

Learning in the Social Workplace

Jane Hart

Social technologies are impacting the way we learn and work in the workplace. Here I want to take a look at three key areas:

1. How individuals are using social media to address their own learning and performance needs
2. How organisations are using social technologies
3. How frameworks are guiding new organisational approaches to supporting workplace learning

1 – Individuals and social media

For the last five years I have been compiling a Top 100 Tools for Learning activity – based on the contributions of learning professionals worldwide. I released the [2011 list](#) in the middle of November 2011 and it has proved to be a popular resource. The [presentation on Slideshare](#) has now been viewed over 350,000 times. The list is once again dominated by free online social media tools as the popularity of pure content and delivery systems decreases. This is just one of the trends [I have been noticing](#) over the last five years. This and the fact that for many people personal and professional tools are merging, and people are now doing their own thing - and using their own tools and devices to do so. These trends have also been tracked by others.

- Back in April 2011 [Forrester Research](#) estimated that around 47% of business users were “using one or more website(s) to do parts of their jobs that are not sanctioned by their IT department” and expected this number to rise to 60% in 2011. This phenomenon is known as the “consumerization of IT”.
- [Another article in CLO magazine](#) around the same time believed that between 1/3 and 2/3 of employees were meeting their learning and



performance needs by working around L&D departments. Some have referred to this as the "consumerization of learning".

So who is using these tools to address their own learning and performance needs? If you listened to the media you would think it was just Gen Ys or Millennials, but my own analysis shows that this is clearly not the case – it is workers of all ages who are using their own tools in this way. But these workers do seem to have some common characteristics. They are clearly web-savvy but they are also highly motivated, committed and dedicated to their work. and have a clear desire to do their job as well as they can and improve their own performance wherever possible. Individuals with these characteristics I call Smart Workers. I've been able to identify 8 key features of how using social media is impacting and changing the way that they work and learn today

1 - The Smart Worker recognises she learns continuously as she does her job

First of all it is clear that the Smart Worker recognises she learns continuously as she does her job. Although she acknowledges that training and self-directed study has a valuable part to play in this, she also realises that formal approaches alone cannot possibly provide her with everything she needs to know. She also recognises that she learns more about how to do her job, just by doing her job – and that "learning" in this way is very different from studying a formal course. It is unstructured and often "messy". So she might find out something new when she reads a document, from overhearing a conversation, by observing her colleagues at work or by asking them questions in discussions in meetings. She might even learn something from the casual conversations in the canteen or coffee bar. In other words she realises she learns all the time from both content as well as from people

It is also clear that smart workers don't have the inclination or time to learn in what we might call the traditional ways - which take them out of the workflow – in a separate room for training or at a separate time to work on e-learning courses. In many cases ...

2 - The Smart Worker wants immediate access to solutions to his performance problems

He doesn't want to have to *study* a problem – just in case he might need it. He simply wants to find the solution to his problem, *when* he needs it - and in the quickest and easiest way possible. And it is for precisely this reason, that the smart worker - rather than using the internal LMS to find courses - makes heavy use of Google to search the Social Web for



solutions to his problems - preferring to solve them by accessing quick and simple resources on sites like YouTube, Slideshare and Wikipedia. He therefore makes significant use of resources that have been created and freely shared by others on the Social Web as they frequently prove to be valuable performance support materials (i.e. job aids) for his work. What is more..

3 - The Smart Worker is happy to share what he knows

He is also very happy to share what he knows - in the same way - using the very same social tools.

4 - The Smart Worker relies on a trusted network of friends and colleagues

Although the smart worker does like to access content-based resources to solve her problems, in fact like most people she actually tries to solve them by **first** calling upon the people she knows to help her. A few years ago this would simply have meant asking her colleagues in the room for help, but now smart workers have access to a much wider group of friends and colleagues through their online social networks. In this respect, public social networks like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and now Google+ as well as other specialist online communities play a very important role in both their personal and professional lives. And the Smart Worker interacts with these colleagues in many different ways, e.g.

- to ask and answer questions
- to share and receive ideas, resources and experiences
- to solve problems and brainstorm together
- to keep up to date with what her colleagues are doing and thinking, and
- to learn from them in many different ways – sometimes even without even realising it!

5 - The Smart Worker learns best and from others

It is also clear that smart workers learn best with and from others - both in a formal and informal context. This is social learning! It happens with and without social media – but social media can make it an even more powerful experience. So, this means in formal training contexts although the smart worker is happy to be able to work on online courses at the time of her choosing and at her own pace; she doesn't really enjoy having to sit at her desk ploughing through hours of online content on her own. She much prefers to learn alongside others where she discuss the topic and bounce ideas off them.



6 - The Smart Worker keeps up to date with his industry and profession

The Smart Worker also keeps up to date both with what is happening in his industry as well as his profession by using a variety of social tools and services. For example, he keeps in touch with experts and analysts in his professional network. He reads industry blogs or aggregated feeds - and even content curated from a variety of different sources.

7 - The Smart Worker constantly strives to improve her productivity

It is also clear that the Smart Worker wants to do her job as well as possible – which involves not just a continuous learning process, but also involves constantly reviewing her productivity in order to find better ways to do her job. The Smart Worker therefore makes significant use of social media tools to help with both personal and team productivity. These tools are used not only to *automate* or *improve* existing tasks and activities, but sometimes even to *innovate* and do things differently.

8 - The Smart Worker thrives on autonomy

Finally, the Smart Worker is a self-reliant individual, who likes to make his own decisions - about the tools he needs to do his work and the most appropriate way to learn. He thrives on autonomy. And as Dan Pink points out in his book [Drive: the surprising truth about what motivates us.](#)

“A sense of autonomy has a powerful effect on individual performance and attitude ... Control leads to compliance; autonomy leads to engagement.”

To summarise then, many individuals and teams now realise they now have powerful tools to more quickly and more easily solve their own learning and performance problems, without leaving the workflow – since a solution is often just one-click away. So we need to consider how can we help support the learning and performance approaches of the new smart workers – who don't want or need to be told how to learn, when to learn it and how to learn it. It's no longer just about training people to be compliant – it's about helping them engage – not just in formal training, but with others in the workplace, so that they are able to support one another.



2 – Organisations and social tools

So how do organisations view the use of social tools? There are still some organisations who ban or block *all* access to social media – usually because they don't understand them properly and see them as a threat. In March 2012 [Gartner](#) reported that the number of large organizations blocking access to all social media is dropping by around 10 percent a year, from around 50% in 2010 to a likely figure of fewer than 30% by 2014.

Of course, in many of these organisations individuals can still access to social tools through their own devices. Hence a growing number of organisations have realised the futility of trying to ban social media, and are developing BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) strategy in the organization. However, this is still an emerging practice – and in some organisations is still only an option for senior people.

But of course, some departments and processes, such as marketing, do have access to external social media, and use public social media sites (like Facebook, Twitter etc) for promoting their products and services. Some others departments also use social media for internal activities, and this includes the Training function, which has begun to incorporate social media into face-to-face workshops or online courses.

But now, some organisations are realizing that social media has an important part to play more widely to support employee collaboration and engagement, and are implementing their own internal social and collaboration platforms – either by upgrading their intranets into social intranets, or by adding extra social functionality onto their existing systems and in doing so are becoming *social businesses*.

What is a social business? [IBM](#) puts it quite neatly:

“A Social Business isn't just a company that has a Facebook page and a Twitter account. A Social Business is one that embraces and cultivates a spirit of collaboration and community throughout its organization—both internally and externally

Many commentators make it clear, however, that becoming a “social business” will change the way we do everything – as organisations move from being traditional hierarchical businesses to networked organisations. “Social” will not just be something that is bolted-on to traditional processes but will underpin a fundamental new approach to



working and learning in the organisation. Paul Adams summed this up nicely in [Stop talking about “social”](#).

“Social is not a feature. Social is not an application. Social is a deep human motivation that drives our behaviour almost every second that we’re awake ... The leading businesses are recognizing that the web is moving away from being centred around content, to being centred around people. That is the biggest social thunderstorm, and all of us are going to have to understand it to succeed. So stop talking about social as a distinct entity. Assume it in everything you do.”

Summary

We have now seen there are two ways that social media is changing the workplace. So how can we respond? In practical terms, how can we support these new ways of working and learning and the fact that knowledge sharing and collaborative working will be a key feature of the new social business? Some early adopters are already developing new approaches to workplace learning, but others require help and support in terms of frameworks, models, techniques and tips.

This is where the Internet Time Alliance comes in. We analyse the emerging practices of the early adopters in order to provide advice and support to the early majority. We work with those organisations who are ready to make a change – not try and force these new ways of working and learning upon organisations. So here are a couple of frameworks that might be of value to you if you are looking to help your organisation move forward.

3 - Frameworks

70-20-10 Framework

The first one is the well-known 70-20-10 framework that was developed at Princeton University and is now employed by many organisations worldwide as a way of thinking and planning about the incorporation of informal learning into workplace learning. Essentially, it recommends that 70+20 that is 90% of learning initiatives in the organisation should be informal – with only 10% being formal training. The 70-20-10 model does have its critics and these often focus on the numbers, saying that these shouldn’t drive initiatives within organisations. For others it is also not clear how to put the 70-20-10 model into practice, in terms of what it actually means on an operational basis. For that reason, I have



developed a framework which focuses on the services themselves and how to support a wider approach to learning in the social workplace.

Workforce Development Services Framework

In the Workforce Development Services Framework there are 4 key service areas although there is a high level of overlap in the activities provided by the different service areas (see image on page 10):

1. **Training/Instructional Services** focus on designing, delivering and managing training, e-learning and/or blended learning events.
2. **Performance Support Services** focus on providing access to, and supporting use of a range of resources (content and people) for performance improvement.
3. **Social Collaboration Services** focus on facilitating collaborative working and the building of internal networks, communities and collaboration spaces.
4. **Performance Consulting Services** focus on finding the best solution to a learning or performance problem, which may well be a training/instructional solution but is more likely to be a performance support or social collaboration solution. This service area therefore serves as the main entry point into the Framework. In other words, instead of managers coming with requests for courses, they would come with requests for help with performance problems.

In terms of activities (see image on page 11)

- **Training and e-learning activities** are likely to include more informal and social approaches, and are also likely to become more and more embedded in the workflow – not divorced from it.
- **Performance support activities** include creating resources like job aids, e.g. by re-purposing courseware, but also involve supporting the creation of employee-generated content, as well the individual's own use of tools, content and networks on the Social Web, together with the sharing of useful external resources through content aggregation and content curation techniques
- **Social collaboration activities** include helping to set up online group and community spaces, developing new collaboration and community skills as well as encouraging workers to “connect and collaborate” and engage in new collaborative work practices.



It is true that some L&D departments are introducing more social approaches into formal learning initiatives, as well as moving slowly into the performance support area, but social collaboration services is a completely new area of work. It is the missing piece of the L&D jigsaw. However, it is important to be clear, that this area of work is not about the design and delivery of learning but about the facilitation of learning through collaborative working. So let's take a closer look at it.

Social Collaboration

Oscar Berg's [Collaboration pyramid](#) shows how ...

“The majority of the value-creation activities in an enterprise are hidden. They happen below the surface. What we see when we think of collaboration in the traditional sense (structured team-based collaboration) is the tip of the iceberg – teams who are coordinating their actions to achieve some goal. We don't see – and thus don't recognize – all the activities which have enabled the team to form and which help them throughout their journey. We see the people in the team, how they coordinate their actions and the results of their actions, but we rarely see the other things which have been critical for their success. For example, we don't see how they have used their personal networks to access knowledge, information and skills which they don't have in their team already but which are instrumental for their success.”

Now Oscar Berg doesn't mention the “learning” word - but he does talk about using personal networks to access knowledge, information and skills – and this is the same thing. So social collaboration then is both about working *and* learning. So do people work and learn collaboratively automatically? Some do for sure, but others will need help.

Social collaboration services are therefore both about helping teams working collaboratively and facilitating learning through collaborative working. They involve:

- (a) encouraging workers to “connect and collaborate” and engage in new collaborative work practices, so that there is a symbiotic relationship between collaborative working and learning; and
- (b) developing the new collaboration and community skills to enable groups and teams for effective working. Although as I explained in my



recent blog post, [Collaboration and community skills are the new workplace skills](#), when I discussed some recent client work with an organisation, it requires a different approach

*“.. as for the new social and collaboration skills that workers require, well **you simply can't train people to be social!** What was required was getting down and dirty and helping people understand what it actually meant to work collaboratively in the new social workplace, and the value that this would bring to them. My Internet Time Alliance colleague, Harold Jarche, refers to this as [modelling, not shaping](#).”*

So this new service area requires not only a new mindset (see image on page 14) – think facilitation rather than training – but also working with new tools and platforms (see image on page 12), and a new skillset (see image on page 13).

I have been working with learning professionals around the world to help them acquire these new skills in order to provide these new social collaboration services in a variety of in-house community initiatives as well as in more structured learning communities in the [Social Learning Centre](#).

But we at the Internet Time Alliance are also available to help you and your organization understand and support these new ways of working and learning.

The Internet Time Alliance helps organizations work smarter. We advise organizations how to get their people working and innovating in Internet time. Social, collaborative learning enables corporations to draw strength from the competence, ingenuity, and autonomy of their people. Our clients minimize time to performance, increase responsiveness to customers, and challenge workers and partners to be all they can be.

Contact Jane Hart at jane@InternetTimeAlliance.com
Visit our website at InternetTimeAlliance.com

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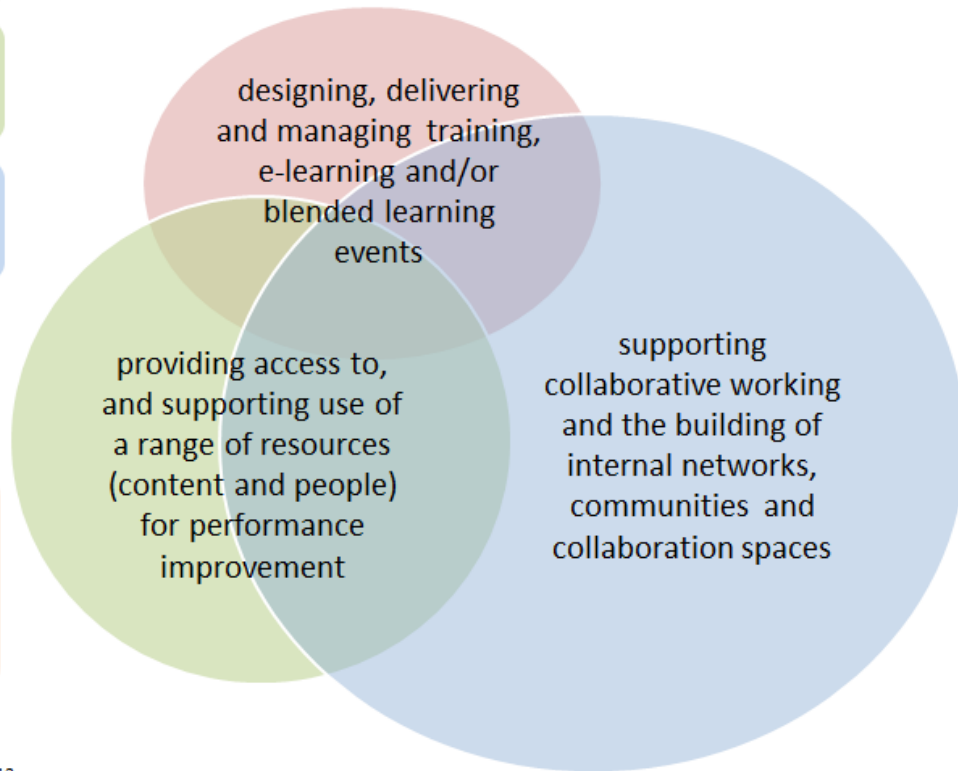
Workforce Development Services Framework 1/5 SERVICES

Training/
Instructional
Services

Performance
Support
Services

Social
Collaboration
Services

Performance
Consulting
Services
finding the most
appropriate solution
to a performance or
learning problem



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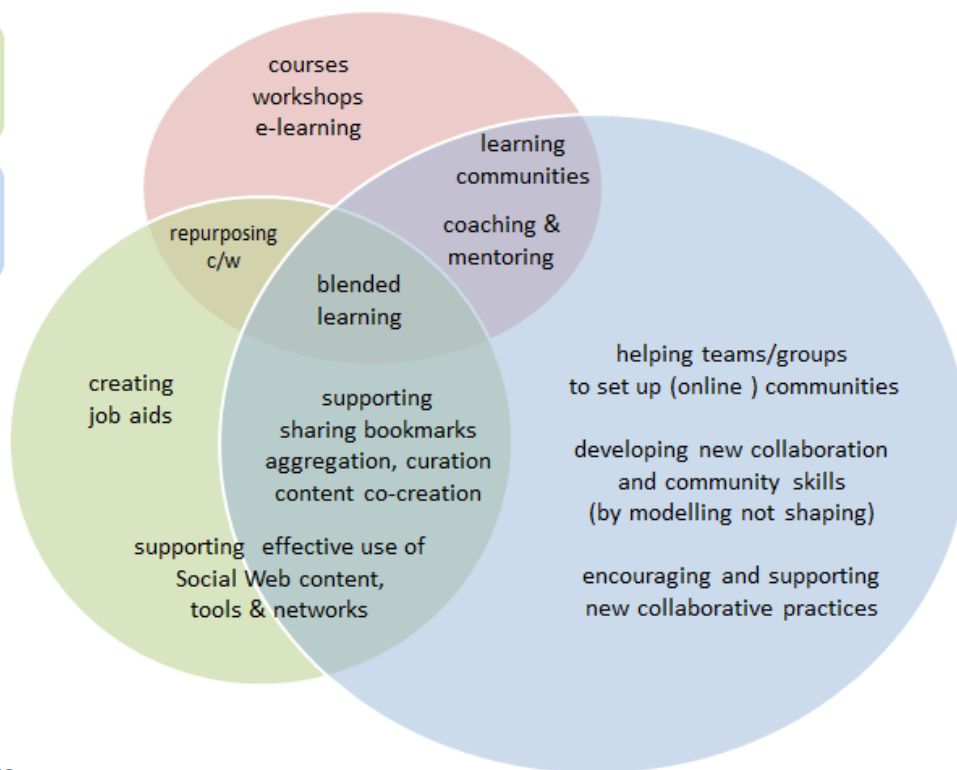
Workforce Development Services Framework 2/5 ACTIVITIES

Training/
Instructional
Services

Performance
Support
Services

Social
Collaboration
Services

Performance
Consulting
Services
identifying
performance
problems and
appropriate solutions



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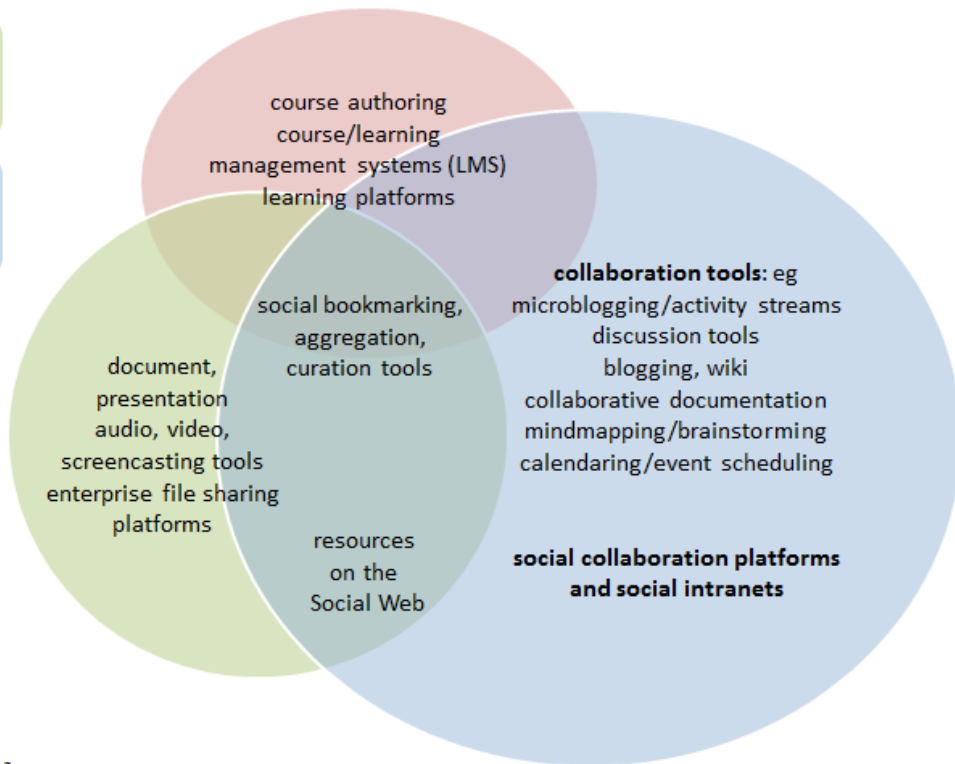
Workforce Development Services Framework 3/5 TOOLS & PLATFORMS

Training/
Instructional
Services

Performance
Support
Services

Social
Collaboration
Services

Performance
Consulting
Services



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Workforce Development Services Framework 4/5 SKILLS

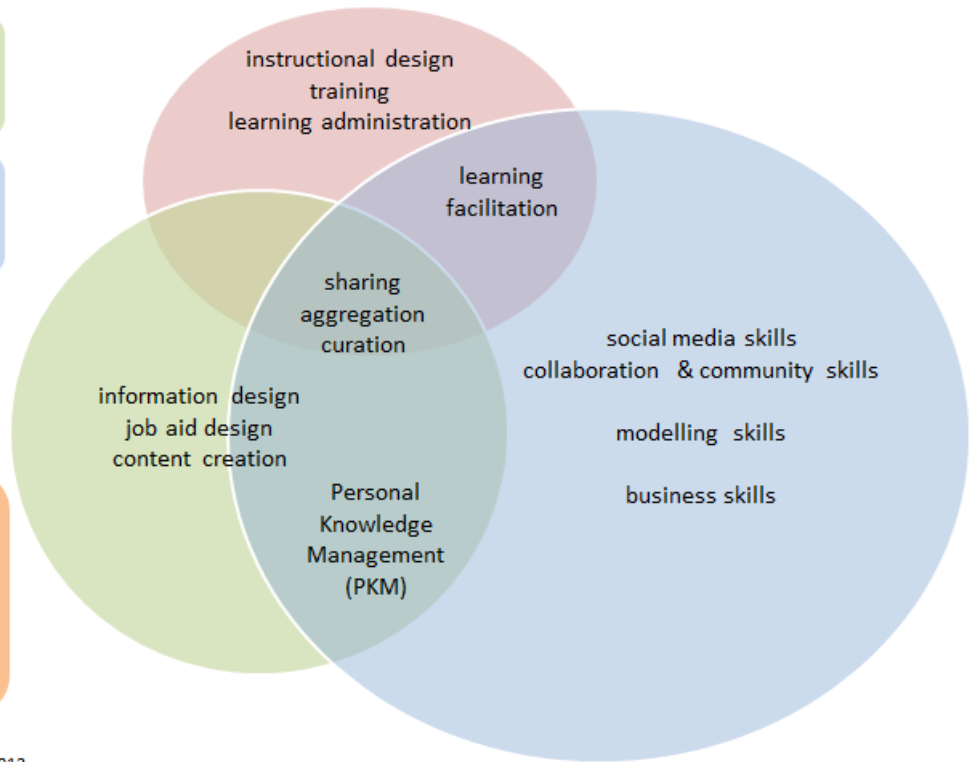
Training/
Instructional
Services

Performance
Support
Services

Social
Collaboration
Services

Performance
Consulting
Services

performance
consulting skills
business skills



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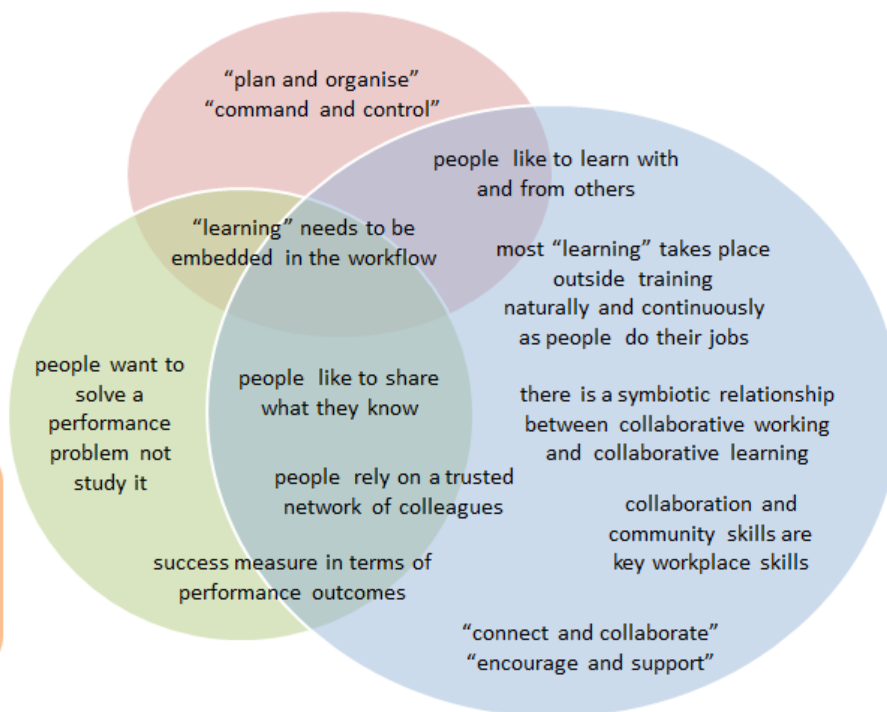
Workforce Development Services Framework 5/5 MINDSET

Training/
Instructional
Services

Performance
Support
Services

Social
Collaboration
Services

Performance
Consulting
Services
a course is not the
only answer to a
performance
problem



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