



# Social Learning

And Its Impact On Employee  
Learning and Development











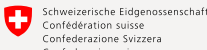
# About Together

Together empowers organizations to accelerate their employee learning and development through Social Learning programs. Our Social Learning programs enable organizations to leverage **mentorship, peer learning, and learning circles** (mentoring and peer learning in groups) to level up their employee development initiatives.

Rather than solo training programs that emphasize coursework and quizzes, employees can connect with each other and accelerate their professional development through career-changing guidance from mentors and encouragement from peers.

HR and L&D teams love Together because our platform offers the best user experience for employees. They don't need to learn a new tool as everything is set up through existing email and calendar systems. Guided mentorship programs and resources provide employees with cues and steps for every part of their journey.

Each program is fully customizable as well allowing administrators to white label their program with a custom URL and branding. If program administrators run into any questions while they're building their program Together's dedicated Support Team provides guidance every step of the way.

 <b>Technology</b> 5,000+ employees	 <b>Consulting</b> 30,000+ employees	 <b>Financial Services</b> 25,000+ employees
 <b>Entertainment</b> 5,000+ employees	 <b>Retail</b> 20,000+ employees	 <b>Education</b> 10,000+ employees
 <b>Consumer</b> 10,000+ employees	 <b>Professional Association</b> 10,000+ employees	 <b>Government</b> 10,000+ employees

**Want to see how we can help you bring your Social Learning program to life?**

[Book a Demo](#)

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## Introduction

Much of employee learning happens socially rather than through individual study. We don't know how to do our jobs until we actually start doing them. Despite this simple truth, corporate training programs emphasize coursework, quizzes, surveys, and other solitary activities. This may be because coursework and tests have historically been easier to track and measure. It's time for a change.

With the onslaught of the pandemic, as our workplaces adapted to a remote-first environment, traditional training program's weaknesses became more apparent. Our training programs also need to adapt as we adjust to the new normal and embrace a more flexible work environment. Employees may see less of each other in person - where key learning and development happens. What will organizations do to make up for that lost learning and development?

**This white paper will propose that the solution to digital training isn't more online quizzes and training videos but Social Learning instead.**

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# What Is Social Learning?

Social Learning is how we learn most effectively: observing, imitating, and getting feedback from others. In the workplace, it looks like employees collaborating to find solutions to challenges, working out their ideas, and making plans to develop the skill sets they need to excel in their roles.

University of California, Berkeley states that:

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**Social Learning involves participation and can take place in either a formal (i.e. working on a course together with a cohort) or informal (i.e. daily, casual occurrences of working and learning in a team) settings.”**



## Types of Learning

<b>Informal</b>	Personal - Reading, Listening, watching, Sharing, Connecting	Team-Working and Learning together
	<b>Formal</b>	Cohort - Learning with Others on a Course
	<b>Individual</b>	<b>Social</b>

Social Learning is emerging as a way for organizations to connect newly remote workplaces and invest in their employees’ development. Social Learning builds a more connected workforce while also accelerating their professional training. It’s equal parts culture-building and employee development.

In the next section, we’ll explain the learning theories supporting Social Learning in the workplace. After we understand Social Learning, we’ll explain why Social Learning is more effective than a traditional learning management system. We’ll also include concrete examples of the different parts of Social Learning programs like mentorship, peer learning, learning circles, and events.

Organizations can’t afford to ignore investing in their best and brightest through Social Learning in today’s ever-changing business landscape.



## The Theories Underlying Social Learning

The term Social Learning has different meanings depending on your context. It was originally coined by the psychologist Alberta Bandura in his 1977 book [Social Learning Theory](#).



## Social Learning Theory



**Social Learning theory is a theory of learning process and social behavior which proposes that new behaviors can be acquired by observing and imitating others.”**

In his book, he researched the way children learn and identified that children learn following this process:

- ➔ Observe those around us (what he calls ‘models’) and how they behave. A model can be anything from a parent or a character on a TV show.
- ➔ Imitate the model’s behavior.
- ➔ The positive or negative response the new behavior provokes will determine if it’s reinforced or discouraged.
- ➔ Similar to observing the feedback of their own actions, they can observe the reactions others’ behavior provokes and decide if they’ll adopt that behavior or not.

As adults, we’re not much different. We still learn in fundamentally the same ways as we did as children. We’re social beings, and we learn from those around us by watching them, adopting their ways of acting, and getting feedback.

**Let’s look at another learning theory that contributes to how we learn:  
Active Learning Theory.**



## Active Learning Theory

Bandura’s research made waves throughout academia and inevitably influenced childhood education. In 1991, Charles Bonwell and James Eison contributed to Bandura’s findings when they published their own research showing that students learn most effectively “when they are doing something [instead of] passively listening.”

With numerous studies, they made it clear that students won’t retain information and learn how to apply it if they listen to lectures alone. Effective learning requires students to read, write, discuss, reflect, and use the information to solve problems. In doing so, they will engage in higher-order thinking like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.



**We learn most effectively when they are doing something instead of passively listening.”**

A framework developed to reflect this realization: **the 70:20:10 framework.**





## The 70:20:10 Framework

The 70:20:10 framework further explains the sources of our knowledge. It states that:



Of our workplace learning comes from direct experience (doing our job).



Comes from our relationships with others, whether coaches, mentors, or peers.



Comes from individual studies like coursework or formal lecture-style training.

The 70:20:10 framework is a simplification but provides a helpful benchmark for understanding that most of our learning is through our experiences with our work and others. Only a fraction comes from individual study or coursework.



## The Bottom Line On Social Learning Theories

The research underlying Social Learning leads to the question: why do our workplace training programs put so much emphasis on individual training rather than Social Learning when it's clear that Social Learning accounts for the majority of outcomes for employees? The way we train our employees is leaving a lot on the table.

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## Traditional L&D Is Predominantly Solo Learning Which Isn't Enough

Despite the research showing that the way we learn is intimately tied to our experience with others, workplace learning and development programs still focus primarily on individual training.

There's an over-emphasis on coursework, surveys, quizzes, training videos, and other activities that employees can complete independently. This may be because it's easier to track whether an employee watches a training video and completes a quiz than to measure the impact a mentor has had on their career development. But which has a more lasting impact?

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Traditional workplace learning leads employees to simply check the boxes and performing the necessary activities to complete “workplace learning,” but rarely retain what they learn.



### Consider These Statistics:

- ✓ According to [The Forgetting Curve](#) coined by German psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus, we forget 70% of what we learn within 24 hours if it isn't reinforced.
- ✓ 75% of [1,500 managers surveyed](#) from across 50 organizations were dissatisfied with their company's Learning & Development (L&D) function.
- ✓ [70% of employees](#) report that they don't have mastery of the skills needed to do their jobs.
- ✓ Only [12% of employees](#) apply new skills learned in L&D programs to their jobs.
- ✓ Only 25% of respondents to a [McKinsey](#) survey believe that training measurably improved their performance.

How can we make employee training more effective for employee development? We bridge the gap between the corporate training that's offered and effective employee development with Social Learning. **Let's look at how Social Learning is more effective than a traditional employee training platform, a learning management system.**



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## Why Social Learning Is More Effective Than A Traditional Learning Management System?

At Together, our Social Learning programs focus on connecting with employees (virtually and in-person) through mentoring or peer-coaching relationships that take place either 1-on-1 or in group settings.

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**Employees—especially those in remote workplaces, need learning and development that’s steeped in social interactions and collaboration.”**

There will always be a place for individual study and guided learning. But numerous studies and surveys show that it isn’t enough for employees. Employees—especially those in remote workplaces, need learning and development that’s steeped in social interactions and collaboration.”

Here’s how we see Social Learning compared to other forms of learning:



**Traditional LMS  
Employee Training**

Consuming training material individually.



**Collaborative  
Learning**

Consuming training content and collaborating with others about training material.



**Social  
Learning**

Learning through group discussion, mentoring, coaching, and peer feedback.



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**Social Learning encourages knowledge sharing between employees, and that’s much more effective than completing a course that barely gets their full attention.”**



## Social Learning Is The Natural Way We Learn

The research above shows that Social Learning is the natural way that we learn. We learn best through working with others, discussing our ideas and challenges and testing out solutions together. We get feedback from testing our ideas and solutions and our peers by asking them for their perspectives.

Social Learning encourages knowledge sharing between employees, and that's much more effective than completing a course that barely gets their full attention.



## We Retain More

The University of Mexico conducted a study of medical students and their class formats. They found that classes designed to encourage active participation in the material and spur discussion between students and teachers led to higher marks and course information retention.

Their learning still included coursework, lectures and tests. The difference, however, was that the teachers emphasized getting students to interact and discuss the topics rather than passively listening to it and taking notes to prepare for exams. The students could lean on the teacher for more information when questions arose, but their learning came primarily from discussing problems and solutions together.

In the same way that the students learned more by being put in the driver seat of their education, employees will learn more effectively when they're learning with their peers and coached on skills relevant to their roles.





## Better For Team Culture

Employees who learn together will work together more effectively. They'll understand how their peers work, their unique perspectives, their strengths and their weaknesses. When problems arise, they'll know who to go to for help and will be comfortable enough to do so. In short, they'll be an effective team.

But it starts with how they learn together. Employee development that focuses on interpersonal relationships will build cultures of learning which are more adaptive to change.

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Additionally, leaders who mentor junior employees will uncover future leaders and high potential employees. They'll gain access to the next generation of talent's perspectives and make better decisions because of it.

Leaders will also get tremendous intrinsic value from using their wealth of experience to guide and shape rising talent.



## Predetermined Training Lacks Context - Social Learning Is Relevant

Siloed independent training may disrupt employee work and be considered irrelevant. Take, for example, that “76% of millennials believe professional development opportunities are one of the most important aspects of company culture.” But “an IBM study revealed that employees who feel they cannot develop in the company and fulfill their career goals are 12 times more likely to leave the company.”

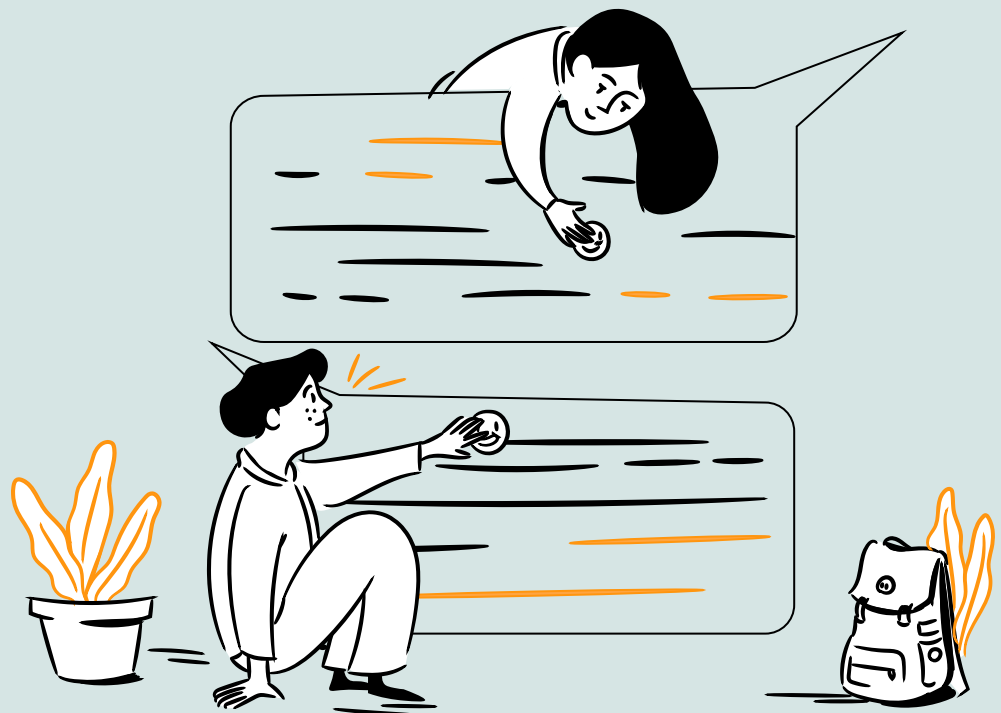
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**76% of millennials believe professional development opportunities are one of the most important aspects of company culture.”**

It's crucial to get employee training right, or you run the risk of losing valuable employees.

Social Learning, on the other hand, is relevant because employees direct it. They discuss their ideas, challenges, and goals with peers, mentors, and coaches.

Their discussions can introduce new perspectives and feedback that lead to new insights and, thus, learning. Additionally, employees will buy into what they learn because they direct it.



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## Different Types Of Social Learning

Now that we've outlined what Social Learning is and why it's the most effective way to develop employees, let's look at specific elements of Social Learning. We'll look at mentorship, **peer learning**, **learning circles**, and **events**.

All of these effectively bring employees together to learn from each other and grow personally and professionally.



## Mentorship

Mentorship within the workplace looks like leaders across the organization connecting with more junior employees to help them grow. Mentors can help their mentees outline plans for their careers, overcome obstacles, discuss their ideas or ambitions, and connect them with others who can help them.

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**It isn't a simple check-in but an active conversation around particular goals or challenges.”**

Overall they are there to support their mentees in their professional growth. An effective mentoring relationship has 1-on-1 discussions at least once a month where they both come prepared to discuss particular topics and follow up on previous conversations.

It isn't a simple check-in but an active conversation around particular goals or challenges. Mentors and their mentees should make real solutions or plans during their conversations. Likewise, the mentor's role is to hold them accountable for making progress.



## Peer Learning

Peer learning is a training model that emphasizes learning through teamwork and problem solving rather than solitary research or listening to lectures. It's clear why it's a central tenant of Social Learning.

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**55 percent of employees will often turn to their peers when they want to learn something new.”**

More likely than not, peer learning is happening informally in a lot of workplaces. According to the Harvard Business Review, 55 percent of employees will often turn to their peers when they want to learn something new.

An advantage of peer learning in the workplace is that it is more cost-effective when compared to traditional training. You won't need to hire outside experts or trainers. Instead, you'll only need to cultivate opportunities for your employees to work together.



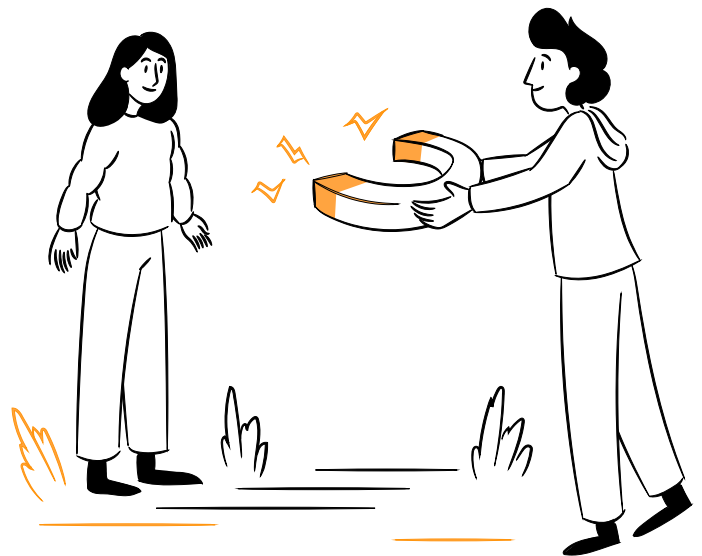


## Learning Circles

In a similar vein to 1-on-1 mentorship and peer learning, learning circles are organized groups of employees who discuss particular topics relevant to their roles or careers. A facilitator oversees the learning circle by helping guide the conversation with thoughtful questions and keeping the group engaged. They help keep the discussion on track.



**Learning circles are organized groups of employees who discuss particular topics relevant to their roles or careers.”**



### Examples of discussion topics learning circles can engage in can be:

- ✓ Female managers sharing their experiences of challenges and successes with one another.
- ✓ Employees from different departments sharing with other teams their priorities, challenges, and perspectives on the business to provide context and open up discussion about possible ideas or solutions.
- ✓ Discussing work-life balance issues and best practices.
- ✓ Employees from diverse backgrounds sharing their lived experiences and building community.

These are just some of the opportunities for learning circles. It's important to note that learning circles are not solely networking events. Instead, it's a collaborative discussion focused on predetermined topics.

During the first meeting, members should be encouraged to discuss their goals and what they hope to get out of the sessions. Facilitators can write their goals down on a whiteboard (virtual or in-person) and look for common goals that everyone shares. This insight will guide what to discuss during the following sessions and show participants that their input shapes the learning circle's design. They make the learning circle their own.



## Events

Events are similar to learning circles but are more of a TedTalk-style event with networking opportunities and a lecture on a particular topic. Whether in a physical space or virtually, events facilitate employee learning and development by providing engaging lectures on interesting topics relevant to employee development.

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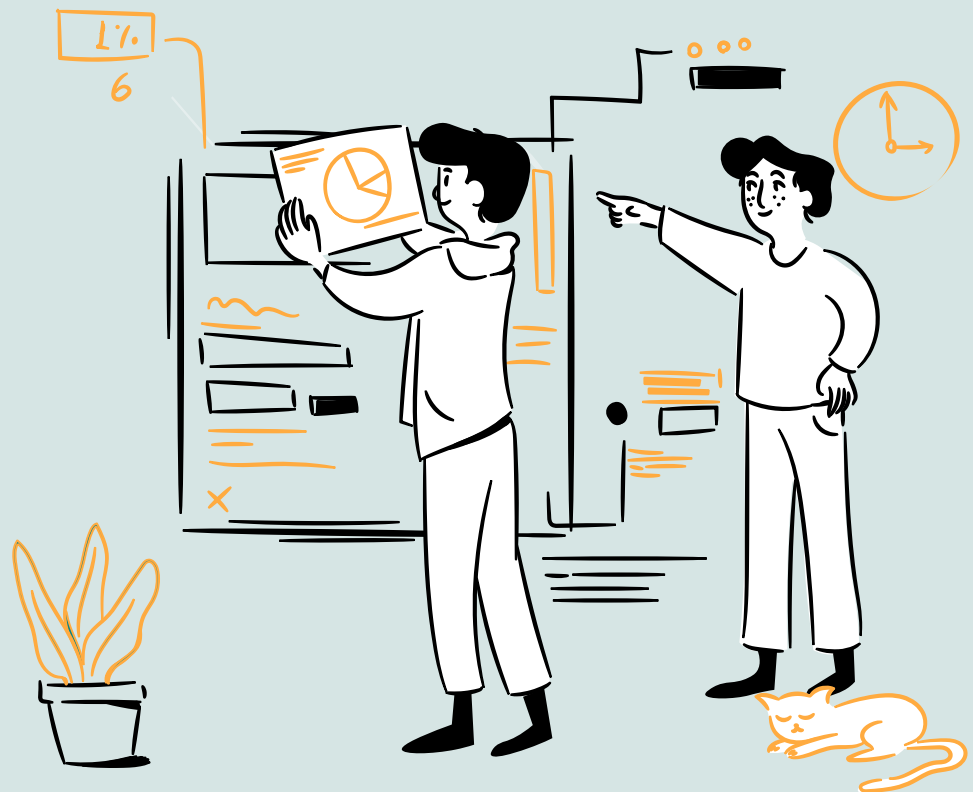
**Events are an opportunity to strengthen your organizational culture and display the unique perspectives, talents, insight, and skills of the individuals making your company what it is.”**

Events usually take place over one or two days and requires significant planning and administrative work. Administrators will have to decide on an overarching theme for the event, how it will support employee learning and development, who will be speaking and what employees should expect from the event.

After you've decided on the learning outcomes employees should get from the event, you can decide on either external or internal speakers. Although it's tempting to bring in experts, there are likely individuals within the organization who have a lot of tacit knowledge worth sharing with others.

Find these individuals by tapping into employee networks and finding those who have influence, not just those with senior titles. Uncovering these individuals and giving them a platform to share their knowledge with the organization motivates them and encourages other employees to do the same by leveraging their unique strengths.

Events are an opportunity to strengthen your organizational culture and display the unique perspectives, talents, insight, and skills of the individuals making your company what it is.



## Examples Of Social Learning In The Workplace

By this point, you understand what Social Learning is and its different elements, namely, mentorship, peer learning, learning circles, and events. In this part, we'll provide concrete examples of workplace Social Learning programs. These are examples organizations can employ to accelerate their L&D initiatives.

Here are four examples of Social Learning in the workplace:



## Connecting A Global Workforce Through Mentorship

Randstad is a Dutch multinational human resource consulting firm headquartered in Diemen, Netherlands. They have divisions across the globe and take mentorship very seriously. So seriously, they have Randstad certified mentors who must go through training to participate in their global mentoring program.

They leverage Together's Social Learning platform to run several different mentoring programs designed to connect mentors and mentees across their global divisions. For example, their Canadian division ran a Reload Your Strengths mentorship program to develop leadership skills among employees.

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**Randstad found that employees participating in the mentoring program were 49% less likely to leave Randstad. The increase in retention saved them \$3,000 per participant per year.”**

During the program, participants shared that their mentors helped them define their career goals, work through challenges, outline plans for the future, and hold them accountable for making progress. Some mentors even connected them with shadowing opportunities where employees could sit in on meetings or connect with individuals with roles they were interested in pursuing. Randstad's Reload Your Strengths mentorship program is just one example of how they've been able to connect their global workforce and break down silos that inhibit employee learning and development and career growth.

An interesting result of their mentoring programs was the program's impact on their retention rate. They found that employees participating in the mentoring program were 49% less likely to leave Randstad. The increase in retention saved them \$3,000 per participant per year. It's no wonder Randstad continues to expand its mentorship programs.





## Peer Learning In Different Contexts

Peer learning is an effective way for organizations to support positive relationships between employees. The result of these relationships is inclusive cultures where employees feel valued and supported. The good news is that employees are already going to one another for help before considering formal training. To accelerate the peer-to-peer learning relationships that lead to such positive outcomes, **let's look at different types of peer-to-peer Social Learning programs:**



### Manager-to-Manager Development.

There's only so much you can learn about management from books. Likewise, many new managers land their positions because they are exceptional individual contributors. So management is a new skill set for them to develop. For this reason, swapping stories with other managers and spending time sharing your own experiences to get feedback is invaluable for learning. New managers can connect with more experienced managers to glean advice for specific situations or share tips with other new managers. These informal conversations are invaluable in supporting managers. Organizations can ensure all managers have access to these learning opportunities by implementing Social Learning programs like a learning circle where managers come together to help each other grow.



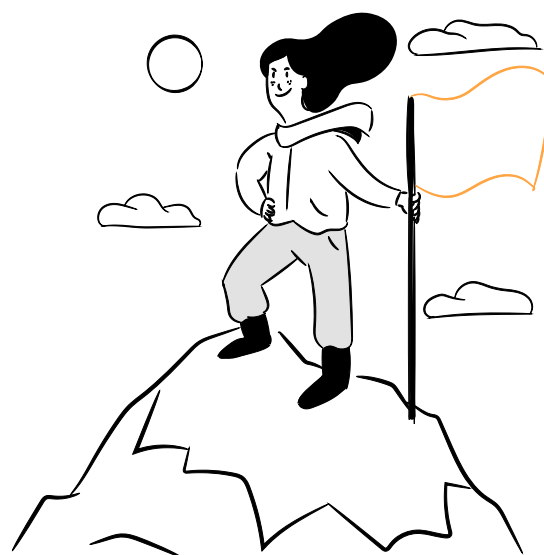
### Cross-Functional Collaboration.

Silos aren't conducive to innovation and collaborative cultures. Peer learning programs designed to connect employees in different roles to share perspectives are a creative way to break down barriers. Employees who rarely talk to one another can break the ice through a peer learning program that encourages them to share their ideas and unique perspectives. These informal learning opportunities can quickly lead to novel ideas. It's also a great way to build cultures where employees know each other even if they aren't in the same department.



### Buddy Programs.

Starting a new job is exciting and daunting. There's a lot to learn and many people to meet. Buddy programs ease the tension for new employees looking to meet new people and help them adjust more quickly to their new role and environment. For example, a peer learning program could pair up a new sales rep with a colleague to show them the ropes and let them shadow them during their first week. They'll build an informal relationship, and the new hire will have someone they can go to with their questions and concerns.





## Building A Community of Female Entrepreneurs With Learning Circles And Mentorship

The Forum is a Canadian-based non-profit whose mission is to “help women entrepreneurs access the resources & community they need to thrive in business.” They achieve their mission by growing their community of female entrepreneurs and connecting them with mentors.

Since its founding in 2001, The Forum has connected over 2000 entrepreneurs with career-changing mentors to help them build their businesses. In addition to creating meaningful 1-on-1 mentoring relationships, they’ve also organized learning circles where entrepreneurs support one another. In this form of peer mentoring, female entrepreneurs can share their experiences starting a business and discuss challenges and opportunities with people who are like them.

The Forum has used mentorship and learning circles to build a support network of entrepreneurs.



## Celebrating Growth With Learning Event

The American Automobile Association (AAA) ran a 6-month pilot program to support emerging professionals in their employee resource group. Run between their diversity and inclusion office and L&D team, they achieved their goal of creating a culture of mentorship within the organization.

By providing opportunities for employees to network, build relationships, and learn about company operations, they contributed to employee growth both personally and professionally.

Their pilot program culminated in a graduation ceremony where participants met other mentoring pairs, shared their experiences and celebrated their growth. This event allowed them to reflect on what they got out of the program and be inspired to continue growing. AAA provides an example of a Social Learning event that motivates and encourages them to continue pursuing their professional development.

## Ready To Start Your Social Learning Program?

We believe Social Learning to be the future of employee learning and development. In our newly remote or hybrid work environments, we can't rely on employees to organically learn what they need to excel in their roles. Sure, they'll still learn from feedback that managers provide and virtual calls they have with colleagues. But organizations are leaving so much opportunity on the table when they don't actively leverage Social Learning programs like:

- ✓ **Mentorship**
- ✓ **Peer learning**
- ✓ **Learning circles**
- ✓ **Learning events**

These elements of Social Learning require top-down support to get up and running. They can't expect it to happen organically. Organizations that don't provide employees with opportunities to get career-changing mentorship or connect to solve problems and grow through the relationships that Social Learning enables are missing out on significant opportunities.



### What's Next?

To continue learning about Social Learning, mentorship, peer learning, and groups, check out our other white papers, blog, and webinars, where we explore each topic in depth. And if you're ready to start your own Social Learning program **get in touch with us today.**





# Resources

## Blog



How To Start A Group Mentoring Program

## Blog



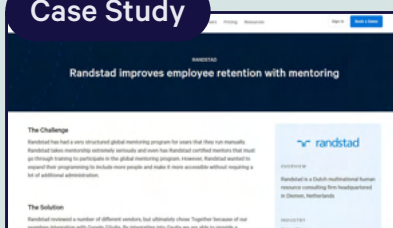
A guide to peer to peer learning

## Blog



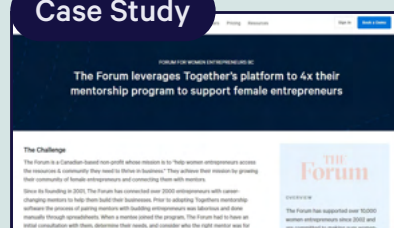
Examples of Successful Mentoring Programs

## Case Study



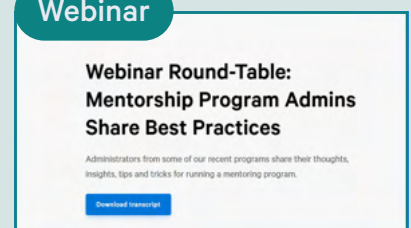
Randstad Improves Employee Retention with Mentoring

## Case Study



The Forum Leverages Together's Platform to 4x Their Mentorship Program to Support Female Entrepreneurs

## Webinar



Webinar Round-Table: Mentorship Program Admins Share Best Practices

## White Paper



Best Practices for Running A Mentorship Program