

FACILITATE KNOWLEDGE SHARING WITH **SMART COMMUNICATIONS**



*A White Paper by Kevin Anselmo
Based on Interviews with Learning Leaders*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Digital disruption is placing a premium on learning like never before. Organizational learning can no longer be viewed solely as one-off, ad hoc trainings. Technological advances and disruptions in the marketplace call for a culture in which employees organically share their knowledge and take part in their own daily self-learning.

Several learning leaders I interviewed on my Learning and Development Stories podcast shared this sentiment and highlighted their experiences around fostering a knowledge sharing culture within their organizations. This white paper highlights the importance of knowledge sharing and different examples from organizations. It also delves into the smart marketing communications strategies and tactics that support a knowledge sharing culture:

- 1. Mobilize Leaders**
- 2. Formulate a Value Proposition through Message Creation**
- 3. Disseminate Content to the Right Audiences**
- 4. Train and Coach Subject Matter Experts to Communicate Effectively**
- 5. Promote Learning Externally**

These points are based on my experiences leading marketing communications within the leadership development space and the perspectives shared by the 14 different learning leaders interviewed on the podcast.

EXAMPLES OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

“There is no way that we as L&D, with only 6-10 of us, are going to be able to support 10,000 people across the company.”

This reality was shared on episode 14 of the Learning Development Stories podcast by Toby Newman, L&D Manager at Here Technologies. Toby and his colleagues took on this challenge by launching a learning platform that provides training for the company’s subject matter experts to share their knowledge by creating their own videos.

“It is important that we as L&D empower the users so that they feel like they can do it on their own and don’t wait for us. It gives us the ability to be a lot more flexible, agile and able to serve as many customers,” he said.

Patrick Veenhoff, previously the Head of Learning & Development at Swisscom, shared a similar initiative while he was in this role.

“We introduced a very disruptive approach to corporate learning,” said Patrick on episode 12 of the podcast. “I didn’t have any trainers, and we didn’t produce any training content. Instead, we enabled 5,000 employees to teach and learn from each other.”

Patrick explained that training is created when a need is identified. The employee then works alongside a coach to develop the training from conception to delivery. It was very well received.

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“Traditional learning and development departments do things top down, and this approach doesn’t work anymore,” explained Patrick. “Instead, for me, the only way to really address this is to create a platform and then an ecosystem that self regulates.”

Both Toby and Patrick described these initiatives as game changers for their organizations.

Perhaps you are thinking that your organization should heed their advice and develop such a knowledge sharing culture. This might entail having employees create their own training videos similar in nature to the examples from Swisscom and Here Technologies. But there are other mediums for knowledge sharing: webinars, events, podcasts, use of internal collaboration tools and articles.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND TACTICS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING

All organizational knowledge sharing initiatives need to be anchored around smart marketing communications strategies and tactics that are directly linked to business objectives. This is all the more critical if employees haven't embraced a continuous learning and knowledge-sharing mindset, thus necessitating a culture shift.

This area of marketing communications is often overlooked in L&D activities, as was reported in LinkedIn Learning's 2019 Workplace Learning Report. Over half of respondents report that increasing learner engagement is the top challenge for their L&D teams, yet talent developers only spend 15% of their time marketing learning opportunities to employees. Here are five strategies and tactics to address this challenge.





Smart Communications Principle #1

Mobilize Leaders

If a CEO is using social media for the benefit of the organization, then that leader is well positioned to ask other employees to do the same. On the flip side, if a CEO engages in inappropriate behavior, then there is a good possibility that “noble” organizational values that employees are encouraged to live by will be disregarded.

Therefore, if trying to instill a positive knowledge sharing culture, leaders need to be seen both sharing their own knowledge and learning from the content that others are creating. So executive sponsorship is critical.

Here are some ways to incorporate leaders in the marketing communications process of your knowledge sharing initiative:

- Secure leadership buy-in. They need to be aligned around the metrics for success and also be on board with an open learning environment.
- Incorporate their voices as you interview stakeholders and create your marketing communications plan.
- Feature their perspectives. For example, highlight the leader in some capacity if creating a promotional video to highlight the knowledge sharing initiative. Ideally this leader is communicating language that reinforces your key messaging.
- Work with leaders to make sure they are sharing their knowledge. So for example, if you are unveiling an employee generated training initiative (like the Swisscom example), consider using a leader as one of the initial “instructors”.
- Support leaders in cascading others’ knowledge. In this scenario, say an employee has created a useful article that addresses a thorny issue facing the company. The leader should be visibly and proactively sharing this information with others across different channels.
- Create leader testimonials. (In a perfect scenario, this happens organically. “The better you can make training for people, the more participants will tell stories for you,” says Jane Hoskisson, Director of Learning & Development at the International Air Transport Association).

Demonstrating these above points, Toby described the communications tactics used around Here Technologies’ knowledge sharing initiative.

“First, we got senior leadership buy-in, and we got them in front of a camera,” he explained. “These senior leaders explained the rationale around the importance of knowledge sharing. The next communication tactic was incorporating testimonials. Peer-to-peer communication has spread the awareness about the benefits of using the platform.”

Toby also made an important point on the podcast: framing all communications around WII-FM (what’s in it for me).

Smart Communications Principle #2



Formulate a Learning Value Proposition through Message Creation

Can you clearly communicate your organization's value proposition around learning? Can you state this in a few succinct sentences? What about the knowledge sharing initiative? Would employees see a purpose for investing the time in both creating content to share with their colleagues as well as consuming the content of others?

If you are not sure about the answers to these questions, spend time figuring this out. You need to formulate language from your stakeholders' point of view and have clarity on how knowledge sharing solves problems in the business. The best way to do this is to solicit employees' feedback up front. I suggest doing interviews and/or surveys with different segments of the employee population – the C-suite, leadership, managers, etc. Complement this by exploring the communications best practices in the L&D space.

Based on your insights from these processes, create a message map that articulates the main value proposition in one phrase and also highlights your three to five related key messages (also written out in a few words). Under each of those messages, include the proof points that tell the story of how knowledge sharing benefits the organization. These proof points should provide the data, examples and stories that bring each key message to life.

Knowledge shared – whether it emanates from subject matter experts or the L&D function – will not have the desired impact if the voice is off. The messaging map process is a good opportunity to nail down the specifics of the tone and voice that your audiences are telling you they want to hear.





Smart Communications Principle #3

Disseminate Content to the Right Audiences

Think of the message map as the title of the book, the table of contents and the introduction. This needs to whet the appetite of your employees and peak their interest. But certainly this is not enough and you need to consistently communicate your organization's knowledge sharing opportunities and experiences in various ways. This content is essentially the chapters of your book.

"People need to see a story about how learning links together and is relevant in the day-to-day. It can't be abstract," said Jane on episode 4 of the podcast.

When you have clarity around the message map, put in place a detailed dissemination plan that focuses on the key learning department messaging as well as knowledge created by employees. This is important for three reasons:

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Jane Hoskisson, Director of Learning & Development at the International Air Transport Association

- It helps to reinforce the knowledge sharing culture you are trying to instill.
- It draws visibility to the knowledge being shared by employees so that the right audiences can benefit.
- It leads to creating additional ambassadors who can share the learning content with others in the organization and/or feel inspired to create their own learning.

For example, as part of my work with a client in the pharmaceutical space, we aligned on a message map and then used this as the basis to create content in which leaders shared their best practices around different learning initiatives. The key was to ensure that the content was both consumed and acted upon, so we created an editorial calendar that listed dissemination tactics across different channels (email marketing, website presence, internal collaboration channels like Yammer, in person, etc.).

Content needs to be easily accessible to support on demand learning. If a leader creates useful training content, other employees need to be able to find it easily when the particular issue they need support on arises. Therefore, regardless of the medium used, the content needs to be organized in a way that makes sense from the end users' perspective.

The content should also serve as a springboard for engagement and discussion. Usually, the greatest learning impact happens when a piece of content leads to follow-up questions and discussions.

Smart Communications Principle #4



Train and Coach Subject Matters Experts to Share Knowledge Effectively

The stories from Here Technologies and Swisscom both hit on the important point of training and coaching. It is obviously impossible to ask employees to create educational videos on their own. This is also the case for other knowledge sharing mediums, such as creating short articles. So it is important that different pragmatic and experiential training opportunities are in place to facilitate knowledge sharing. Such possibilities could consist of:

- In person events on how to create content across all different formats.
- On-demand content on how to share knowledge.
- Policies and guidelines.
- 1-to-1 coaching support.



Smart Communications Principle #5

Promote Learning Externally

Some knowledge shared should be just for internal purposes. But other types of knowledge sharing can be used as a strategic asset to communicate to external audiences.

I don't come across too many organizations that are effective in communicating how learning and development takes place in their organization and often wondered why. This crystalized for me when I interviewed a senior HR leader for a client project. She noted how when recruiting the highest levels of senior management, salary will not move the needle in snatching away top talent as these individuals are already extremely well paid. She shared with me how the company was able to recruit a top executive away from a competitor because of how impressed the leader was with the company's robust learning and development initiatives.

This anecdote is applicable for other employee groups as well. According to the LinkedIn 2018 Workplace Learning Report, 94% of employees would stay at a company if it invested in their career development. For millennials, learning and development ranks as the number one benefit that an employer can offer, according to a 2018 study by Price Waterhouse Coopers.

“The recruitment of talent is more competitive than ever. Employer branding and being able to understand and connect with prospective employees requires a marketing and communications mindset as well as all of the knowledge and expertise that the talent and development side of the house brings,” said Melissa Taylor, Global Learning and Development Director for the public relations firm Porter Novelli, on episode 10 of the Learning and Development Stories podcast.

To help in recruiting talent, you should consider disseminating “appropriate” knowledge created by employees through your organization’s external communications channels.

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Also, why not consider content marketing initiatives that link to organizational learning. A terrific example is IBM. The public IBM Training and Skills website page notes that its goal is to “enhance our training capabilities and extend reach into new cities and countries by partnering with highly qualified IBM Business Partners who provide high quality, authorized training for IBM clients, IBM Business Partners and IBM employees.” Included on this page is a wealth of content. Video training content is available on the IBM Training YouTube page, and there is an entire content section dedicated to development. Also, a search through Google News shows that IBM is also generating external media visibility around its training initiatives. This is a great way to make potential new hires aware of your organization’s learning culture.

Sharing such knowledge to the right external audiences requires partnership with your organization’s marketing communications team.

FINAL THOUGHTS

See one, do one, teach one.

The process of creating educational experiences provides impactful learning for the person creating the content. It crystallizes thinking, opens networks and enables iterative learning as individuals share feedback. In addition, such knowledge equips employees with potentially new digital literacy skills and tools that can be maximized in a host of different opportunities.

Based on conversations with learning professionals over the past year, a frequent refrain I hear is that such knowledge sharing activities and the related communications and marketing tactics are a stretch, mainly due to resources and culture. The shift from centralized learning for a few to decentralized learning for many might feel outside the organization's comfort zones. It involves giving up a bit of control, experimentation and innovation. Then again, organizations grappling with disruption are asking employees to adopt these types of behaviors. What a great opportunity for the learning function to demonstrate this by deploying knowledge sharing initiatives embedded around smart marketing communications strategies and tactics.

Kevin Anselmo is founder of Experiential Communications. He develops and executes communications strategies for L&D departments.

LET ME KNOW IF I CAN HELP YOU IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

L&D MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

My customized strategy work for L&D departments / corporate universities helps you establish a brand voice, articulate a clear vision and mission statement, assemble key communications collateral and create centralized communications processes.

CONTENT CREATION

I can help you craft compelling content - white papers, articles, case studies, blog posts, video scripts, social media content and podcasts - that best positions your L&D activities and maps to your big picture goals.

COMMUNICATIONS TO SUPPORT KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

I enable transfer of knowledge through a training program that gives participants the tools to effectively communicate their learning to their colleagues.

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