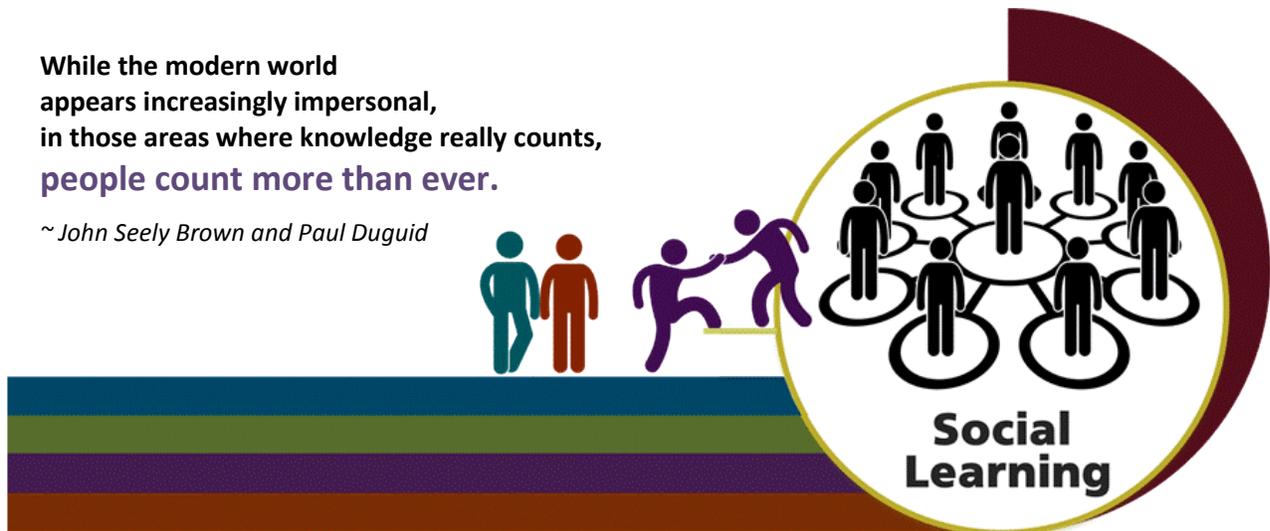# Social Learning Success Factors
Recommended strategies for promoting social learning

**While the modern world
appears increasingly impersonal,
in those areas where knowledge really counts,
people count more than ever.**

~ John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid

The benefits of social learning are quite well known, and learning professionals are often called on to support social learning in their organizations. In most instances, it wouldn't be advisable to *require* people to engage with one another in specific ways, but there are activities that learning leaders can initiate to encourage and support productive interactions. The idea is to form a partnership with those who need support to advance social learning.

Five factors provide a fertile environment for social learning:

- **Purpose** – the degree to which the organization and the people whose learning you want to support have identified learning and performance goals
- **Individual inclination and skill** – the extent to which people have the interpersonal and technical skills to engage effectively in social learning, and the motivation to do so.
- **Solid interpersonal relationships** – the extent of positive relationship dynamics among the people who are engaging in social learning.
- **Appropriate activities** – the degree to which the activities being encouraged and enabled are in alignment with people's needs, and the degree to which people are engaging effectively with those activities.
- **Supportive tools** – the appropriateness, availability, and ease of use of the tools being offered.

These factors and support recommendations are based on decades of research on social learning, and you can find more information about the research on which this framework is founded at L4LP.com/social-learning.

Recommended Strategies for Promoting Social Learning

The following pages provide specific recommendations for actions that learning and development professionals can take to encourage and support the kinds of rich interactions that help people to learn. Learning professionals can fill in details for these actions based on their own situations and organizational culture.

To use this job aid, consider a particular group of people you want to support and their specific learning and development needs. With that in mind, consider the five factors and determine the degree to which the elements listed in the left column are present. Where the elements may be weak, the right column provides suggestions on what learning leaders can do to promote social learning in collaboration with the group itself.

Social Learning Success Factors

Purpose

To strengthen these elements

Business goal or initiative	− Engage with potential sponsors and champions − Communicate alignment between business goals and individual goals and values
Performance goals	− Find pockets of real need for performance support − Offer help to people who have already identified a need for themselves
Desired learning outcomes	− Encourage people to define their own goals − Align learning goals with performance goals and business initiatives

Individual Inclination and Skills

To strengthen these characteristics

Motivation	− Define purpose of social learning in consideration of people's needs and values − Develop marketing campaign for social learning activities
Social savvy	− Invite exemplars to engage − Make introductions among learners
Interpersonal skill	− Model the needed skills − Provide development resources for needed skills
Time	− Value outcomes − Allow dedicated time for learning

Solid Interpersonal Relationships

To strengthen these characteristics

Rapport	− Provide robust profiles − Encourage photographs and videos − Highlight people's backgrounds and tell positive stories about them − Actively introduce new people
Trust	− Encourage working out loud − Share author names (not anonymous or attributed to a department)
Role engagement	− Describe roles and responsibilities (e.g. mentor, subject matter expert) − Assign roles (e.g. sponsor, contributor) − Name and recognize community manager and ambassadors − Introduce and connect people to one another
Compatibility or appeal	− Invite external perspectives − Highlight experts and connectors − Grow and diversify the community
Culture	− Encourage leadership engagement − Minimize competition among learners − Recognize contributions − Moderate issues

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Social Learning Success Factors

Appropriate Activities

To increase engagement with these activities

Socializing	– Establish welcome rituals – Encourage conversation with compelling content and discussions
Storytelling	– Post articles or videos about specific projects and people – Encourage sharing of success stories, fumbles and lessons learned
Information exchange	– Pre-seed content areas with valuable documents and links – Strategically curate content to keep it fresh – Run barn-raising events to rapidly build learning assets – Encourage working out loud – Invite blogging as a way of sharing information – Recommend posting of resources that are shared among individuals – Post project documentation – Encourage networking and cross-team interactions – Recognize contributions
Q&A	– Ensure timely responses – Invite guest experts – Assign people to answer questions – Highlight questions of the week
Mentoring and coaching	– Assign roles – Recognize efforts – Allot time
Group inquiry (Co-learning)	– Plan learning activities – Run book club or article discussions – Engage active conversation via Twitter, chat, or discussion forums – Devise micro learning events
Joint effort and collaboration	– Assign projects to a team of people with varying skills – Encourage working out loud – Enable communication and virtual meeting tools – Enable collaboration tools

Supportive Tools

To increase productive use of these tools

Document repository **Posting tools** **Collaboration tools** **Chat tools** **Discussion boards** **Virtual meeting tools**	– Enable appropriate tools – Use tools that people already use if possible – Make tools easily accessible in the workflow – Improve findability with categorization and tagging – Allow people to create new spaces and forums – Provide how-to directions and tip sheets – Troubleshoot issues
Work environment	– Encourage conversation – Provide a variety of meeting space configurations (groups, one-on-one) – Design flexibility for reconfiguration – Design spaces for serendipitous encounters