to solve common problems. Social capital became financial capital as two farmers who exchanged tools could do more while buying less.

The opportunities ramped up as transportation enabled us to become more mobile and expanded the number of people we could socialize with around town. Then the phone let our voices do the travelling and negated the requirement for us to be in the same place as those we wanted to talk with. As telephone lines expanded globally, distance became even less of a barrier for conversation and connections. As satellites and cellular and computer networks came online, we became able to communicate with anyone and everyone, anywhere and anytime.

Communication and collaboration reached a tipping point with email and online forums, then instant messaging, then voice over Internet, then video. Just as we thought we couldn't possibly be any more connected, our social nature fueled yet another expansion as we formed alliances and human networks of distributed organizations using commercially available then inside-the-firewall media tools.

These connections represent more than an expanding volume of conversations. We are witnessing a dramatic increase in our collective thinking, collaboration, and capacity to grow. Doug Engelbart, the father of personal computing, was prescient when he pondered a collective IQ half a century ago:

What if, suddenly, in an evolutionary sense, we evolved a super new nervous system to upgrade our collective social organisms? [What if] we got strategic and began to form cooperative alliances, employing advanced networked computer tools and methods to develop and apply new collective knowledge?⁸

We may now be realizing this dream. An opportunity to raise personal, organizational, and collective IQ has arrived. As stressed as our communication capabilities seem today, history shows this trend will continue as we figure out how to more effectively connect, collaborate, converse, and learn. We need to embrace the opportunity for personal connections and be willing to evolve.

Emerging Expectations from Shifting Workplace Demographics

Think back to the year you joined the workforce. Then reflect on how things were about six months into that job. Did you think you should be given the opportunity to make big splashes and reap rich rewards? Did you consider your off hours your own, reserved to pursue your passions? Many of us did. Yet we forget that when we label newcomers to the workforce as unrealistic about advancement or uninterested in working hard.

Some of the qualities associated with the youngest generations in the workforce today are qualities of age, not generation. Brashness, dissatisfaction with the status quo, and constant questioning are characteristics many of us had when we were young. Because we didn't have Facebook connections with friends reinforcing our perspectives, let alone magazines and blogs showcasing young people who became chief executive officers at 19, we abandoned those mindsets to fit in.

Have your expectations of the workplace changed in this newly connected world? Are many things the same as they were as recently as

last year? If you were to go to work for your company now, would you not have higher expectations than you had in the past? We certainly would.

Our wide look at demographic shifts has convinced us that organizations of all types and sizes have a lot to learn and do differently if they are to attract and keep the talent—of all ages—they need to succeed. It's not all about Millennials (also known as the Net Generation and Generation Y). Many of us, their older colleagues, also find that new social technologies allow us to work in ways we never believed would happen in our lifetime.

These shifts are about everyone in the workforce. We don't discount the generational factor; we simply see it as part of the whole.

We believe differences in generation, gender, and consumer outlook together provide a useful framework to address a changing workforce and workplace. Success will go to those businesses savvy enough to understand, learn from, and leverage these shifts.

We should aspire to create a workplace that uses the talents of everyone, connecting them in meaningful ways, regardless of differences in generation, gender, and consumer outlook.

Generation

By 2014, potentially half the workforce will be from Millennials. Overall, this generation has a high comfort level with technology and broad expectations about using it to learn. The previous generation, Generation X, shares many of these expectations but has learned to navigate slow-to-change workplaces. Millennials and generations after are not as apt to put up with inefficient ways.

Fairly soon, Generation Z will begin entering the workforce. They are even more intimate with technology and have higher expectations for instant answers and constant connectivity than Millennials.

Baby Boomers have already begun to retire. Although the perception exists that older workers do not widely embrace technology, a recent survey by ASTD shows that 79 percent of Baby Boomers, compared with 76 percent of Millennials, believe that social media tools are not being used enough for education activities within organizations.⁹

Generations

Depending on the author or commentator, the dates that demarcate the generations can vary. For the purposes of this book, we've used the Pew Research Center's report titled "Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next."

- ◆ Baby Boomers: 1946–1964
- ◆ Generation X: 1965–1980
- ◆ Millennials, Net Generation, or Gen Y: 1981–1997
- ◆ Generation Z: After 1997.

Source: Pew Research Center, Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2010).

Gender

To add to the demographic shift, estimates suggest that within this decade nearly 60 percent of the workforce will be female, a group more likely to turn to its social networks for insights and perspectives than males.¹⁰ Studies show that women experience a physiological and emotional change when they connect verbally—and combined with new ways to easily maintain, organize, and create new connections, these networks demonstrate value to women more quickly because these connections feel more like experiences they have off line.

Consumer Outlook

Another shifting workplace influence is consumer savvy. Rich media around us everywhere—on TV, on the Internet, in stores, and on mobile

Personal Matters

Regardless of generation or gender, most employees no longer have someone staying at home to handle personal matters while they are at work. To take care of ourselves, we divide our energy and focus between work and home. Organizations that prohibit this through policy or technology controls become poor guardians of their employees and limit their capacity to attend to small items that may become big distractions.

When people of all ages rely on technology, they see they can work anytime, anyplace, and that they should be evaluated on work results—not on how, when, or where it was done.

phones—have changed our expectations about communication inside our companies, too. We bring our knowledge and assumptions from the marketplace to work. As a result, we are no longer willing to put up with hard-to-manage interfaces, poor quality events, or questionably useful design because we now know—we’ve experienced—better alternatives.

Increasing Reach of Customized Technology

As consumers, we have grown to expect manufacturers and retailers to customize all sorts of things for us: houses, personal computers, jeans, sneakers, credit card billing cycles, and so on. A new breed of technology and new forms of distribution replace a long history of mass production with mass customization.

This trend is moving to the workplace in *mashups*, assembling unique items to create something new. Producing new results from pre-existing bits and pieces can result in new songs, new software, new courses, and new job roles.

Wayne Hodgins, a futurist focused on technology, standards, and knowledge creation, coined the term “snowflake effect” to describe the exponentially growing trend toward extreme mass customization for every person, every day.¹¹

We see four types of mashups influencing how people learn socially: role, workgroup, content, and management.

Role Mashups

Although the word mashup is new, in the 1970s, Alvin Toffler wrote that a society neatly divided into producers and consumers would change to one composed of “prosumers” who would produce and consume.¹²

A similar blurring of roles occurs in social learning with everyone acting as both learners and teachers. Rather than simply doing two jobs, the mashing up of roles creates a whole new way of working.

This intersection can be credited with the rapid adoption of social media in society. It fundamentally changes our level of participation from being recipients to being creators and innovators, heightening engagement and focus in the same way that knowing we are going to

write about or teach something heightens our senses as we take in new information.

Mashups change work's traditional linear and separate roles into a culture of co-production, co-design, and co-development, mixing responsibilities among everyone involved in a new cyclical process. In the case of the new social learning, it's not about simply giving people online communities or wikis and getting out of the way. It is about a new iterative and inclusive model where anyone is able to create, use, publish, remix, repurpose, and learn.

Workgroup Mashups

Global connections are creating what *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman calls a "flat world," where we can reach, team up with, and learn from people everywhere.¹³ Through collaboration, outside the boundaries of traditional hierarchies and located anywhere on the planet, people can join forces to produce content, goods, and services.

In writing this book, we were able to assemble instant workgroups of people by sending queries over Twitter, engaging with those who follow us online, running ideas and questions by them, seeking their opinions and data they might know of to back up our hunches, and asking about the objections and arguments they hear and how they overcome them. Through these means we found relevant articles, organizations with compelling stories, critics to consult, and supporters who extended what we thought about these topics in ways that strengthened what we wanted to say.

Content Mashups

With the Internet, anyone can find almost anything about a topic. Often, we don't need to create new content because all the parts we need already exist. Mashups allow us to quickly access these relevant bits of existing information and put them together to form a new combination just right for the current need.

Sites such as Slideshare let you see collections of slides and enable downloading so you can pick out individual slides and mix and modify

them to create your own just-right slide set. Slideshare also enables people to share comments, identify favorites, make recommendations, and find other content you might also like.

Thumbs-up and thumbs-down ratings on websites such as Reddit collectively create new content. When you add comments or assign stars evaluating your experiences with a product, service, or site, you also create new content.

Add to that fresh insights, some riffed on by others, when we share this information over Twitter, Facebook, or an in-house equivalent, or when we create a social bookmark using Digg or Delicious, where we add our perspectives and opinions on existing bits of content such as web pages, blogs, and articles.

Management Mashups

Leaders have always conveyed their visions. Now they use blogs, email, newsletters, video, and audio to widen their reach and to engage co-workers in a conversation.

The head of Intel's human resources learning and development group took this further by posting his semi-annual assessment scores to the entire Intel learning and development community and inviting discussion on a global level. In effect, he used a mashup to say, "Let's talk. How can I work on these things?" He used the technology Intel uses for collaboration (a companywide wiki) and feedback about him personally (his review) in a forum where people could add their perspectives on him and the organization to create something that hadn't existed before. He also asked people to be his employees and customers, coaches, and teachers. His role modeling and risk taking led to further conversations about being more strategic as a group and sped up how everyone learns.

Bob Picciano, general manager of IBM software sales, uses social tools inside IBM to reach out to his immediate teams and quicken the pace for people to reach corporate executives. He makes traditional hierarchies more blurred and more dynamic, getting the job done through networks and communities. When asked by Luis Suarez, social computing evangelist at IBM, how it feels for a very busy leader to use social

tools while at work, Picciano responded, “Liberating! It’s liberating to let command and control go.”¹⁴

“In many cases you aren’t giving up control—you are shifting it to someone else that you have confidence in,” says Charlene Li, founder of Altimeter Group and author of *Groundswell* and *Open Leadership*. “More than anything else, the past few years have been dominated by the rise of a *culture of sharing*. This new culture has created an additional, timelier way to listen and, more importantly, opens it up to anyone in the organization who is willing to learn.”¹⁵

Because of technological advances, especially social tools, we are no longer just surfing the Internet: In some ways, we are becoming the Internet. We are no longer following leaders: We are leading and influencing people and organizations. The Internet is becoming our supporting infrastructure. The power of mashups, the power of social media itself, is the inclusion, interoperability, sharing, and iteration that are so very human and social.

Learning can easily occur anytime, anywhere, and in a variety of formats. It always has, but now it’s codified and easy for others to see. These new social tools can enable organizations to strike a balance between surfacing the knowledge people need and giving them the ease and freedom to learn in a healthy and open way.

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Is This Learning?

Often when we talk about these trends and technologies, people ask us how we define *learning*.

We define learning as the transformative process of taking in information that, when internalized and mixed with what we have experienced, changes what we know and builds on what we can do. It’s based on input, process, and reflection. It is what changes us.

By pigeonholing a very small segment of this transformative process with labels such as *formal* and *informal*, we marginalize learning. And so the rich and exciting conversations that transform people stop being considered learning at all. They get called communications, marketing, pre-sales, or customer support.

Learning is what makes us more vibrant participants in a world seeking fresh perspectives, novel insights, and first-hand experiences. When shared, what we have learned mixes with what others have learned, then ripples out, transforming organizations, enterprises, ecosystems, and the society around us.

Training, knowledge management, good leadership, and a whole host of organizational practices can add to an environment where people learn, but people can learn without this assistance, too.

In what is known as the 70/20/10 learning concept, Robert Eichinger and Michael Lombardo, in collaboration with Morgan McCall of the Center for Creative Leadership, explain that 70 percent of learning and development takes place from real-life and on-the-job experiences, tasks, and problem solving; 20 percent of the time development comes from other people through informal or formal feedback, mentoring, or coaching; and 10 percent of learning and development comes from formal training.¹⁶

To help see learning in a broader way, think of five people you communicate with and then identify at least three things you learned from each. Most people find this easier than recalling information they learned in a formal setting—not because they weren’t offered useful topics to learn—but because when we connect with people, the exchange sticks with us. That engagement calls up something from within us or connects with an emotion, and that mental dance leaves a footprint we can walk in again. Reflecting on it later improves learning even more.

Some formal training programs are designed for gaining new skills or competencies. A new emergency medical technician (EMT) may not remember all the steps for cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), but when she needs to use it, her body knows what to do. That learning is about more than recall, too. It’s also about building muscle memory and a warehouse of options when the need to resuscitate someone arises.

Other training programs are for expanding your thinking or capacity to deal with situations ahead. The same is true of learning with people. This also comes from the community around you, in person or online. Etienne Wenger, author of *Digital Habitats*, *Communities of Practice*, *Situated Learning*, and other books, asserts that human knowing is fundamentally a social act.¹⁷ By hearing about the experiences of others, you mash up snippets of data, add them to your own, and fit them into your sense of who you are and what you can do—together and with others. “To learn is to optimize the quality of one’s networks,” says Jay Cross, author of *Work Smarter* and *Informal Learning*. “Learning is social. Most learning is collaborative. Other people are providing the context and the need, even if they’re not in the room.”¹⁸

The traditional model of corporate training, where experts disseminate knowledge in one-time training events or someone presents all day, is being modernized. It needs to take full advantage of the larger opportunity for incidental learning, learning from interacting with others, and learning along the way in the course of work.

Organizations and individuals will not be sufficiently served only by formal training. Diverse backgrounds and learning styles, and especially the complexity of people’s jobs, determine what and how they learn. More critically, much of what needs to be learned is moving faster than we can create structured learning opportunities. Traditional training methods may be useful for teaching highly specific tasks or safety procedures, but evolving practices require more. Ad hoc and self-directed learning becomes a key strategy when we need to move fast.

To learn is to optimize the quality of one’s networks. Learning is social. Most learning is collaborative. Other people are providing the context and the need, even if they’re not in the room.

The new social learning, which centers on information sharing, collaboration, and co-creation—not instruction—implies that the notion of training needs to expand. Marc Rosenberg, author of *E-Learning* and

Beyond E-Learning, points out, “The metaphor of the classroom must make room for the metaphor of the library and the town hall.”¹⁹

Studies show that we learn what we need to solve problems and inform decisions in the real world. Learning and work strategist Harold Jarche often says, “Work is learning, learning work.”²⁰ Knowledge acquired but never put to use is usually forgotten. We may act as if we care about learning something and go through the motions, but we will forget it unless it is something we want to learn and it fits how we work.

Social learning is especially good at “loading the boat,” showing us that for any crisis or just to satisfy our curiosity, there is a network to support us at any time. It’s what Howard Rheingold, who teaches about “virtual community” (a term he coined) and social media at the University of California–Berkeley and at Stanford University and author of books including *The Virtual Community* and *SmartMobs*, describes as the “online brain trust representing a highly varied accumulation of expertise.”²¹

Social learning is also very good at giving people a view into the little moments that happen between big activities, modeling behavior for others to observe, retain, and replicate—or avoid. We look across the tweet stream and tuck away lessons of finessed customer service calls, graceful endings to overlong presentations, and recoveries from cultural *faux pas* in front of visiting clients. Together we are better.

New developments such as life-like simulations, immersive environments, and ever more intelligent searches hold the promise of a new way—a deeper way—to connect and gain context-rich information that can transform us and thereby affect the organization, the society, and the people we serve.

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By Tony Bingham & Marcia Conner
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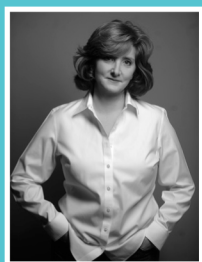
The New Social Learning

Social media tools are powerful building blocks for enabling learning and development, while also documenting the learning journey and leaving a path for others to follow. Put emerging social technologies to work for your organization, and you'll open the door to greater knowledge, a richer learning experience, and an enhanced corporate culture where "brain share" is a way of life.



Tony Bingham

Tony Bingham, President and CEO of the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD), is committed to ensuring that the training and development community has the necessary tools to build a capable, successful workforce. From years spent working in the technology sector, Bingham understands the power of collaborative technologies to create big change for organizations.



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"Want to thrive in today's world of constant change? Then read *The New Social Learning*—a book full of evocative stories about the power of social learning in organizations."

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Author of *The New York Times* best-sellers *MOJO* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

"This is a refreshingly sophisticated and studied analysis of what's really valuable in the social media arena and how to make the best use of it. A great handbook for our times."

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