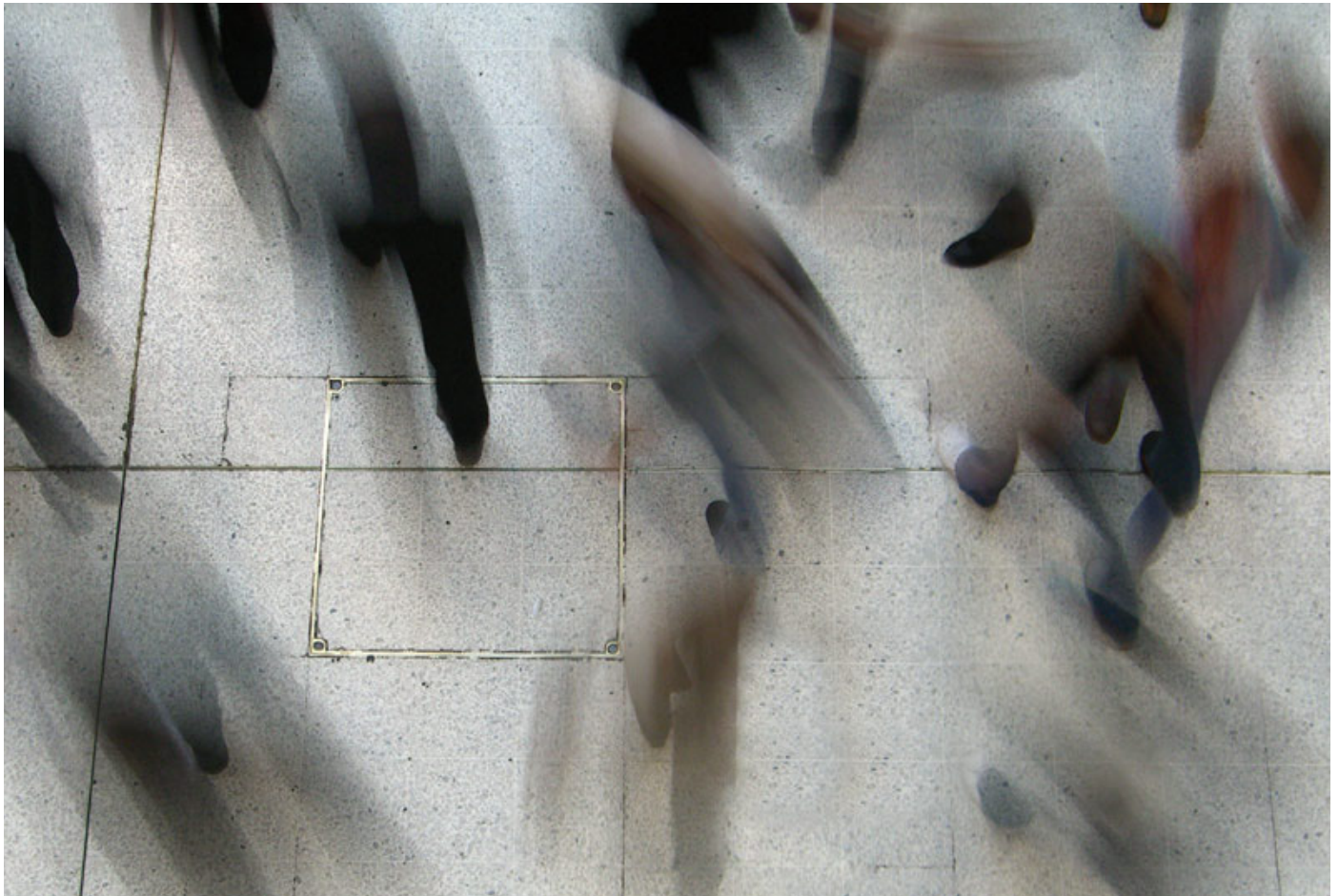


# Social Networking in Government: Opportunities & Challenges



## Part III: Closing the Satisfaction Gap in Using Social Networking Tools in Training and Development



# Social Networking in Government — Part III: Closing the Satisfaction Gap in Using Social Networking Tools in Training and Development

## Executive Summary

A “social network” (SN) focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Social networks have become the latest trend in digital connectivity. Most social networking tools are Web-based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as sharing best practices, building communities of practice, e-mail and instant messaging services. These tools are often called “social software” and are often utilized by organizations, businesses and government agencies to support a wide range of talent and learning needs. “Social software” augments and leverages the new tools of Web 2.0 (such as blogs, wikis, RSS feeds and social networking sites, including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn) to find creative ways to recruit, engage, connect and retain employees, as well as facilitating strategic knowledge sharing across organizations and government agencies. SN tools can help with the current challenges facing today’s government agencies such as “brain drain” from a retiring workforce, the need to create inter-agency knowledge sharing and an increased need to imbed talent tools where the work is getting done.

In the first report in this series — based on a recent research study by the Human Capital Institute (HCI) and Saba — we explored the overall use of various SN tools in government — as well as the current effectiveness and future importance of these tools in carrying out key talent management, work performance and public communication functions. In the second report, we discussed the ways that SN tool use varies among different types of government agencies, from town government to federal agencies such as the Department of Defense, as well as how use differs among various functional groups (e.g., HR versus Operations) *within agencies*.

In this, the final report, we turn our attention to the opportunities and challenges of using SN tools for one particularly critical talent management function — training and development. The use of SN tools for employee development is growing in the private sector for two key reasons:

- Economic — many companies see social networking as a cost-effective method to train and develop employees in today's tough economic environment.
- Organizational Change — increased rate of organizational change is creating an increased need for just-in-time learning solutions to replace or complement more traditional instructional design.<sup>1</sup>

Government agencies are facing similar pressures — with decreasing government revenue and budgets replacing the loss of profits being experienced by the private sector. However, as we illustrated in the first report, government and private sector workplaces differ significantly in their level of SN tool use. Nearly twice the percentage of government respondents reported that their office does not use any SN tools and, therefore, lag behind private sector respondents in SN tool use 29 percent to 15 percent. However, among government workplaces that are using SN tools, employee learning and development along with communications/public relations are the functions for which SN tools are most likely to be used.

As part of our larger study of SN tools in government, we collected data on four learning and development topics in particular:

- For which types of learning and development are SN tools most likely used?
- Who, within government agencies, drives the use of SN tools for learning and development?
- How satisfied are SN tool users in government with the current crop of social networking functions and Web sites to power enhanced employee training and development?
- What are some of the *best practices* currently being implemented by government agencies to leverage SN tools to improve training and development?

### Key Findings:

- People involved in training and development are the most likely group to use threaded discussion boards and threads than other groups — highlighting the usefulness of these functions in talent development.
- Functions aligned with knowledge sharing and informal learning and development are the most likely to be effectively conducted via SN tools.
- Regardless of government agency type, workplaces are far more likely to use SN tools for *informal* rather than *formal* learning and development.
- There is low satisfaction with the usefulness of currently used SN tools to improve learning and development — *highlighting the major opportunity for improvement in the future.*

### Recommended Action Plan:

- Information about **successful uses** of SN tools should be **widely distributed** to encourage leadership buy-in of SN tools enhancement for underutilized functions. Examples of some of these “best practices” are included at the end of this report.
- **Training and development groups** need to take the **lead to leverage** the success of SN tools *for informal training and development to enhance the use of these tools in formal training and development programs.*

---

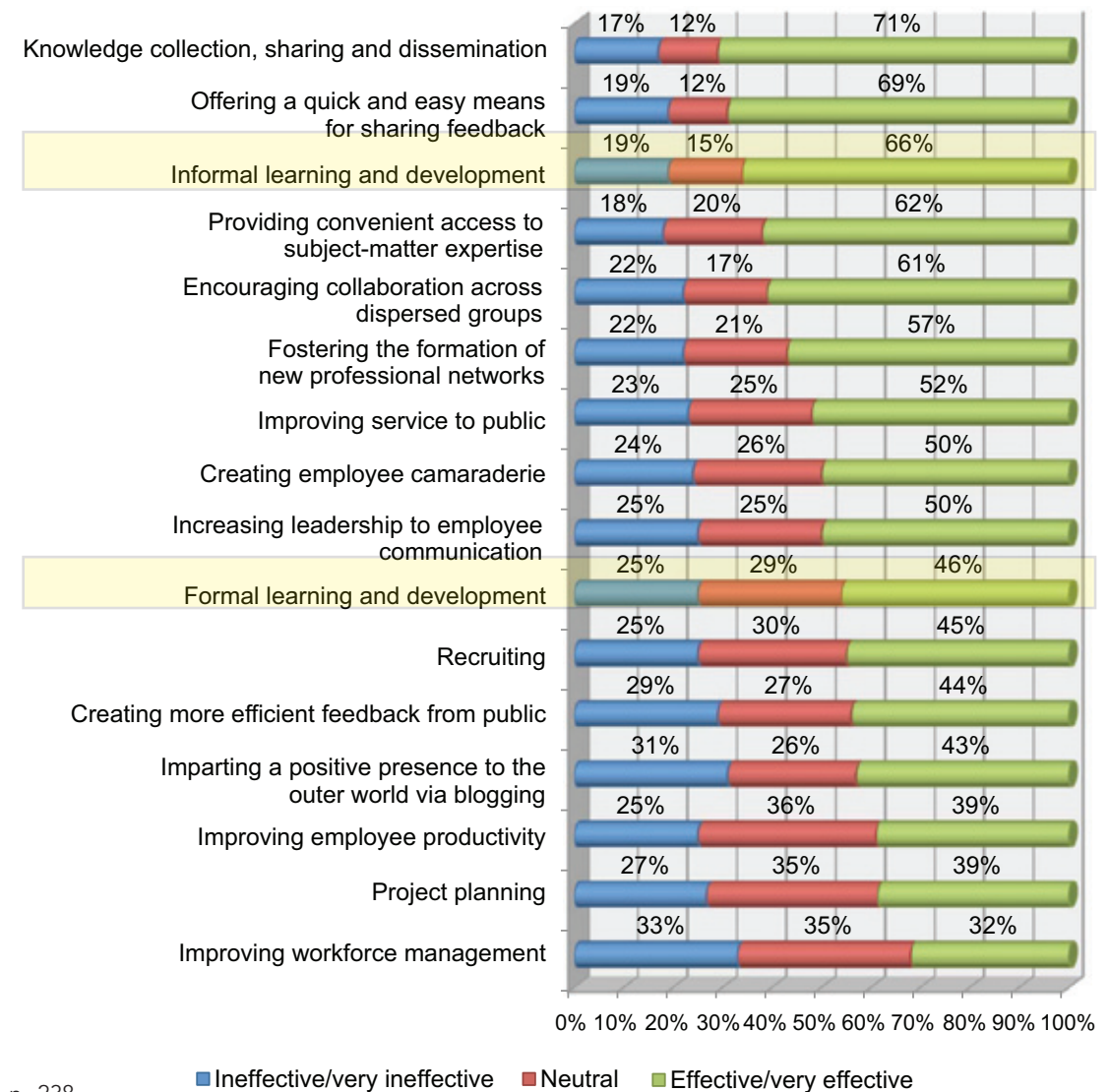
<sup>1</sup> Marjorie Derven. “Social Networking: A Force for Development?” *Training & Development*, July 2009.

## For Which Learning and Development Functions Are SN Tools Being Used?

One of our most important findings is that government agencies tend to use SN tools more effectively for informal than for formal training and development (Figure 1). This is most likely due to the natural link between using SN tools for knowledge sharing and network building (their original purposes) and making that knowledge and those networks available for employees to access at their leisure — in an informal, non-classroom style.

**Figure 1.** Government agencies use SN more effectively for informal learning and development than as part of their formal learning and development programs.

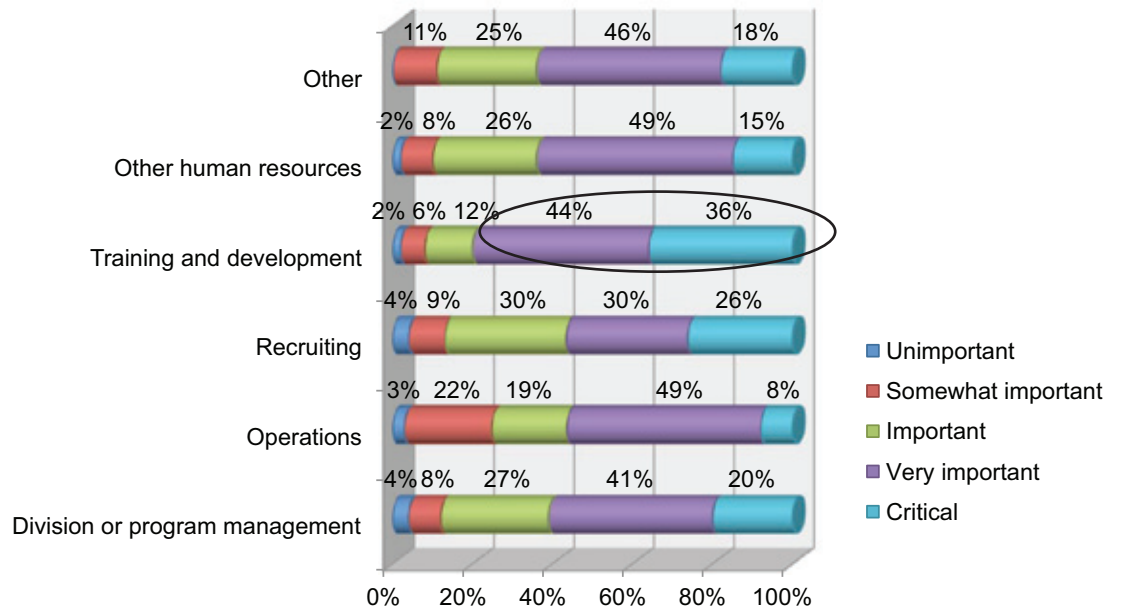
### Current Effectiveness of SN Tools for Critical Work Functions



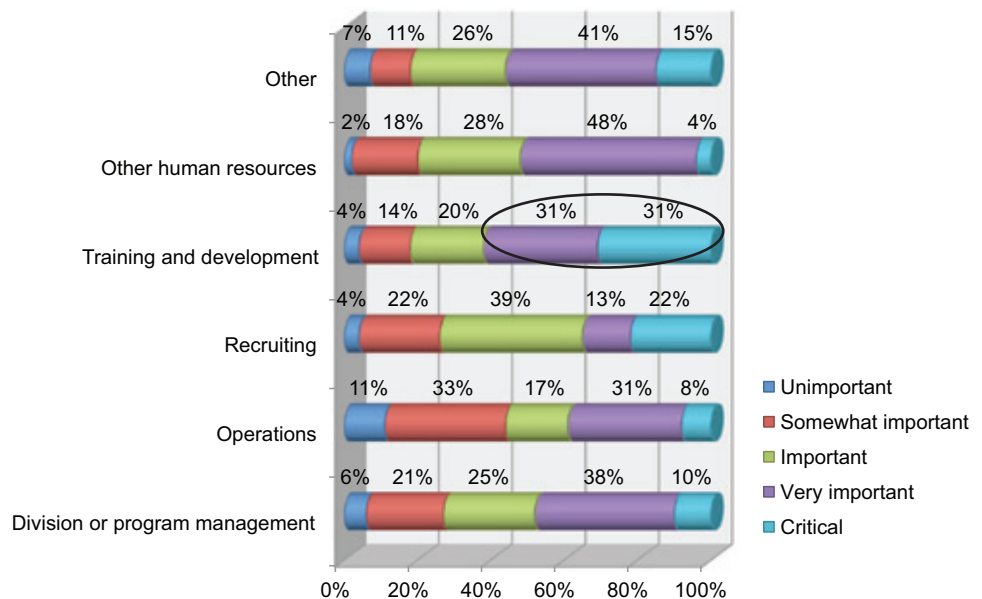
The emphasis of informal over formal approaches is also apparent when we break down our results by functional role (Figure 2). However, these results also show that those on the front lines (individuals in training and development functions) rank the future importance of SN tools higher than other groups — for both informal and formal approaches. This is important, since it is this group that will be the driver for the increased adoption of SN tools for learning and development in the future.

**Figure 2.** Training and development staff place greater emphasis on the future importance of SN tools for both informal and formal training and development. A significantly greater percentage ranks SN tools as being very important/critical for informal approaches versus formal approaches (80 percent versus 62 percent). n=246

### A. Informal Learning and Development



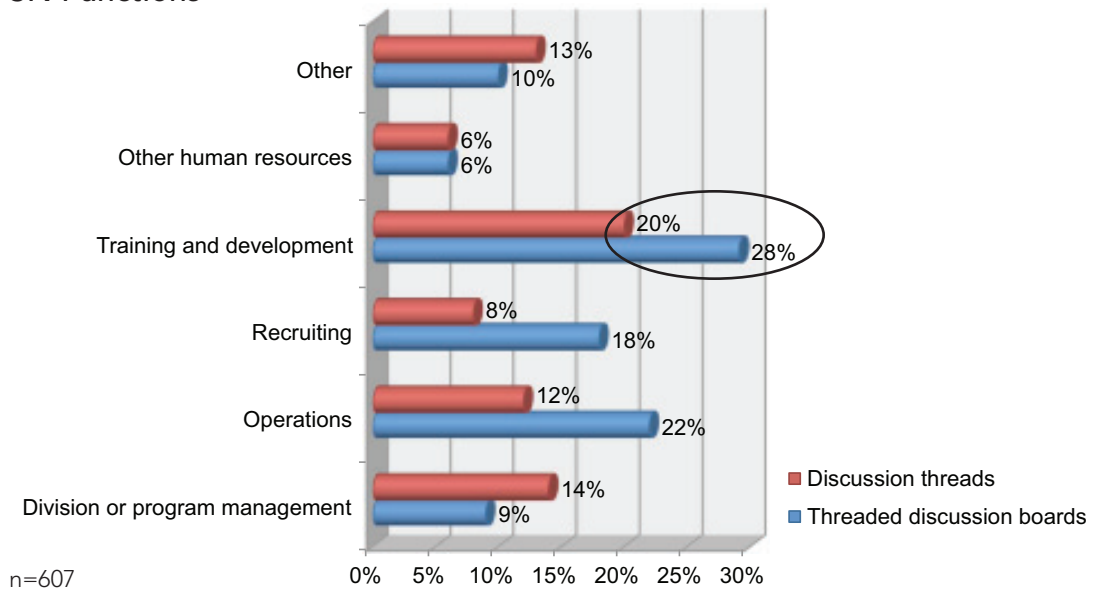
### B. Formal Learning and Development



Respondents working in training and development also differ from other functional groups in the social networking functions they are most likely to use (Figure 3). In particular, training and development divisions are more likely to use threaded discussion boards and discussion threads than any other group — indicating that these SN functions are considered particularly important tools for employee development.

**Figure 3.** Percent of various functional roles using specific SN tools (only statistically significant differences shown). Training and development departments are significantly more likely to use threaded discussion boards or discussion threads to carry out their employee development work.

### SN Functions



As we mentioned above, our results show that those respondents most likely to appreciate the value of SN tools for learning and development see the future importance of these tools as being greater than their current effectiveness. So, what type of SN tools will they be looking for to improve employee learning and development in the future? One possible answer is gleaned from determining with which type of tools they are most satisfied today.

### Current Satisfaction With SN Tools for Learning and Development

Figure 4 describes the current level of satisfaction, in government workplaces, with the learning and development function of SN activities — e.g., community of practices, threaded message boards, wikis, etc. There is room for improvement in how well these SN functions are leveraged for learning and development programs, the only use of SN tools approaching a 50 percent satisfaction level, with community of practices (at 46 percent).

However, this is not as bad as the level of satisfaction directed toward the major social networking Web sites (Figure 5). Only Facebook and LinkedIn (two of the most used SN Web sites in workplaces) achieve satisfaction levels of over 40 percent. The low ratings for many of the Web sites (e.g., Jobster) are explained by their comparative lack of functionality in learning and development. In contrast, Facebook, YouTube and some other major Web sites are being used for various talent management purposes, including learning and development (see Report #1 in this series for additional details).

Figure 4. Most government agencies that use SN functions in learning and development are not satisfied with their use. n=165 (Communities of practice) to n = 100 (Chat)

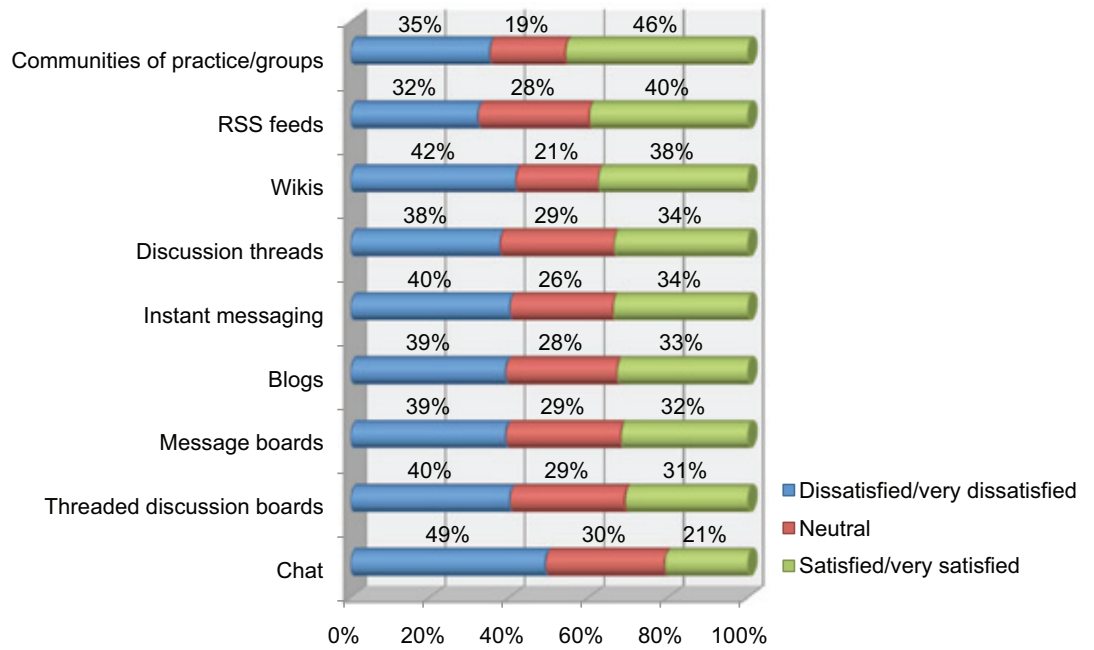
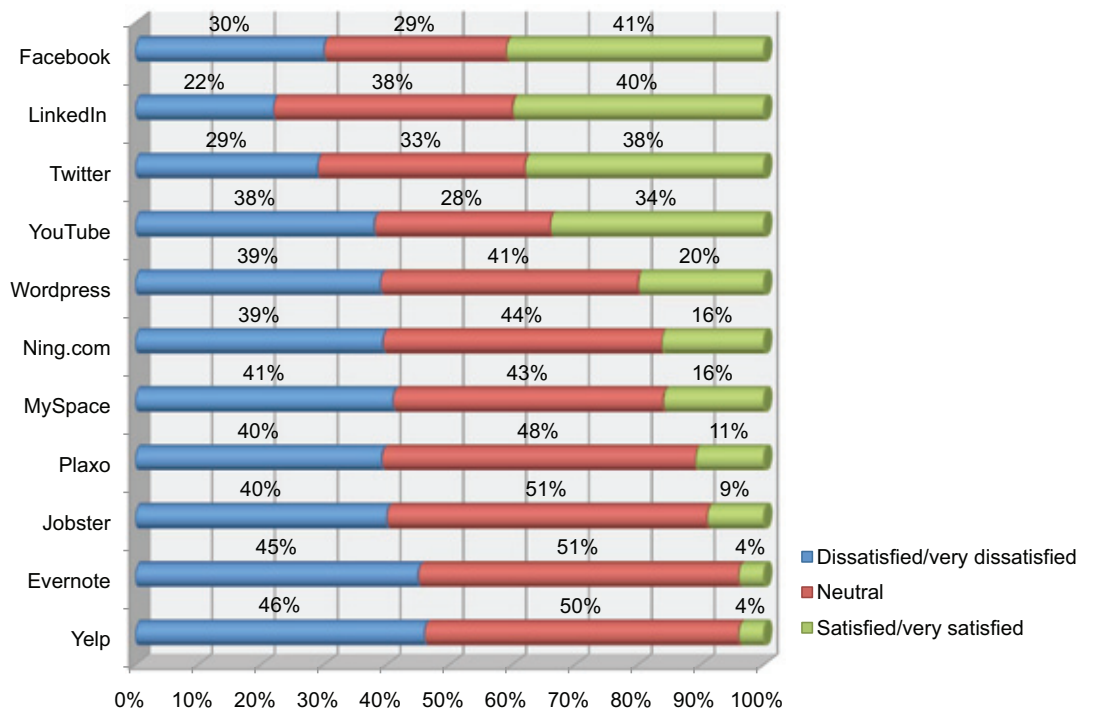


Figure 5. Those in government who do use SN Web sites for learning and development express significant dissatisfaction with their functionality. n=120 (Twitter) to n=52 (Yelp)



## Future Directions for Better Using SN Tools for Learning and Development

As the final part of our analysis of current satisfaction with SN tools for learning and development, we conducted a *factor analysis* of all responses (for all SN functions and Web sites) to determine if there are any underlying drivers explaining the respondents' level of satisfaction with SN functions and Web sites.<sup>2</sup> We discovered that satisfaction is driven by four factors (see **Table 1**).

First, there are respondents whose focus is on a group of related SN functions — discussion threads, message boards, chat and IM (Group 1). These respondents tend to think of these four SN functions as similar tools for learning and development. Second, there are respondents whose focus (for using SN tools in learning and development) is on a group of tools including some of the major Web-based functions for locating and sharing information (wikis and RSS feeds) and the most popular social networking Web sites (YouTube, Facebook and Twitter) — Group 2. These respondents are driven by the goal of networking people together through information sharing. They also provide one of the more positive notes in the general low level of current satisfaction — these functions tend to rate higher than others.

In contrast, Group 3 includes those respondents whose responses were driven by their low opinions of some less commonly used SN tools — Yelp, Evernote, Plaxo and Ning.com. While this does not mean that these SN tools are not useful for learning and development, it does suggest that government agencies tend to think of them as similar tools that, if they use them, produce mostly negative results. At least as currently implemented, these users have not yet figured out how to effectively integrate them into their development programs, and the results achieved by those who have tried are not positive. (See **Figure 5**).

Our final driver of SN tool satisfaction (Group 4) may be our most important one for the short-term improvement of applying SN tools to learning and development. Two SN functions, communities of practice and blogs, and one SN Web site, LinkedIn, both straddle Groups 2 and 3 above and also form their own distinct group — with respondents using one tending to use the others as well. Given that the level of satisfaction with these three tools, especially communities of practice, are higher than other functions, the agency looking for the quickest path to improving the use of SN tools in learning and development would be advised to look here.

These are important findings when it comes to deciding how to better leverage SN tools for learning and development in the future — especially in times of budgetary constraints where departments must make tough choices as to which SN tools to invest in. Instead of investing in all SN tools, it would be wise to focus on those groups (e.g., Group 4) that contain related tools whose current satisfaction levels are higher and which the factor analysis tells us tend to form a functional group of tools that can (and should) be used together.

Clearly, a major goal for those interested in using SN tools for learning and development is to find ways to better leverage the capabilities of currently available SN tools, improve the functionality of those tools or develop totally new approaches to using social networking concepts for employee learning and development (see sidebar: Best (and Worst) Practices in Using SN Tools for Learning and Development). Most critically, doing this will require educating potential users of SN tools about their capabilities in learning and development — 39 percent of current users of these tools for learning and development told us that their dissatisfaction arose from a lack of understanding on how to use SN tools.

---

<sup>2</sup> Factor analysis identifies clusters of individual responses that are driven by an underlying factor — used to group and reduce the number of variables and to understand what drives similar responses to different questions.

Table 1.

Group 1: Knowledge Communication Functions	Group 2: Network Building Functions via Information	Group 3: Low Satisfaction Functions	Group 4: Top Drivers
Discussion threads	Wikis	Yelp	Communities of practice
Message boards	RSS feeds	Evernote	Blogs
Chat	YouTube	Plaxo	LinkedIn
Instant messaging	Facebook	Ning.com	
	Twitter		

Sidebar

### Best (and Worst) Practices in Using SN Tools for Learning and Development

(as told to us by our respondents)

"Best — introducing new entry-level employees to the agency's culture / Worst — do not effectively use all available technology." — *Manager at a U.S. Federal Government Agency*

"The free webinars and discussion groups are critical to our learning so that we can then teach other agencies since we are a central support agency. Blogging can be difficult without complete control over content as it could put our agency at legal risk." — *Recruiting Supervisor at a U.S. State Government Agency*

"The best is Defense Connect Online, a collaborative tool with application sharing and video feeds. Unfortunately, less than 1 percent of employees are familiar with this tool." — *Program Manager at the U.S. Department of Defense*

"To develop and design training without bringing the Subject Matter Experts to the Center. For just-in-time training without having to travel." — *Training and Development Practitioner at a U.S. Federal Government Agency*

"We use social software to connect with experts in various fields of practice and leverage their knowledge to help us improve our practices through the use of applications such as discussion boards. We frequently participate in webinars and other interactive learning opportunities for our staff to gain additional knowledge in their areas of expertise as well." — *Training and Development Practitioner at a U.S. State Government Agency*

"We use Facebook for a community of practice forum....works pretty well." — *Training and Development Director at a U.S. Federal Government Agency*

"Best: Group collaboration; social learning and professional networking across a global workforce; knowledge management. / Worst: Failure to support social media systems at the corporate level either due to ignorance or security concerns." — *Training and Development Senior Manager at U.S. Department of Defense*

"At best, it is used to educate our employees on where they might go to find opportunities for learning and development." — *IT Practitioner at a U.S. State Government Agency*

"Internal wiki documenting policies and procedures, and linking appropriate forms." — *IT General Manager at a County or Municipal Government Agency*

"Online training in some ways is good as you can usually do at your leisure. However, because there is not one single site for training; you have to figure out where each training course is located." — *HR Practitioner at U.S. Department of Defense*

"Still a little early to understand the true impacts; like all Web-based tools they are only as good as the people who actually visit the sites." — *HR Practitioner at a U.S. Federal Government Agency*

## Appendix: Research Methodology and Demographics

The data for this report came from a Web-based survey emailed to government workers in the HCI member and non-member database. The survey included 5 demographic (concerning both organization and respondent) and 19 multiple choice, Likert-scale and extended text response questions divided into four sections:

- Current use and management patterns
- Effectiveness and importance of SN tools
- Use for leadership and development
- Expectations and barriers to future use

We collected data from 607 respondents that included all levels of government — from municipal to federal (defense and non-defense). The demographic breakdown of respondents is shown in Figures A.1. – A.4.

Figure A.1.

### Agency Size; n=607

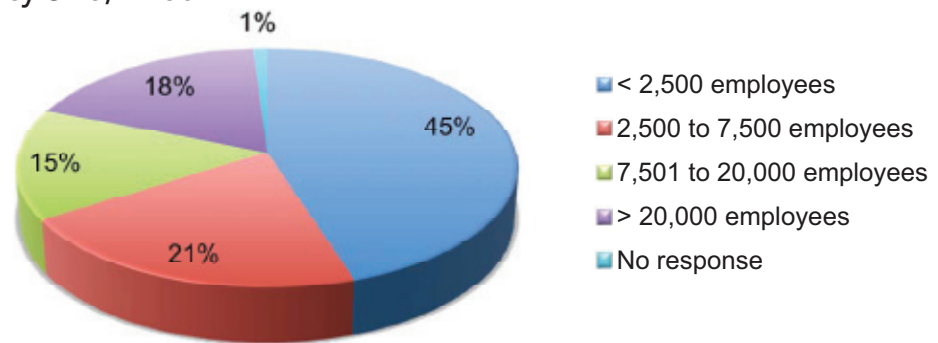


Figure A.2.

### Government Level/Agency Type; n=607

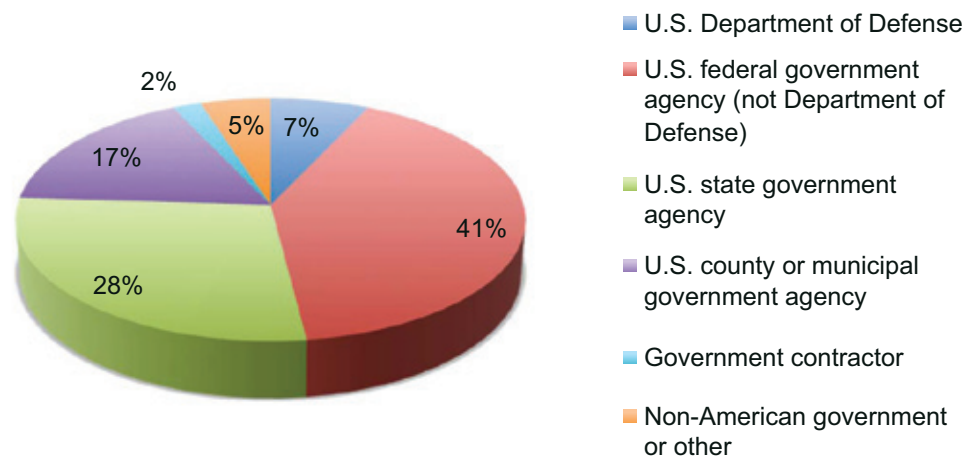


Figure A.3.  
Job Position; n=607

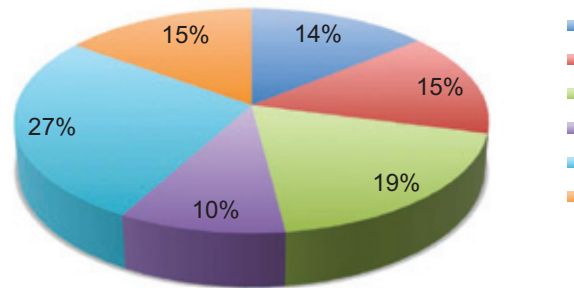


Figure A.4.  
Functional Role; n=607

