

Wednesday, 06 September 2017

From Knowledge Worker to Insights Expert: the New Era and Reign of the SME Featured



SUPPLEMENTING CURATED CONTENT WITH CURATED INSIGHTS WILL TAKE YOU TO A NEW LEVEL.

BY LACI LOEW, BOB DANNA AND CANDY OSBORNE

Employees are struggling to keep up with data that continues to grow at an alarming rate. Now, more than ever, they're also having to make sense of changing technology with things like artificial intelligence (A.I.) and cognitive technologies in the workforce. According to reports by McKinsey, nearly half of all jobs could be fully automated or augmented by 2035, adding to employees' fears that they'll soon be replaced by machines.

The technological landscape is forcing employees to adapt or be phased out. But as employees persevere with information and data overload and a lack of clear personal and professional boundaries, being on call nearly 24/7, how will they break through? Ironically, employees who can make sense of the insurmountable amount of data and content and who can then draw thoughtful insights will become subjectmatter experts (SMEs) within an

organization, fortifying their foothold in the company and making them invaluable to the company and to their peers.

Jeff DeGraff, Ph.D., author of “The Innovation Code: The Creative Power of Constructive Conflict,” expands on the ironic state we’re in:

“The rhythms of reflection and deep thought run contrary to the speed of work. Making sense of the world requires more than just an infographic. It requires real time.

“Of course, there are many more aspects to the new world of work beyond technology, boundary busting and time shifting. We can speculate about these, because they are already here. But there’s still much about the new world of work we can’t know yet. All we can really do is to continue to make it up as we go along. Maybe the real revolution is making time to make sense of it all.”

What if there were a way to empower employees at all levels to draw their own insights and share them with their organization not only to position themselves as experts, the go-to people for more information in the organization, but also to help accelerate expertise?

THE ROLE OF SUBJECT- MATTER EXPERTS

Interestingly, if you ask employees who the SMEs are within their organization, you’ll likely get responses that senior leadership has all the knowledge. But research proves otherwise. Most SMEs are buried within the organization, having no voice or means to share their insights and knowledge with others.

What if there were a way to tap into hidden knowledge within an organization to amplify and accentuate the voices of experts, regardless of job title or level?

knowledge to insight

According to a Forbes article entitled, Top 10 Business Trends That Will Drive Success In 2017, two of the top 10 predictions involve SMEs. The first prediction states that customers would rather interact with SMEs instead of sales people; the second prediction is that SMEs will be supported by salespeople. Shifting the focus to enabling employees to be SMEs despite the data overload and changing technology is key. Helping employees to become SMEs can be done by enabling them to develop and share their insights.

We’re entering a new era, shifting away from knowledge workers to insights experts individuals in the enterprise network who distill meaningful and actionable ideas from all the information they read and share with others through a collaborative and dynamic network or platform. This probably starts with a handful of individuals but needs to evolve to all workers, and only organizations with workforces 100 percent full of insights experts will have employees who make meaningful contributions to the business. Thus, the business would have staying power.

ENABLING EMPLOYEES TO DEVELOP INSIGHTS

Content curation and the development of insights are already happening. Employees curate as they handle, sort, annotate and manage information daily. They print documents and use sticky notes, read books and highlight information, make annotations and take notes in notebooks. Online they read and save emails, bookmark sites, insert comment bubbles on PDFs, and contribute on sites like Evernote, Google Docs and social media.

The challenge is that insights are being created and captured in silos, sporadically shared with others who may be only peripherally aware that the knowledge exists, or repeatedly shared to numerous employees (by a single SME) to a point of spending time inefficiently.

When employees curate insights, they're called insights experts. To be useful, their insights need to be shared across the organization in a meaningful and practical way. These insights experts can identify the useful, actionable two percent of information from all the content they read, gifting a wealth of time savings and expertise to coworkers in need of the same information.

ENABLING A CULTURE OF SHARING

Because of flattened organizations, employees are already enabled to get answers from anyone in the organization; however, the current process is cumbersome and archaic. The smaller the group, the less noticeable it is, and the less need there is for scalability. But today's enterprise workforce of geo-dispersed and remote workers distorts a clear path of insights discovery and sharing across the full organization.

Current tools allow for the identification of information but do not allow employees to recall, synthesize, analyze or apply the information. Do your employees hoard information or share it? What does that look like today? How much time is wasted by the SMEs explaining themselves multiple times or by the information-seekers searching for it?

Going forward, we need tools that can shift away from the traditional model of curating content to one that will enable employees to draw thoughtful insights and share them from the content they consume. This is the level of expertise needed to propel an organization forward: content curation combined with insights curation.

What are the possibilities of an organization full of SMEs? Greater productivity? Faster speed to market? Increased bottom line? Actualized innovation? Increased sales effectiveness? Greater customer satisfaction? The potential for success is boundless and measurable.

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE?

Imagine a network that recognizes and rewards individuals based on their subject matter expertise and meaningful contributions. This is an enterprise-wide network that seamlessly integrates the curation of insights with content. It is set up for recognition and rewards for those who take the time to digest information, draw thoughtful insights, and share them with their colleagues. Not only will insights lead to social badging and SME status, but employees will more deeply root themselves as true experts and help to accelerate expertise and the application of it throughout the organization.

Learning is accelerated exponentially when you cut to the “a-ha” moment, the curated insight. Consider this example: a sales representative has been learning about consumer mindset by reading books, articles and attending webinars. Throughout her professional development, she makes the connection that the leads marketing delivers are already self-educated on the company’s solution and therefore she and her peers should be moving the conversation away from an educational one to a convincing one. Sharing this insight with her sales and marketing teams could result in better qualified leads and a lowered cost of customer acquisition because they’re better able to target and deliver qualified leads.

When employees seek answers today, their search results return courses, books, videos, blogs, websites, intranet sites, PDFs and other documents, in long form. Then, employees must sift through and read information in bulk until they find what they need — if they find what they’re looking for at all. Searching for insights flips this traditional search query model on its head, such that employees get immensely condensed search queries with the option to expand to the long-form asset if something piques their interest.

Adapting to the changing technological landscape, the rate of data growth and other facets that will continue to overwhelm employees calls for next-generation thinking based on future workforce trends. It’s not a talent management system, a learning management system, a social layering system, or a reward-and-recognition system per se. It’s something altogether unique that allows curated content and curated insights to be shared, discoverable and immediately actionable to the people seeking it. It is what will fuel SMEs, their colleagues and the organizations they support.

About the Authors

Laci Loew, founder and Principal, Laci Loew & Company LLC, is a results-driven human capital industry analyst offering research-based consulting and advisory services in human capital practices with more than 30 years of experience. Bob Danna, retired Managing Director, Deloitte, now serving as the Executive Chairman of the Board of Pandexio, Inc., has more than 40 years of experience in HR and learning transformation, leadership development, workforce analytics and associated management consulting. Candy Osborne, owner of Snowbird Creatives, began her career as a photojournalist in the U.S.M.C. 25 years ago and continues to craft compelling stories: many of them about enterprise learning.