Chapter 2
Use of Technology-Enabled Informal Learning in a Learning Organization

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ABSTRACT
This chapter explores how an organization created to inform members became an online learning organization. Using technology, the organization continued to support the professionals as they evolved in their individual careers and within the organization. Best practices arose to better inform the members and to expand communities of practice (CoPs). Members meaningfully engaged in the learning organization, in their avocations, and their vocations. This mix-method study, with over a 118 Association for Talent Development (ATD) professionals, addressed how the ATD could continue to support professionals in our evolving technological society. The study allowed the ATD professionals themselves to identify how they could help the organization and its’ members to advance the organization by using technology, informal learning and research-based learning to improve the membership organization roles. The study highlighted how important informal learning, professional development, modeling, and identifying best practices, are to an organization’s growth and the professionals’ growth.

INTRODUCTION
As information continues to expand, it is essential that all organizations find means to assist their members to remain current and informed in order for the members to remain current and to expand their competencies. This engagement is especially true for member organizations where the members are at great distances from the host organization. In these situations, the travel necessary to share the information needed to advance may not be possible due to costs, distance involved, or varied schedules of the individuals involved. The Association of Talent Development, formerly known as the American Society

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for Training and Development (ASTD), is a professional membership organization that helps its members develop skills and knowledge needed to lead organizations throughout the world in both face-to-face and using technology-enabled formats. As of 2013, ATD has over 41,000 members from over 126 countries. The ATD also has local chapters to enhance involvement and increase the level of presence.

The purpose of ATD is to “create a world that works better” (Association for Talent Development, 2017, p. 1) and its mission is to “empower professionals to develop talent in the workplace” (Association for Talent Development, 2017, p. 1). To do this the Association provides research, books, webcasts, events and educational programs. For those that can attend the association it also offers international events where its membership can view the “latest trends and best practices for designing, delivering, implementing and measuring learning programs” (Association for Talent Development, 2017a, p. 1).

The members are professionals that may become part of the “Communities of Practice” (Association for Talent Development, 2017b, p.1) under a host of titles: career development, global human resources development, government, healthcare, human capital, learning and development, learning technologies, management, sales enablement, science of learning or senior leaders and executives (Association for Talent Development, 2017b, p.1-4). There is a competency model where members may become credentialed through a competency-based model and become a Certified Professional in Learning and Performance (CPLP) by demonstrated competencies in 10 areas:

change management, performance improvement, instructional design, training delivery, learning technologies, evaluating learning impact, managing learning programs, integrated talent management, coaching, and knowledge management (Miller, 2015), p. 27

These communities of practice (CoPs) exist across the USA and many countries who are actively involved in ATD. One such community is in the southern part of the USA and was the location for the study that will follow.

Background

According to the ATD (2015) report, “Bridging the Skills Gap: Workforce Development is Everyone’s Business”, there are jobs in the USA and beyond that are not being filled because the technology is constantly changing the view of the workplace and people are not being trained fast enough to fill the slots that are available creating a “skills gap” (ATD, 2015, p. 7). According to ATD study “people in the know,” the talent development professionals, say that:

- 56% of the current workforce’s skills “do not match changes in the company strategies, goals, markets or business models” (ATD, 2015, p. 7);
- When promoting internal people for select jobs, 48% of them “lack a requisite skill” (ATD, 2015, p. 7) and for 45% of “certain types of jobs there are too few candidates” (ATD, 2015, p. 7).

The workforce is changing, and at such an exponential rate, organizations like ATD have to become more proactive and address how to provide adequate training and talent development to the changing workforce and prevent what appears to be a skills gap. It is also essential that organizations like ATD devise new ways to reach the varied generations and manage a new workforce that is growing more and more to be a virtual workforce. New collaborative environments need to be created to allow for generational
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