




5 (or More!) Ways Community Managers Can Jumpstart Innovation with Learning & Development Peers

TOP THREE TAKEAWAYS

Jeff Merrell shared his experiences for integrating community into learning and development (L&D) within Northwestern University.

1. Learn how to use community as a way to extend formal learning.
2. Interested in incorporating training practices to form a community? One participant shares her successes with a sales group on their Jive platform.
3. Learn one one best practice that gets people up and running on the community platform without ever attending a formal training session.

 SNAPSHOT
<p>SPEAKERS Jeff Merrell (Northwestern University)</p>
<p>COMPETENCIES Community Management</p>
<p>MATURITY PHASES CMM2, CMM3, CMM4</p>

OVERVIEW

Jeff is the Associate Director of the Masters in Learning and Organizational Change program at Northwestern University.

- Emphasis is placed on the role of community and learning from two standpoints; how to build community for graduates, as well as what it means for organizations.

Purpose of this Call

The field requires a shift in professional practice, i.e. to change how instructional designers think about learning and/or the way community managers think about structural design. To learn how this is playing out in today's organizations, participants shared their best practices. Jeff referred to these as "experiments".

The Masters in Learning and Organizational Change Program

Jeff gave participants an overview of the program:

- Consists of roughly 250 people in a Jive community.
- The entire purpose of the community is learning; it's a graduate school.
- Jeff has learned from this that although there is always a space for formal learning, communities help the conversation and critical thinking to continue outside of the instructor-led classroom and/or e-learning classes.
- Jeff's advice is to experiment with how to find that "white space".

BEST PRACTICES**Consider Using a Community to Extend Formal Learning**

One participant added to Jeff's comment about finding white space by sharing his experiences:

- This participant has worked on a design thinking community that offered a full day or 2 half-day in-class, instructor-led seminars. Prior to taking the class, students were asked to engage with the management of any team or group that was also going through the training.
- Furthermore, there was engagement with management post-class, as well. This participant worked on the post-class community piece.
- The comment about finding white space rang true for this participant because people would try to implement the training into their jobs afterwards. Some people took what they learned in the class and created new artifacts or new approaches. The community served as a way to capture these artifacts and make it more explicit. This participant would invite these people to check back with the community to encourage people to learn from each other post-training.
- Some of the new approaches that came out of this would then be rolled back into the class itself helping the training to evolve.

Identify Community Members Who Have an Aptitude for Teaching

This same participant makes an effort to identify community members who either have experience teaching or an aptitude for teaching. He invites these people to share their technical expertise with the community and has other experts evaluate their teaching ability. If they have the ability, further teaching opportunities for them are sought out. It's not integrated into the L&D efforts right now, but this participant believes that it could be in the future because it essentially uses the community as a place to vet potential expert instructors and give them a platform to do more of it.

Be a Student in the Program to Learn How to Infuse Community into it

Another participant shared how she became a student of her company's Sales and Enablement Program in order to understand it fully before deciding how to best infuse community into the learning.

Afterwards, she facilitated a full-day strategy session asking these types of questions:

"What would success look like?"

"What would you like to do that you can't do now?"

"What's working well?" and "What's not working well?"

Once she had a clearer understanding of the program, they added new goals. One goal was to help new hires get up to speed quickly. They used their Jive community to drive adoption.

BEST PRACTICES, CONT.

They identified 10 learning goals for all new sales hires to know by the end of their second month of tenure.

All new sales hires are invited into a private group. From there, the Jive learning began.

Consider Integrating the Learning without Calling it Learning

This same participant used the new hire onboarding process to teach new hires how to use Jive without actually identifying it as training. For example, once in the private group, each stage of the onboarding process incorporates a new learning step, i.e. how to upload their profile picture, how to reply to a discussion by making a comment, uploading a picture in their comment, etc. Teaching them how to work in the community at this stage without calling it training was actually a key success factor.

Create a Landing Space to Help Standardize Repeatable Learning

Adding on to the above program, this same participant shared that they created a public landing space for everyone in the community called: “Sales New Hire 365”. This is where all the repeatable documents are held. Every new hire training group – called cohorts – go through the same onboarding process. By sending them to this landing page, it reduces the time needed for this repeatable step.

Identify Ways to Form a Community and Infuse Community into the Training

Ensure that the newly formed community is a safe haven for learning. As cautioned by this same participant, new hires will not be willing to ask questions in public groups.

- In this experiment, once the new hires were inducted into this safe group, they were given an assignment. They were asked to meet with their teams prior to the week-long workshop. No instructions were given. Trainees had to learn how to use WebEx and search the community for their team’s contact information.
- Once at the training, instead of sitting at tables and writing their discussions on white boards, they changed this step to a timed blog post with a question.
- Each team made a comment for the blog vs. a verbal report. Now they have a written artifact. It is not at this point yet, but the goal is to take the golden nuggets from each discussion and innovate by sharing 1 or 2 notable comments from each group with the rest of the community outside of that private group.
- There is an alumni community that the new hire group is invited to join after they complete the workshop. They can also share their golden nuggets there.

Teach Community Management Principles

It is vital that those who use communities as part of the learning process are trained themselves in community management principles.

- Don’t work with communities until there is an established community manager/community owner.
- Don’t take it for granted that they will automatically know what to do.

LESSONS LEARNED

The participant who shared her Sales Enablement Team best practices also shared these lessons learned:

- Don't make the changes all at once or the group will become overwhelmed.
- Guide them through the community management process.
- Give lots of kudos along the way.
- Let people know they are experts in this training. Encourage them to train others.
- Think about measurement practices.
- Think of yourself as an internal consultant. Read *"Flawless Consulting"* by Peter Block, an amazing checklist of powerful questions to ask that strengthens your ability to influence.
- Don't give solutions. Instead, help the team to create their own solutions and then support those solutions.

One participant uses his community as a way to test new training before going live. The community members benefit from the training and the training team can test the material. It's an excellent collaboration between community and L&D.

Hillary shared that for TheCR – since it is a learning network – learning is such an inherent part of the community. In Hillary's experience, people in this type of community need more structure than what may have been suggested in the sales example above. People can get lost without some guidelines.

TheCR now has their fundamentals training integrated into TheCR Network. They are looking at regular programming as next steps, such as higher education and supplemental learning.

Adopting more formal learning has helped people understand and become comfortable in the community, which allows them to be more exploratory with the resources available

The other area in which this has proven helpful is that since people speak the same language, it level sets the community.

LESSONS LEARNED, CONT.

For learning goals within community events, insist that presenters define the learning objectives of the session. Since many of these people will not have an L&D background, make sure that they identify what the attendees will know after they session that they didn't know before and/or what they will be able to do differently as a result of the training.

A common mistake that some data scientists and engineers make is to interpret "session goals" as "project goals." Ensure that it is understood and differentiated prior to training.

The community is a great place for learning to be shared, reinforced, and expanded upon. When people share personal stories relevant to the learning, the message sticks. Design the training to encourage that sort of behavior.

It was suggested as a next step for this call to gather use cases and then crowdsource ideas to make the training work within these use cases. Participants liked this idea.

RESOURCES

As mentioned in the discussion:

<https://www.amazon.ca/Flawless-Consulting-Guide-Getting-Expertise/dp/0470620749>