

# THE RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

ENHANCING COLLABORATION AND  
PRODUCTIVITY ACROSS GENERATIONS



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Are social media technologies transforming today's workplace? And, will they increasingly become essential to improving learning and boosting productivity, especially for younger generations of employees? To answer these and other critical questions about social media, ASTD partnered with the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) to examine how organizations are using and *should* be using these technologies to achieve maximum benefits.

We've found that, although there are some strong relationships between using these technologies and reported learning productivity, these technologies have not yet garnered the widespread adoption one might expect. Most organizations have yet to fully integrate and formalize the use of social media in the workplace. Employers that don't figure out how to leverage social media could fall behind both as employers of choice and as learning organizations.

### HOW ARE PEOPLE USING SOCIAL MEDIA AT HOME AND AT WORK?

Our research report, *The Rise of Social Media: Enhancing Collaboration and Productivity Across Generations*, hereafter referred to as the Study, defines social media as technologies designed to facilitate social interactions and communication. We found that most employees have, in fact, embraced social networks, especially in their personal lives. Nearly two-thirds of respondents to the major survey we conducted in late 2009 said they used social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, either often or all the time in their personal lives. Less than 10 percent said they never use them.

But that doesn't mean that all social media has become mainstream. Other tools are used less often.

For example, just 12 percent of respondents said they use micro-blogging sites such as Twitter often or all the time.

Social media technologies tend to be used less for work-related purposes. The most popular are shared workspaces, which include technologies that are designed for business use such as Google Docs and SharePoint. On the whole, however, these tools are not used very often for work-related learning. While some companies have figured out how to use shared workspaces, wikis, and social networks, other technologies such as micro-blogs, social bookmarking, virtual worlds, and augmented realities have yet to gain the same kind of traction.

Despite relatively low self-reported usage, many signs point to a rise in social media usage for on-the-job learning. In fact, more than four-fifths of the respondents to our Study said use of social media for learning within their organizations would increase over the next three years. What's more, respondents from the Millennial generation (born after 1981) are more likely to use these technologies at home or at work than Generation Xers, who in turn use them more than Baby Boomers. If this trend holds, then a growing proportion of the future workforce will rely on social media technologies in the workplace.

### HOW MUCH IS SOCIAL MEDIA BEING USED AT WORK?

The most common reasons people use social media on the job are to find resources more easily and to improve knowledge sharing. However, for all 11 uses that were investigated by the Study, none had an average Likert-scale score higher than 3, which corresponds to moderate/occasional usage. This finding indicates that, on the whole, organizations

and employees have not yet intensively used social media technologies for work-related purposes.

However, there are those who live on the cutting edge of social media usage. For example, nearly a quarter of respondents said they use social media technologies to a high or very high extent in order to boost collaboration. Moreover, this Study found very strong and significant correlations between the degree to which Study respondents use social media tools for various work-related purposes and the degree to which they say that social media tools allow them to get *more* work done, get *better* work done, learn more in less time, and learn truly useful things. In other words, these tools seem to have the potential to become excellent productivity-enhancement technologies.

The sheer amount of usage tends to differ by age group. Members of the Millennial generation use social media at work to a greater extent than members of Generation X, who in turn use it more than Baby Boomers. Millennials also spend more time interacting with social media each day than the older generations. About one third of Baby Boomers said they used social media for work from 30 minutes to more than an hour each day, while 45 percent of Millennials said the same. These tools are used at work most often to find resources more easily and to improve knowledge sharing and communication. People are less likely to report using them to solve problems more efficiently or to increase participation in learning.

## IS THERE VALUE IN SOCIAL MEDIA FOR THE LEARNING FUNCTION?

Shared workspaces, wikis, and podcasts are seen as the most valuable tools for the learning function, while more nascent technologies such as augmented realities and virtual worlds are

not yet seen as very valuable. For the most part, Millennials see more value in these technologies than the older generations, but Baby Boomers and Generation X seem to find some value in podcasts that Millennials do not. When it comes to the learning function, Millennials are more likely to say that social media helps them learn more in less time as well as learn truly useful things. The older generations are more likely to see social media as a waste of time, but overall workers tend to find these tools at least somewhat useful at work.

While Millennials seem to have a firmer grasp of the potential for social media in the learning function, the Study finds that companies that encourage the use of these tools and put the proper guidelines in place can expect to see more effective learning taking place. Regardless of generation, workers across the board believe their organizations should be using social media more.

So, social media tools do, in fact, seem to have considerable value for the learning function, both today and into the future. Tony Bingham, CEO of ASTD, stresses that “understanding how to use Web 2.0 technologies—and the huge impact they have on how the workforce learns and communicates—is critical to engaging employees and customers, and ultimately, critical for an organization’s growth and success.”

## | ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS |

### The American Society for Training & Development

ASTD (the American Society for Training & Development) is the world's largest professional association dedicated to the training and development field. In more than 100 countries, ASTD's members work in organizations of all sizes, in the private and public sectors, as independent consultants, and as suppliers. Members connect locally in 133 U.S. chapters and with 30 international partners. ASTD started in 1943 and in recent years has widened the profession's focus to align learning and performance to organizational results, and is a sought-after voice on critical public policy issues. For more information, visit [www.astd.org](http://www.astd.org).

### The Institute for Corporate Productivity

The Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) improves corporate productivity through a combination of research, community, tools, and technology focused on the management of human capital. With more than 100 leading organizations as members, including many of the best known companies in the world, i4cp draws upon one of the industry's largest and most experienced research teams and executives-in-residence to produce more than 10,000 pages of rapid, reliable, and respected research annually, surrounding all facets of the management of people in organizations. Additionally, i4cp identifies and analyzes the upcoming major issues and future trends that are expected to influence workforce productivity and provides member clients with tools and technology to execute leading-edge strategies and "next practices" on these issues and trends. For more information, visit [www.i4cp.com](http://www.i4cp.com).

## **ASTD** RESEARCH

ASTD Research tracks trends, informs decisions, and connects research to practice in the field of workplace learning and performance. ASTD Research conducts a wide variety of ongoing studies on topics of interest to the learning profession. Recently released studies include:

- Annual State of the Industry Report
- Learning's Role in Employee Engagement
- Learning's Role in Globally Dispersed Workforces
- Tapping the Potential of Informal Learning
- Talent Management: Practices and Opportunities
- Executive Development:  
Strategic and Tactical Approaches
- The State of Sales Training
- Learning in Tough Economic Times:  
How Corporate Learning is Meeting the Challenges
- Transforming Learning with Web 2.0 Technologies
- The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce:  
Exploring the Challenges of Employer-Provided  
Workforce Readiness Training
- The Value of Evaluation:  
Making Training Evaluations More Effective
- Improving Succession Plans: Harnessing The Power  
of Learning and Development

For more information about each study, as well as ASTD Research's comprehensive benchmarking services, visit [www.astd.org/research](http://www.astd.org/research).

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