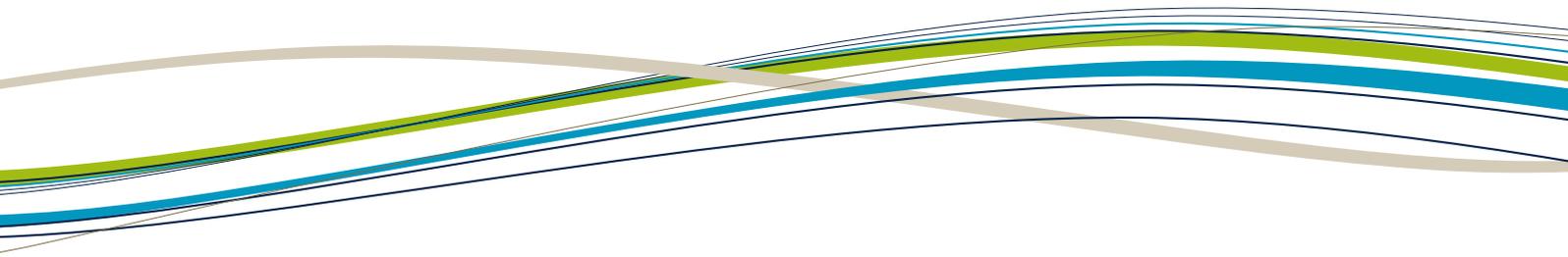


Informal Learning

Let's Share What Works



Stay Informed

Networks



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Welcome

🔗 Welcome to the “Informal learning: Let’s Share What Works” eBook

Foreword By Jérôme Wagnier



Informal learning is a new trend, but it’s always existed.

As a young boy I remember going to school and attending classes where I’d be introduced to new ideas, explained by enthusiastic teachers, via carefully planned lessons. Later, back home in my room, I’d find myself revisiting these ideas every time I completed a homework project. If I came across points I didn’t understand, I could ask my parents for help, or I might call my friends or classmates and together, we’d grasp concepts better by trading thoughts and sharing perspectives. We didn’t use terms like “distance learning”, “remote working” or “informal learning” at school, but that’s what it was. We didn’t consider the technology that made phoning a friend possible a “learning tool”, but that’s what it was.

Informal learning has always existed, and, from the Chinese Abacus to the Casio calculator, technology has always played a supporting role. But technology is only an effective enabler when it makes the business of learning less complex. Its role is to support our learning, not to dictate it. We all know this, we always have: but in a digitally-driven economy where technology teases, captivates and charms us more each day, it’s something we’re prone to forget.

When we succumb to technology’s allure we enter the informal arena through the digital door. And that’s when things get complex. Lead times grow longer, budgets go up and new constraints slow us down. For about 50 percent of the learning leaders in this study, these are the main reasons why well-intentioned social learning initiatives seem to flounder

Drawn from data collated over the last four months, this “Informal learning: Let’s Share What Works” eBook exclusively reveals the big picture insight that comes into focus when the thoughts and opinions of over 100 learning leaders are analysed and distilled.

We asked participants some pretty simple questions about the roles they performed within the organisations they worked for. Then we asked contributors to think about the informal learning initiatives, either planned or under way, within their departments.

We wanted to know:

- Where, within the team, informal learning initiatives usually sparked?
- Who tended to start these initiatives and how did they spread?

- As new informal learning took root in the business, which members of the team were thought to be most ready to offer support and help cultivate the new approach?
- And as social learning started to deliver change, who within the team, was considered most likely to offer spoilers?

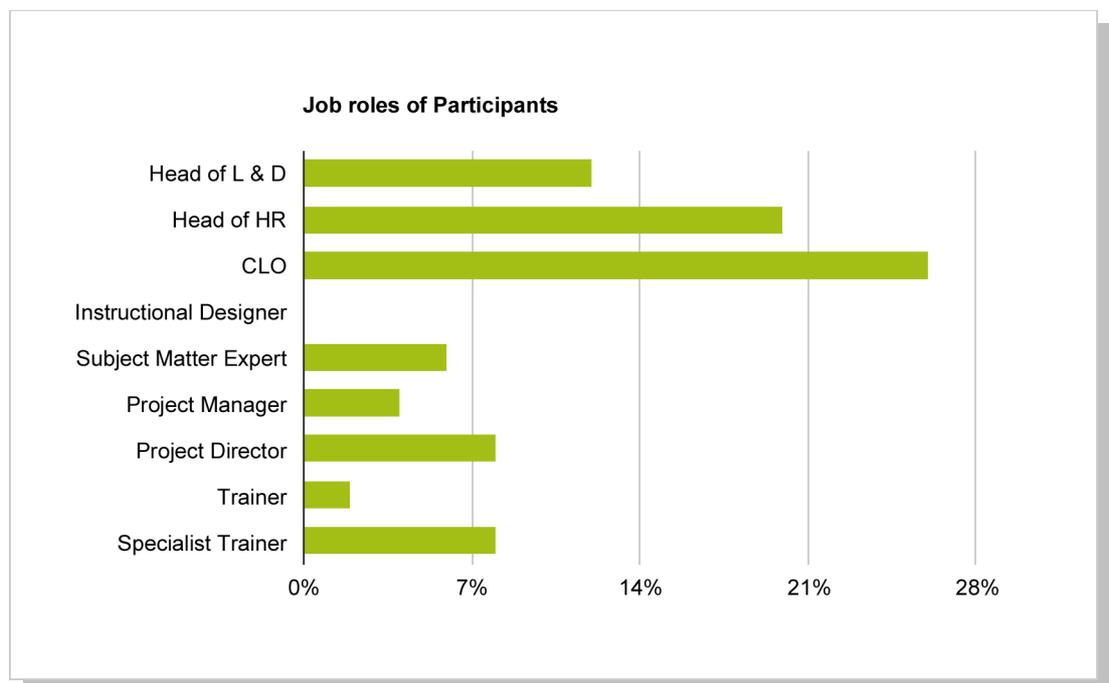
These are the questions that learning leaders ask themselves every day: this study is what happens when you ask them to 100 of the people working in our industry now, then crunch the data they share together.

🔗 About this study's sample

As the graph on this page demonstrates, the collective insight offered up in this report has been created by blending together contributions sourced from every section of the learning community.

Just over half of the people who have contributed information for this project work in companies employing more than 500 people. Nearly 1 in 5 work in companies employing 5000 or more.

58% of the contributions used to create this report come from CLOs, Head of HR or Heads of L&D. The remaining 42% are SMEs, Instructional Designers, Project Managers, Project Directors, Trainers or Specialist Trainers.



🔗 Unmasked: Social learning superheroes and social learning sinners

Once we've identified Informal learning's heroes and sinners, it becomes easier to understand the key factors that get enthusiasts so excited, and the weak spots that feed the fear in today's social learning sceptics.

Ask 100 people working in learning today to unmask this industry's social learning superheroes and sinners and a pretty clear picture starts to evolve.

CLOs, HR and L&D Directors are the three musketeering heroes most ready to fight the cause for informal learning in the workplace. Aply assisted by trusty sidekick, the SME, this team seeks to win hearts and minds for informal learning right across the workplace.

The pesky villain of the piece can be revealed as the Trainer (or the Specialist Trainer) who is, according to the learning leaders who shared their insights with us, at least three times more likely than any other job role, to be cast the anti-social sinner in the group.

Rightly or wrongly, it seems that most Trainers are *perceived* to guard against social change and seek to protect the tried and tested.



Jérôme comments:

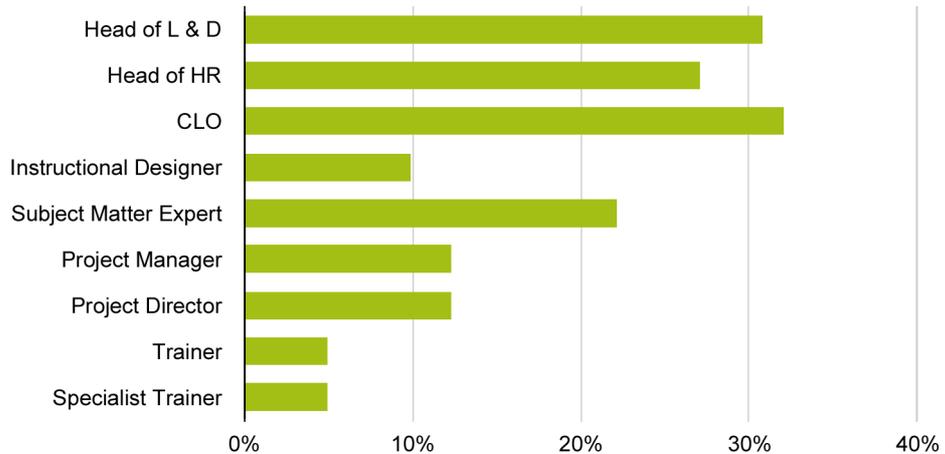
It's interesting that while half of the L&D experts in our survey seem to be presenting informal learning as something new and complex, the other half just seem to be getting on with it (whether they realise it or not).

The trainers who took part in our survey were almost always most likely to say that they lacked confidence in informal learning practices, but in my experience, trainers are weaving informal learning into the mix every day.

As we expect and demand: trainers provide the slides, the presentations and the demos that support the formal 10 percent portion of the 70-20-10 model, but the informal talks and discussions they have in and around the classroom are great examples of how social learning extends naturally beyond the formal curriculum. Lunches are never breaks for trainers because this is when students are most prone to discuss things one to one, exchange ideas, share problems and consolidate thinking. A trainer is always aware of what's emerging during formal course breaks.

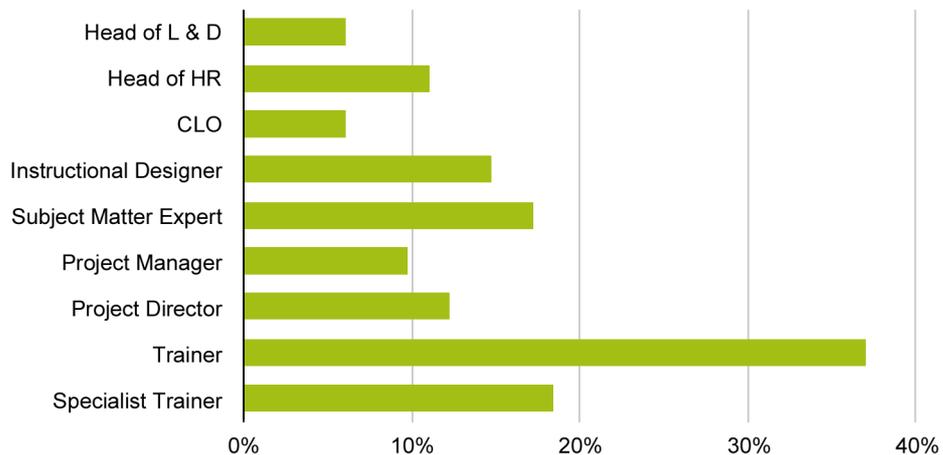


Social Learning Superheroes



When you ask CrossKnowledge Academy members to unmask the heroes and sinners on the social learning scene, the CLO, Director of L&D and HR Director make up the trio of top job titles that most people describe as either “experts who understand social learning enough to promote its benefits effectively to others” or “enthusiasts who are excited by the idea of social learning and actively seek opportunities to develop its use in the workplace.”

Social Learning Sinners



On the question of informal learning, Trainers (or Specialist Trainers) are considered to be the least enthusiastic members of the learning community. This group is most commonly described by the learning community as “sceptical and unlikely to recognise the benefits” of informal learning.

✧ Introducing the superheroes: CLOs, HR and L&D directors

The more senior people are in the L&D industry, the more confident they are in their abilities to deliver really effective informal learning.

One of the first remarkable features to jump out of the data we collated during this project, was the general tendency for senior players in the learning business to describe themselves as informal learning “experts”.

7 in 10 respondents who hold the most strategic, decision making, roles in learning development (that’s the people with job titles like HR, L&D Director or Chief Learning Officer), describe *themselves* as “enthusiastic informal learning experts, capable of promoting the benefits of informal learning to others and developing effective social learning in the workplace”.

✧ Everyone at the top’s an expert, but some are more expert than others

If we break down these top job titles and compare responses for each group, it’s possible to rank our social learning heroes even further.

The CLO tops the table here. People with this job title were thought, by every part of the learning community, to be the most experienced informal learning experts of all. The Head of L&D follows very closely behind the CLO, winning almost as many votes of confidence from the learning experts participating in our study.

The third musketeer in the top tier is the Head of HR. Scores for the Head of HR were extremely positive overall, but this job role falls victim to a small percentage of critics who said that while HR Heads were undoubtedly “sold on the benefits of social learning, they often seemed to lack a clear roll-out plan for delivery”. This, albeit slight, criticism, ranks the Head of HR behind the CLO and the L&D Director in our trio of heroes.

✧ Say hello to the informal happy-go-luckies: Instructional Designers, SMEs, Project Managers and Project Directors

When asked, Instructional Designers, SMEs, Project Managers and Project Directors usually say they are neither strongly for or against the informal learning concepts that so excite the top decision makers in the social learning superheroes category. This easy-going group of happy-go-luckies *is* keen to buy into informal learning initiatives, and will do so without resistance if they are rolled-out efficiently, but they're unlikely to protest too much if social learning initiatives are not rolled out.

Perhaps most importantly for the social learning superheroes, happy-go-luckies will lose interest and enthusiasm if they feel that informal learning initiatives are *not* being rolled out efficiently.

Unfortunately, super hearing is not one of the powers we can easily accredit to Social learning's superheroes. CLOs, L&D and HR Directors seem to hear some, but not all, of what their colleagues in the happy-go-lucky camp are telling them. They agree that Instructional Designers, SMEs, Project Managers and Directors are "generally enthusiastic" about the informal learning programmes either in the works or planned, but when this "general enthusiasm" cannot be leveraged, different reasons why, are cited.

CLOs, HR and L&D Directors tend to cite "low confidence and lack of experience" within the SME, Instructional Designer, Project Manager and Project Director communities as the main reason that informal learning initiatives can flounder. This was the opinion of nearly 3 in 4 of the CLOs, HR and L&D Directors in our study who described themselves as social learning experts¹.

SMEs, Instructional Designers, Project Managers and Project Directors agree that their enthusiasm can flounder, but they say that this is usually because "roll-out planning" for the informal learning programmes they take part in is not rigorous enough. They're "sold on the benefits of informal learning", but they don't really see the kind of direction they'd expect from the top down. This opinion was expressed by more than 3 in 4 of the SMEs, Instructional Designers, Project Managers and Project Directors participating in our study².

If the Instructional Designers, SMEs, Project Managers and Project Directors in the happy-go-lucky group *are* crying out for a solid roll-out plan, the social learning superheroes don't seem to hear their calls.

¹ CLOs, HR and L&D Directors make up 58% of the entire study

² SMEs, Instructional Designers, Project Managers and Project Directors make up 42% of the entire study

✧ I know I'm no expert...but are you?

Here's another eyebrow raiser: CLOs, HR and L&D directors are the most likely groups within the learning team to describe *themselves* as "experienced" informal learning practitioners, but the instructional designers, SME's Project Managers, Project Directors or Trainers who work for them tend not to support the their claim.

Instructional Designers, SMEs, Project Managers, Project Directors and Trainers are more likely to think that they, personally, lack the skills and expertise they need to really be confident about informal learning, but they don't think that CLOs, HR or L&D Directors are any more experienced.

As far as the happy-go-luckies are concerned, they themselves are not particularly well equipped to drive informal learning programmes from concept to practice...but neither is anyone else in the learning team.

Jérôme comments:

It's easy to be an expert if you don't have to put things into practice.

The people who are the most humble in this survey are the trainers and the instructional designers. In other words, members of the learning community who need to put concepts into practice.

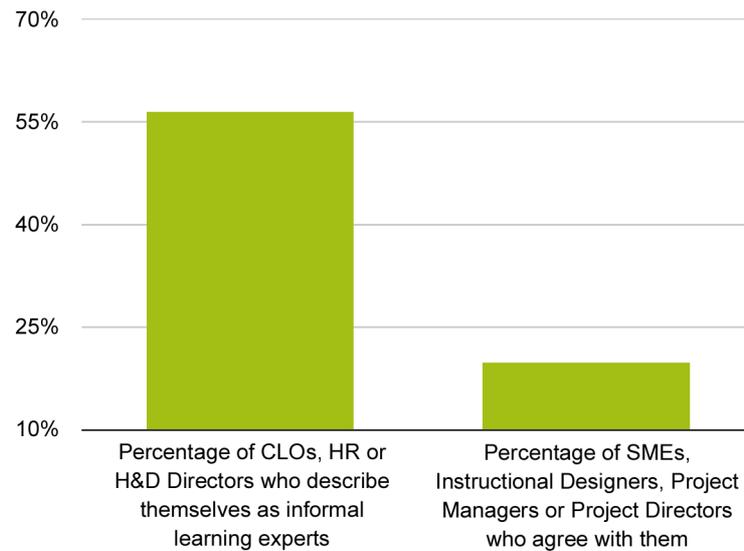
I think that we all need to align our perception of what informal learning actually is. And it has to be very simple and practical. It's not just a case of bolting new technologies onto existing learning practises.

Just because you set up a support group for learners on one of the big social networks doesn't necessarily mean you've started an informal learning initiative. You can't declare a community. Your community of learners already exists and any attempts to corral them into a specific space and / or time simply won't work.

What you can do is leverage the fact that people are already *in* communities – to help them learn better, which is really a different point of view.

Study the people you are training and work out how they like to communicate already. Then adapt your social learning strategies to suit the connections they already know and trust.





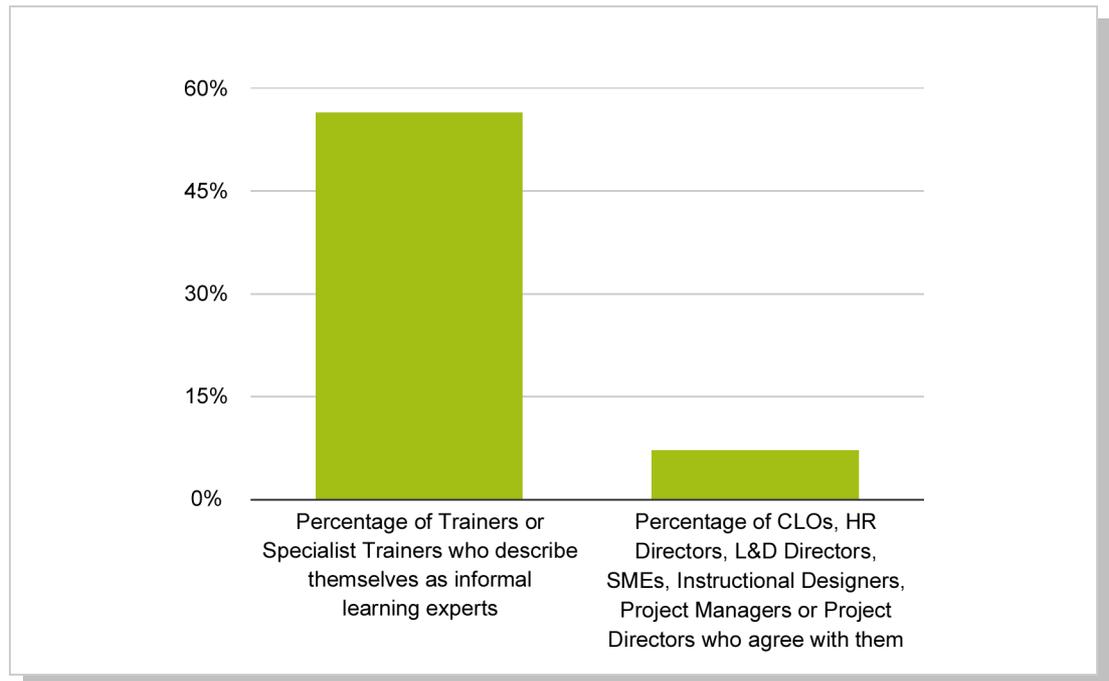
The column on the left represents the CLOs HR or L&D Directors who described themselves as "experts who understand social learning enough to promote its benefits effectively to others" or "Enthusiasts who say: The idea of social learning excites me and I actively seek opportunities to develop its use in the workplace."

The column on the right represents the SMEs, Instructional Designers, Project Managers, Project Directors and Trainers who described CLOs HR or L&D Directors as "experts who understand social learning enough to promote its benefits effectively to others" or "Enthusiasts who say: The idea of social learning excites them and they actively seek opportunities to develop its use in the workplace."

🔗 The pesky social learning sinners

Voted the indisputable villain of the social learning scene by our panel of participants is the **Trainer or (Specialist) Trainer**.

Rather deviously perhaps, when asked to describe *themselves* for our study, Trainers (and Specialist Trainers) were much more likely to claim they were “informal learning enthusiasts”, than admit to being “informal learning sceptics”. It’s popular opinion, collated from the wider industry, that puts Trainers firmly in the social learning sin bin.



Overall, the Trainer, or Specialist Trainer, is approximately five times more likely to be labelled a social learning sceptic than any other member of the L&D team.

People in happy-go-lucky job roles, like Project Manager, Project Director or Instructional Designer, were considered to be far less sceptical than Trainers (less than two in 10 of the the learning experts participating in our study rated these people as sceptics). And people in job roles like CLO, HR or L&D Director were considered the least sceptical of all (mentioned by less than 8% of participants).

❖ Counter Intelligence for the social learning superhero

If trainer scepticism *is* the weakest link in the chain of events required for really successful social learning roll-out, then knowing where trainer initiated scepticism is most likely to first take hold and spread across the L&D department may help social learning superheroes isolate and diffuse the negative impact of the social learning villain.

If we drill down on our study and focus only on comment offered by Trainers and Specialist Trainers, it's possible to identify the job groups that Trainers themselves consider to be least enthusiastic about informal learning. Using this measure to guide us, any sceptical Trainer with a mind to plant seeds of doubt on the informal learning landscape may try to recruit cohorts as follows:

- **The Project Director:** The first cohort that the Trainer will seek to convert is the Project Director. In general, the Trainers who took part in our study thought that Project Directors were mostly “sceptics” who “tended not see the benefits of informal learning”.
- **The Project Manager:** Project Managers are thought, by Trainers, to be slightly less sceptical than Project Directors, but more frustrated, by “unconvincing roll-out plans for informal learning deployments”. By spotlighting any perceived weaknesses in the deployment plan, the Trainer has the capacity to recruit support by sparking departmental debate or criticism on roll-out strategy and magnifying issues known to concern Project Managers.
- **The Instructional Designer & the SME:** While generally thought to be enthusiastic about informal learning in the workplace, SMEs and Instructional Designers are - for the anti-social Trainer - often considered swing voters who may well be won over once support from the Project Manager and Project Director has been achieved.

**Jérôme comments:****Gently does it**

Everybody wants change, but nobody wants *to* change, so developing an effective informal learning culture won't happen overnight. Take it slowly, support it, invite it, let people do it at their pace. And when progress is made, communicate and market achievements.

We must stop trying to formalise informal

In the classroom we constrain and control our social learning by organising teams and setting time frames. We're confident of the benefits that 20 minutes of group work can deliver but we're reluctant to free up this social learning activity and let it out of the classroom. It's social, but it's not informal.

As trainers, we encourage people to participate in group learning experiences outside the classroom, but when they return to the classroom the next week they haven't done anything. They didn't find time to work because they are not used to this.

Responsibility for this failure does not rest with the trainer, its a training problem that all of us must work to resolve . The trainer needs to be the captain who is helping people to cross the new channel: to experiment and migrate from the classroom to other places. We need to invite people to carry on working together: to inspire them to carry on exchanging ideas. And to do that we need to give them some kind of framework.



Report round-up:

Who participated, what we learned, and why we should think again.

Who participated?

This report collates the thoughts, insights and opinions of over 100 CrossKnowledge Academy members gathered over a period of four months between September and December 2011.

French and English versions of our study's questionnaire were available and participation via these two languages was approximately 50/50.

58% of this report's participants identified themselves as CLOs, Head of HR or Head of L&D.

42% of this report's participants identified themselves as SMEs, Instructional Designers, Project Managers, Project Directors, Trainers or Specialist Trainers.

Just over half of the people who collaborated with us on this project worked in companies employing more than 500 people. Nearly 1 in 5 worked in companies employing 5000 or more.

A reminder of what we learned

The more senior people are in the L&D industry, the more confident they are in their abilities to deliver really effective informal learning.

CLOs are thought to hold more informal learning know-how than anyone else in the business. Heads of L&D and HR are, respectively, the second and third most social learning savvy groups in the workplace.

Instructional Designers, SMEs, Project Managers and Project Directors are naturally enthusiastic about informal learning initiatives, but their enthusiasm is volatile and can easily flounder.

Trainers are thought to be the least likely group in the learning mix to actively engage in developing social learning concepts.

If social learning initiatives stall, CLOs, HR and L&D Directors usually blame low confidence within the SME, Instructional Designer, Project Manager, Project Director or Trainer Communities.

SMEs, Instructional Designers, Project Managers, Project Directors and Trainers usually say that unconvincing roll-out plans are why social learning initiatives stall.

❖ Everyone loves a good bad-guy

Every good success story needs a bad-guy, but while it may be convenient for the industry's social learning heroes to point the finger at the pesky Trainer in this tale, things are never quite that simple.

Trainers may well be the industry's leading anti-social learning protesters, but it's the lack of a really solid roll-out plan which usually gives their protest substance and allows doubts and fears to take root more widely across the learning landscape. The concerns that Trainers raise are heard, understood and readily acknowledged by everyone in the business of learning delivery...except the CLO, the HR Head and the L&D Director.

The real villains of the piece then, may well be the heroes themselves: this, predominantly, self proclaimed trio of experts who, in our study, claim to "understand social learning enough to promote its benefits effectively to others and develop it's use in the workplace". Our **study, indicates** that other members of the learning team³ generally agree with the former point, that CLOs, HR and L&D Directors "understand social learning enough to promote its benefits effectively", but they are much less certain about the latter, their ability to "develop social learning's use in the workplace".

It's interesting to note that the three groups in our study *most likely* to describe *themselves* as "social learning experts" (CLOs, HR Heads and L&D Directors) are also the groups *least likely* to echo the concerns about unclear roll-out plans which, to greater or lesser degree, are recognised by every other member of the learning team.

Jérôme comments:

CLOs, HR and L&D Directors may well be intellectually convinced of the value that informal learning will bring to their business, but they also understand the challenges of deployment. We have all the pieces of the puzzle, but **its** quite difficult to make it live.



❖ If you think you're an expert, think again

Study the contributions, insights and comments gathered during the course of our informal research hard enough and some important trends, perceptions and bias start to form and crystallise.

While it may be early days and caution is undoubtedly required, it is possible to use these collective insights to inform and guide the social learning deployment strategies we develop next.

First and foremost, the findings of our survey have put the validity of this industry's social learning "experts" under the spotlight and called them into question. While the vast majority (over 7 in 10) of senior players in the

industry (CLOs, HR and L&D Directors) confidently awarded themselves the status of social learning “expert” when asked in our survey, this top group of decision makers rarely commands the same level of respect from other groups in the learning mix.

When asked anonymously and without risk of consequence, SMEs, Instructional Designers, Project Managers, Project Directors and Trainers just don’t think that CLOs, HR and L&D Directors *are* all that social learning savvy. In fact, they rarely seem to think anyone, anywhere in the industry has what it takes to really leverage informal learning’s potential.

The CLOs, HR and L&D Directors who claim to be the informal learning heroes of our industry seem to be kidding no one but themselves, and old school vanity may be the single biggest hurdle left on the social learning landscape.

Perhaps, we need a new breed of hero, because leading the informal learning agenda might be more about asking questions than offering advice.

We need senior decision makers who understand that sharing doubts and seeking answers makes them stronger, not more vulnerable. We need workplace initiatives bold enough to inspire wide participation and brave enough to risk experimentation. Ultimately, we need social learning heroes in the workplace who recognise **the the hero** in all of us.

Jérôme comments:

You can’t expect people to learn on the job if you don’t have the help of the managers

Informal means that the workplace becomes a learnscape. So we need managers to buy-in to the initiatives we start. We don’t have only one target in terms of communications and change management. We have learners but we also have their managers. We need to use marketing skill to really understand the attributes of, and create specific communications approaches for, each community in the workplace.



🔗 Informal Learning: Let’s share what works

Help us build the definitive road-map for successful social learning deployment. Comment on this eBook, contribute and share your experiences with informal learning at our [community forum](#).

