

Social Learning

Using social learning principles for learning and development

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At MaxKnowledge, we've had the honor to work with over 700 career colleges and universities representing over 1,000 campus locations. Our goal has been to maximize employee and organizational performance through effective online and blended training. We've been totally focused on developing highly structured programs and processes to achieve performance results for our institutional clients.

As a training company, MaxKnowledge has always tried to utilize every opportunity to learn and improve our own organization. We take feedback very seriously and respond through a systematic process. In essence, almost everything that we have developed has been in response to the feedback we've received from our institutional clients and course participants. Our job is quite simple. We listen to the experts in the field and develop solutions that meet their needs.

For years we've been offering structured learning opportunities through our tutorials, webinars, courses and programs. Although all of our learning opportunities have been participant-centered, we've always been the primary drivers. So we figured it's time to also create an unstructured learning environment, one in which any professional in the career college community can take the driver seat. And as we have learned from many of our clients, it's okay for MaxKnowledge to loosen up a bit and experiment with unstructured learning!

To create a truly unstructured learning opportunity, we used the proven principles of social networking to develop a **social learning** environment. With feedback from our clients, we named this informal space "The Lounge".

The Lounge is an online learning community of career college professionals. It's the place where our sector's educators can exercise their own thoughts and reflections, and make connections with other colleagues who have similar interests.

The Lounge is a free service for the career college community, empowering users to create their own personal profiles, announce their learning and development interests, create learning groups, post blogs, initiate discussions, and even share and discover what's happening in real time through the Wire (a Twitter-like service in The Lounge).

The Lounge also includes the Performance TV show sponsored by MaxKnowledge. Formed as a special group within The Lounge, Performance TV conducts interviews with career college experts on hot topical issues.

The Lounge provides a setting for informal discussions and knowledge sharing outside of the traditional training environment. It is the place where we can all learn from each other. The Lounge community is growing very fast. Within a few weeks of the launch, many groups were created, dozens of blogs were posted, and several TV interviews were conducted. This is the power of social learning!

Some of the online groups formed within The Lounge are linked to learning groups that are also active on the ground. Two examples are the Student Retention Forum which meets annually at the Career College Association (CCA) convention, and the Best Practices Forum which represents the online arm of the annual Best Practices & Great Ideas conference sponsored by The Pacific Institute.

I must admit that as a former engineer, I've always wanted to establish definitive structures and parameters for any new initiative. But, I am really enjoying the free flow of information and learning in The Lounge. I am learning that every professional in our sector is an expert on a particular topic or application. There is so much knowledge and experience out there that must be captured and shared for the benefit of each member of our community and the career college sector at large. Although social learning does not replace structured training, it is truly a valuable supplement to help maximize performance.

The Lounge can be accessed through all training portals powered by MaxKnowledge, including our national/CCA portal (www.maxknowledge.com), the state association Online Training Centers, and the Center for Excellence in Education (our employee development initiative with the Imagine America Foundation).

Dr. Moghadam is the founder and CEO of MaxKnowledge, the leading employee training company for the career college sector of higher education. He has over 20 years of experience in career education, serving in many capacities including professor, director of education, academic dean, director of student affairs, campus director, college president and owner. Moghadam earned his PhD in Engineering from the University of Cambridge at the age of 22. He is a recognized leader in career education and has been selected as a Top Innovator by the Career College Central magazine. Moghadam can be reached at amirm@maxknowledge.com.