Serious Insights

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The Tens—Making Enterprise Social Learning Work

1 **Decide what you need to know** Start with knowledge, not with technology. Define what you need to know. Define knowledge in the context of strategic initiatives in order to imbue it with strategic intent. You may not know all of the knowledge you think you need, which is another reason for item ten.

2 **Who knows what** Most knowledge resides inside of people's minds, and any new knowledge is incubated there—capturing who knows what means creating deep profiles either crafted by individuals, or derived from communications and data. Connecting people is a higher order metric than capturing artifacts.

3 **Management Engagement** Social learning isn't about management leadership, but management participation. If learning is important to an organization, then leaders need to model the behaviors they expect from their workforce, in this case, actively learning, more specifically, actively learning, and teaching, through social media channels. Management must also lead by giving themselves permission to both learn and teach as part of their objectives.

4 **Model the flow** Knowledge is not static. Rather than use language like repositories, transfer and retention, use flow. Organizational learning in particular includes structured components. For instance, when engaging with a customer, an opportunity is created to listen, to document the learning and to transmit it to others. Knowledge flows should be identified in order leverage learning opportunities. Similarly, mediation points (as opposed to end points, which suggest a termination) should also be documented so that the architecture will ensure that those who need knowledge have access to it.

5 **Recognize the channels** Up to this point, no technology has been mentioned. Technology must align with engagement models and the way knowledge is shared. Choose channels that align with people's work models and with other technology. Do not assume that existing channels are sufficient, but do not dismiss them without good reason.

6 **Capture Context** Information exists for fleeting moments as people interpret data through their knowledge. Knowledge exists in human minds, and in some cases, codified in systems. When people try to translate their knowledge into systems, they do so imperfectly, because they concentrate on facts and logic, not on context. Structured systems can only interpret facts and logic, but unstructured systems can include deep context, from bias to fuzzy categories, history and differing opinions. Those may also be data, but they are data more easily interpreted by people than by systems. By capturing this context social systems offer a new path to value for organizational learning.

7 **Define proximity** Proximity is a particular form of metadata. Knowledge is valid at certain places and at certain times. Organizations need to pay particular attention to capturing the proximity knowledge. Location and time services make this easy. Be careful, however, when deploying channels that don't consistently capture this information as it reduce knowledge cohesion and lead to fragmentation. It hinders the ability to segment currency from history.

8 **Define the storage architecture** Vendors who offer communications through different channels downplay the fact their information isn't stored in a common, easily integrated repository. Some will integrated with existing APIs, but that means they siphon off communications into side channels. IT organizations need to create effective architectures that integrate data, not fragment it.

9 **Define the Access Model** Knowledge is captured through many channels, but organizations believe, incorrectly, that they should concentrate knowledge delivery through a single channel or portal. Knowledge delivery should be just as contextual as knowledge capture. It should not, however, be overly complex or confusing—don't permit multiple channels with the same functionality or intent. Do create channels that reach broadly and deeply through systems and organizational boundaries. Chaos theory teaches that complex patterns emerge from chaos. Allow complex patterns to emerge, but avoid anarchy.

10 **Create feedback loops** Learning itself is a learning process. Feedback loops should monitor if knowledge is flowing, how effective it is being used, and if any emergent knowledge has become a focal point. Item one suggests identifying what you need to know, but you will also need a feedback loop to identify emergent knowledge. Emergent knowledge, by its nature, defies prior categories so the organization must be diligent to not only identify it, but to recognize it and assign it value. This is the second most important feedback loop. The most important feedback loop focuses on ensuring the health of the learning ecosystem.