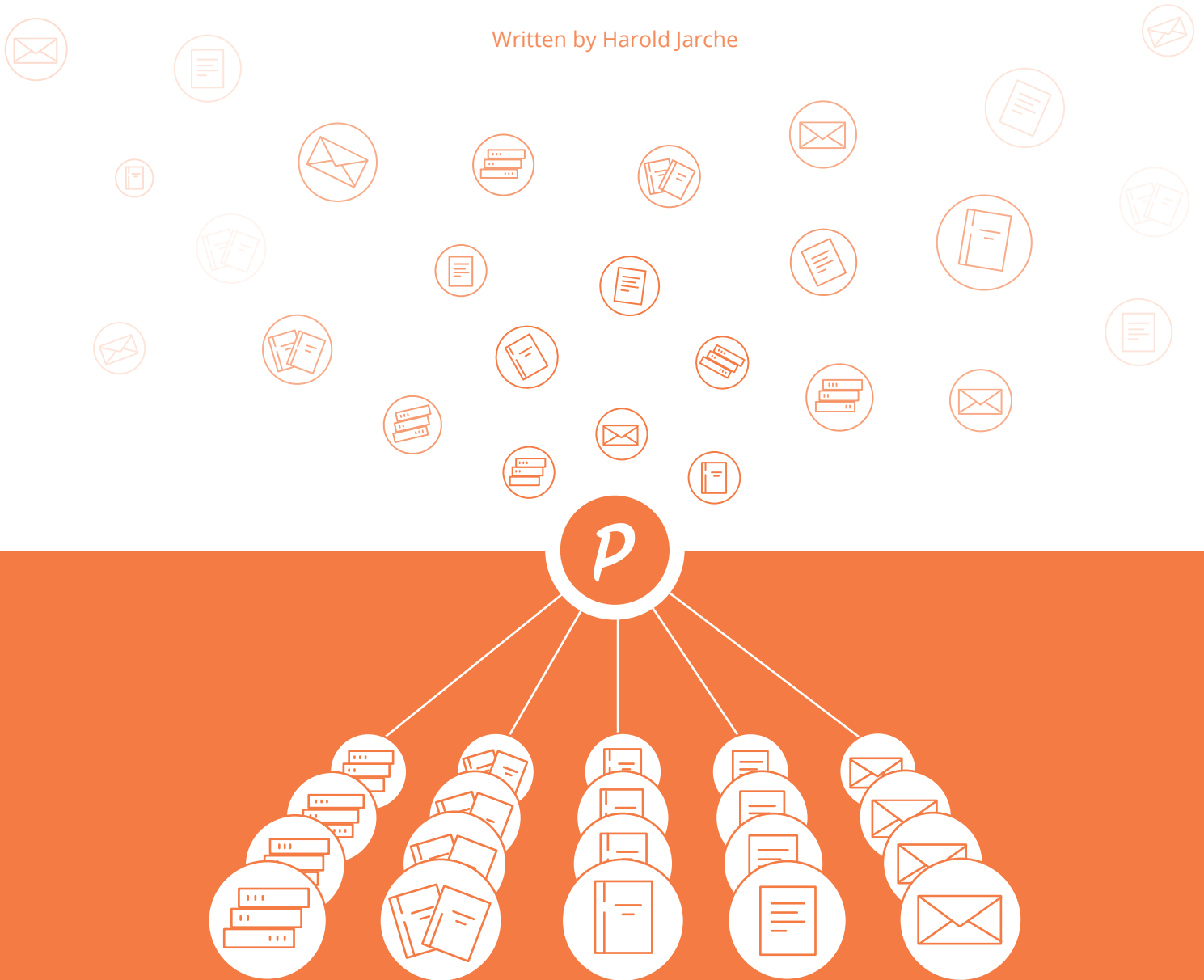


Learning's Future: Curation With Intent

Written by Harold Jarche



Overview



Technology and social networking have integrated themselves into our working and professional lives, often changing the nature of work itself.

As a result, learning and development has never been more important, yet L&D organizations can barely keep up. The solution is readily available: Empower workers to curate and share information throughout the company.



By sharing knowledge through their professional networks, workers better relate to their peers and more efficiently solve problems.

Curation becomes a form of engagement, and the return on that engagement is trust. That's an important result to CLOs who want knowledge to flow quickly.



It's time to let go of the idea of directed learning and embrace the concept of facilitated learning through curation.

Organizations that encourage individuals to identify small pieces of information and join them with minimal oversight will organically share and make sense of knowledge to everyone's advantage.

If you care about corporate learning, you should care about curation.

As the need for learning becomes more critical, the pace of technical change often means formal training can't be developed quickly enough to keep up. For Learning & Development organizations, curating and sharing information from internal subject-matter experts throughout the organization keeps their workforce up to date with rapidly changing roles and technology.

As more workers curate for their co-workers, departments or even their entire company, it's destined to become an integral way for enterprises to share knowledge.

That's especially true today, when jobs are being redefined and workers continually require new skills. According to Josh Bersin by Deloitte, employees are overwhelmed by the sheer pace and complexity of their work -- and they lack the skills to keep up with their changing roles. Georgetown University's Center for Education and the Workforce reports that 65 percent of jobs require a college degree while only 34 percent of Americans have one. That's pushed organizations to increase Learning & Development by double digits for each year between 2011 and 2014.

An Explosion of Learning Content



400 Universities

offer more than 2,400
massively open online courses
(MOOCs)



Self-authored video

makes up more than half of
total internet traffic



Number of companies using MOOCs

grew 110 percent
in 2015-16

Source: Bersin by Deloitte

With learning becoming increasingly social and personal, it's most effective when it's tailored to match the approach a worker takes to their job and is comfortably conveyed to them.

Creation of such an individualized approach can come from the workforce itself. When workers share their expertise with colleagues, learning naturally happens -- more quickly and in a more personalized way.

The key to making that happen is curation, the selection of information for sharing. In today's world, where learning should be embedded into almost every job, curation helps separate the signal from the noise that bombards the workplace. Effective workplace curation is the sharing of knowledge with the intent to help others. Properly done, it develops media literacy, reduces the cognitive load for ourselves and others, and improves social intelligence through sharing and feedback. As work becomes less routine, with fewer standardized methods applicable to each task, an organization's ability to innovate will depend on how well its workers share knowledge.

This might sound like a "soft" skill, but when spread across the organization it can lead to meaningful results. As Martin Harrysson, Estelle Metayer and Hugo Sarrazin wrote in the McKinsey Quarterly's November 2012 edition: "By identifying and engaging [internal expert] players, employing potent Web-focused analytics to draw strategic meaning from social-media data, and channeling this information to people within the organization who need and want it, companies can develop a 'social intelligence' that is forward looking, global in scope, and capable of playing out in real time."

Beth Kanter, an expert on social media and learning for the nonprofit sector, describes content curation as a three-part process that involves seeking, sensing and sharing. She believes "it has to support your organization's communications objectives or your professional learning goals." Effective curation, then, happens within the context of the enterprise, when workers curate for their team, department or organization.



Seeking



Sensing



Sharing

First of All, Find Information of Value

Curation should always spotlight useful information and make it easier to understand the core message. Six specific ways to add value to information:

1. VALIDATE

Ensure that information is reliable, current and supported by research.

2. SYNTHESIZE

Describe patterns, trends or flows in large amounts of information.

3. PRESENT

Make information understandable through visualization or logical presentation.

4. CONTEXTUALIZE

Describe the information in the context of the organization or group.

5. QUESTION

Critically examine the assumptions of a source of information.

6. COMPARE

Show how and where sources of information differ on a topic, and where they agree.

Learning is often about making connections. Curation helps identify and share connections. To offer value, curators must understand where their information comes from: Who's providing it? Are they a reputable source? How do they know? Because the algorithms behind a search engine skew its results in unknown ways, the simple fact that a piece of data appears atop Google's results list doesn't mean it's the highest quality information available. Consequently, knowing and trusting the data's source is critical in an age of information abundance.

That's all the more important because businesses often require information on complex or specialized subjects for which there is no single reputable source. In such cases, they need a network of experts who can give an informed and nuanced perspective. The challenge is these networks may not yet exist. We may have to build them ourselves. In that case, trust is imperative: If we trust a person involved in the network, we're likely to trust the sources of information and knowledge they rely on.

But we should always be wary. By continually testing the information we receive, we can discern patterns and understand an expert's underlying biases. Over time, we'll be able to build a unique network and, as Rob Cross and Andrew Parker point out in their book *The Hidden Power of Social Networks: Understanding How Work Really Gets Done in Organizations*: "High performers are distinguished by larger and more diversified personal networks."

This highlights a reality about valuable curation: Good curators must be connected and curious -- connected, in the sense that they need large and diverse networks from which to glean new information and perspectives, and curious because curiosity drives learning, curiosity about ideas improves creativity and curiosity about people improves empathy and understanding.

Share With Intent

Once we've curated information, we have to share it. And effective sharing effectively involves more than simply posting it in an online learning community.

One size doesn't fit all, so curators have to determine when to share specific knowledge, with whom, and through which channel.

In some instances, an organization-wide blog may be the most effective way to share. In others, posting to a narrowly focused community may be the best way to reach an intended audience.

Curators must also recognize when to capture information that may not be needed until later. For example, 1,500 workers could use a specific tool every day, but over six months 200 of them may stumble across the need to use an unfamiliar feature to make a deadline. If curators had the foresight to recognize information about how that feature could be valuable under certain circumstances, they could categorize it and include it in a knowledge base for use on-demand.

Curators add further value by putting information in the context of the person asking for help. Sending a note saying, "Here's a link to the resource," provides some value, but including a description of how the resource has previously been used adds more. Providing a list of resources, with each annotated according to the context of the person asking for help, adds even more.

Create a Solution Based on Engagement

All of this is especially important at a time when technology and automation are driving fundamental changes in how work gets done. While media discussions center on how new technologies will eliminate the need for many roles now performed by people, in November 2015's McKinsey Quarterly, Michael Chui, James Manyika and Mehdi Miremadi contended that the focus on individual occupations was misleading. "Very few occupations will be automated in their entirety in the near or medium term," they wrote. Instead, "certain activities are more likely to be automated, requiring entire business processes to be transformed, and jobs performed by people to be redefined, much like the bank teller's job was redefined with the advent of ATMs."

In many cases, then, automation will result in workers taking on roles that are more complex. While ATMs handle more of a customer's routine banking chores, for example, tellers take charge of more tasks that involve

sensitive financial matters and require human interaction. So, automation doesn't necessarily mean work becomes easier. It means people are left to address issues that are more technically or personally complex.

Such redefined jobs require learning new skills, yet the pace of technical change often outpaces L&D's ability to develop formal training. Consequently, organizations have little choice but to lean more heavily on informal learning if they're to help employees' keep their skills current. Curation helps accomplish this by encouraging workers and L&D teams to find and put to use the knowledge and work of others. It fosters wider sharing of diverse ideas, and over time that sharing builds trust. Improved trust speeds the flow of knowledge throughout the organization, and the organization becomes more nimble. Better sharing improves learning, and better learning leads to better decisions.

Trusted Networks Ease the Flow of Information

Because technology makes it easier to share information, curators must be discerning in what they share. A shotgun approach to knowledge-sharing doesn't accomplish much besides burying the audience, thus diluting the value curation is supposed to offer in the first place.

In large organizations especially, employees require the right social tools to share knowledge, collaborate and cooperate. Such tools enable faster feedback loops inside the organization and allow it to work more effectively with connected customers, suppliers and partners, and to address challenges posed by competitors. They connect the work being done with the identification of new opportunities and ideas.

But people view knowledge in a personal way. For example, most employees care little about organizational knowledge bases; instead, they care about what they need to accomplish their goals.

After building his company's knowledge base in 2003, Ernst & Young's Chief Knowledge Officer Dave Pollard wrote: "[My] conclusion this time around was that the centralized stuff we spent so much time and money maintaining was simply not very useful to most practitioners. The practitioners I talked to about [personal productivity improvement] said they would love to participate in PPI coaching, provided it was focused on the content on their own desktops and hard drives, and not the stuff in the central repositories."

Pollard's experience demonstrates that individual knowledge sharing and organizational knowledge management must complement each other. A decentralized approach, with individuals using their personal methods and sharing on their own terms, yields better results over time. The self-determination theory developed by professors Edward Deci and Richard Ryan has shown that workers are engaged when they have autonomy, mastery and relatedness. In the context of curation, they need the independence to select their own tools, the time to practice and master sense-making skills -- which allow them to take information and create meaning and understanding around it -- and a trusted network of peers with whom to share and learn.

Curation supports such self-determination. By connecting information and knowledge with their professional networks, workers better relate to their peers and more efficiently solve problems. Curation becomes a form of engagement, and the return on that engagement is trust. While trust is all-but impossible to measure, it's an important result to CLOs who want knowledge to flow quickly, and the idea that knowledge flows faster through trusted networks is a foundation block of learning.

To succeed, organizations must let go of the idea of directed learning and embrace the concept of facilitated learning through curation. They must empower individuals to identify small pieces of information and then join them under minimal organizational control. While each person has to find their own process, the end result is an organization that collectively makes sense of and shares knowledge to everyone's advantage.

About the Author

Harold Jarche is a leading authority on the emerging network era with a focus on social learning, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration. He has been described as “a keen subversive of the last century’s management and education models”.

Harold regularly speaks and writes about power of social networks, communities of practice, and personal knowledge mastery (PKM). A graduate of the Royal Military College, Harold served over 20 years with the Canadian Armed Forces in leadership and training roles.



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