As social media becomes a ubiquitous part of our daily lives, one firm has found a way to use it to help with exam studies. Sunder Ramachandran explains how social learning helped JLT India trainees achieve exam success

WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?

JLT Group is an international group of risk specialists and employee benefits consultants and one of the largest companies of its type in the world. The India office is home to more than 850 employees engaged in operational and knowledge service roles.

To focus and grow in specialist areas, JLT partnered with the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII) to enhance the knowledge of its workforce and drive specialism (a key JLT strategy).

Social learning at JLT India

A group of 40 employees from JLT India was preparing for various CII professional exams scheduled in May 2013, including LM 1, LM 2 and IF exams. The group engaged in a new concept – social learning – during an eight-week period to help them achieve exam success.

As a training team, it was becoming increasingly clear how employees are hooked on the virtual world. Social networking, micro blogging and YouTube videos for learning are all media that employees are embracing in their personal learning space. Our goal was to use the same engagement principles and support these students to prepare for their professional qualifications.

Social learning involves participating with others to make sense of new ideas using technology platforms. To this end, we used 'chatter' (our internal collaboration platform from Salesforce.com) to provide engagement opportunities to all learners. The following are the key mechanics of this engagement:

Communities of practice: We created a CII exam community on our internal social platform. This became the epicentre of all discussions pertaining to the exams. Participants were encouraged to share tips, answer questions and also post updates on their own progress. The training team watched from the sidelines and moderated where required. The discussions were facilitated by CII-certified peers. It was amazing how peer-to-peer information sharing and learning was adding speed to the knowledge acquisition process. The group was 'learning at will' by getting questions answered at their workstations.

Offline meets: A strong sense of ownership led to offline meets. Participants met once every week for 60 minutes to discuss key learning and updates. Any key points made on the online forum that required further deliberation were brought up in the offline meets. This was also an opportunity for senior managers to address the participants, which further encouraged them to succeed at the exams.

Chatterthons: We borrowed the widely popular tweetathons concept (used on Twitter) and launched chatterthons. Each week, a topic of importance was picked up and live chat sessions were organised within the online community. This enabled us to drive engagement among the group. The learners responded well and usually more than a dozen questions were answered in a 30-minute slot.

Gamification through Fastest Finger First: Gamification involves using game mechanics within a learning intervention – for example, leaderboards, rewards and competition. This helps engage the learner and keep them motivated to learn more in an engaging way. To achieve this, contests were launched within the online community. The focus was on the ability of the learners to provide correct answers with speed (also an important exam skill). A list of questions was prepared and all the participants were invited to be a part of these online events. Learners providing the fastest correct answer were rewarded. As the activity kicked off, the response was overwhelming and we were excited to see participants answering questions with the spirit of competition. The winners were rewarded with goodies.

Results achieved

We saw an evident change in the idea of how learning gets delivered and achieved an overall success rate of 83% in LM 1 and 100% success rate in LM 2 exams. Overall, 34 candidates were successful at the various exams in May 2013.

Social learning is clearly the most pragmatic and effective way to ensure that participants take ownership and engage in peer-to-peer study. The key benefits of social learning at Jardine Lloyd Thompson India were: improved knowledge sharing; fostered collaboration; informal learning opportunities; and provision of an easier method for finding resources and building relationships. ⏻

Sunder Ramachandran, senior trading manager, Jardine Lloyd Thompson India