MUTANT LEARNING™

How to Develop a Social Learning Lab

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S ocial media proliferation, mobile applications and wireless accessibility have dramatically influenced how informal learning is taking place. The question is are you someone who is embracing all of the relevant learning fragments available to you? If you frequently turn to social media and other online sources for answers, you are what we call a Mutant Learner. But if you are an unconnected sceptic—a traditional learning Luddite—and you fall within the camp of people who see social media and online networks as learning charlatans you could be classified as a Zombie Learner.

Like any age of civilization, if you are not mutating and adapting, then you are slowly dying. This mutant age is no different. However, in previous eras, evolution was slow and mutations took time to develop. In this new age of instant information, learning mutations are occurring faster and faster.

If you're not actively working towards becoming a Mutant Learner, then you are a part of the dying breed of Zombie Learners who are content with the status quo. Mutant Learners are those among us who use technology and online tools to constantly learn, initiate, wander and create. They are the new generation of learners.

Being a Mutant Learner does not come without its challenges. To be an effective Mutant Learner and survive the deluge of information available at your fingertips, you must have a system, a process and a daily ritual that will provide structure and focus to you – this is your unique Mutant Learning Lab.

An ideal Mutant Learning Lab is simple, relevant and accessible. It requires you to be connected to the right people and networks and to block out dedicated lab time to scan, review and study relevant learning fragments. Most of all, a Mutant Learner must not only consume information but also contribute their perspective and knowledge to the online mutant community. This is how learning in the mutant age is occurring and how it will continue to grow.

Are you a Zombie or Mutant Learner?

You may not be aware of this, but inside each of us are two diametrically opposed creatures trying to escape: a Zombie Learner and a Mutant Learner.
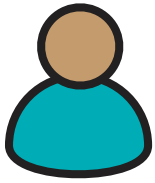
Zombie Learners are half alive, morbidly going through the motions day in and day out. They do just enough to get by in their jobs and personal lives, only learning when forced to attend in-person training or when regulations and law requires them to. Zombie Learners rarely explore the incredible universe of learning tools so easily accessible in today's ultra-connected world.
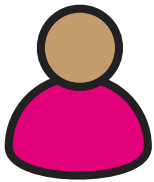
Mutant Learners, on the other hand, are rapidly adapting, evolving and changing to effectively harness today's explosion of learning. They are actively looking for new information and, even more importantly, contributing and sharing their knowledge with the rest of the world. These individuals are collaborative innovators and the thought leaders of the future.

Given a choice between the two, we hope that you would choose to be a Mutant Learner. To survive in today's constantly progressing world of knowledge, you need to kill your inner zombie and embrace your inner mutant.

To clarify, Zombie Learners are bad. Mutant Learners are good. However, the distinction between these two types of learners requires a little more exploration. To learn how Mutant Learning occurs, you need to understand the Five Links of Mutant Learning.

The 5 Links of Mutant Learning

The 5 Links of Mutant Learning model is made up of two axes. (See model on next page.)

The vertical axis on this model essentially represents your **activity rate as a learner**—think of it as your learning pulse rate. Are you an active learner? Someone who is actively engaged in searching for answers and progressing? Occasionally sharing the knowledge you've discovered? Or are you considered a dynamic learner: someone who is vigorously seeking answers and continuously improving themselves. Some may consider you a dynamic force who motivates and affects people with your thoughts and contributions.

> **THE AXES**
>
> VERTICAL
> Active = mildly engaged in learning, occasionally sharing knowledge
> Dynamic = vigorously engaged, seeking answers, regularly helping others find answers
>
> HORIZONTAL
> Consumer = primarily learning from others' knowledge
> Contributor = focused on creating and sharing knowledge with others

The horizontal axis indicates what **role you play in the learning economy**. Are you actively adding value by creating and contributing your knowledge? Or do you consume and learn from the knowledge that others have produced? Both roles are acceptable because one cannot exist without the other—knowledge must be contributed, or produced, before it can be consumed. As you will see, we strongly advocate not only consuming knowledge, but you should also seek opportunities

to contribute to the knowledge base in a community. No matter what your field of study or career track, you have relevant experience that will benefit someone else who has not had those experiences yet.

Now let's dive into the 5 Links of Mutant Learners, or learning styles, of people in the mutant age.

The Initiator. This learner initiates a conversation by asking, "Do you know?" They are dynamic consumers of knowledge. These are the individuals who ask questions in a social networking site like Facebook and LinkedIn and wait for the community to answer. They instigate, prod, stir, and then wait to see what answers they get.

The Creator. This learner says, "I will do it." They are dynamic contributors of knowledge. They know the answer to the Initiator's questions, and can confidently articulate their response via a blog, wiki, community post, or other online tool. Creators are the life blood of the Mutant Learning age. Without these dynamic contributors the perpetual growth and value of online mutant communities would die.
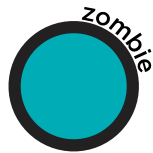
The Learner. This learner thinks, "I want to know." These are the active consumers. This is how most of us learn everyday. We seek knowledge – finding it, reading it, and internalizing it. While there is nothing new about this category, the means through which we gain knowledge has exponentially increased and dramatically changed due to technological, mobile, and wireless advances.

The Wanderer. This learner says, "Look what I found." They are an active contributor to the online learning community. A wanderer is someone who stumbles upon an interesting source of knowledge somewhere on the web and then shares it on Twitter, Facebook, or another online community. While their initial intent may not have been to learn anything new, their online activity accidentally led them to learn something of value, which they then wanted to share with others. We want to make it clear that being a wanderer is not necessarily a bad trait, in fact, JRR Tolkien once said, "Not everyone who wanders is lost." As long as you don't spend most of your learning bandwidth wandering, accidentally stumbling across learning fragments can be a refreshing change to the regimented practice of looking for specific information.

The Zombie. The last link is one we have already introduced you to, the Zombie. A Zombie Learner says, "I don't care." They are not producing or consuming—they are decomposing. They have no desire to explore and spend little to no effort learning new things or opening themselves up to new technologies of learning. These people are also referred to as Luddites, people who hold on so tightly to their old ways of business that it strangles innovation and new modes of learning.

So, which link should you be in? Most people should spend the majority of their time in the first four links, depending on their work-life balance and current
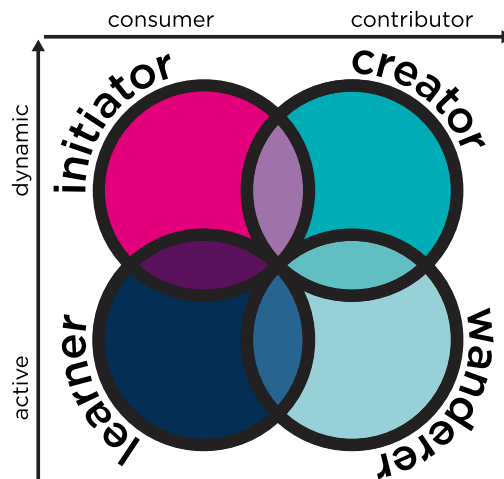
projects. While most of your time is probably spent as a Learner, to be a true Mutant Learner you have to take your newly acquired knowledge and transform yourself into an Initiator or Creator. Never waste your time being a Zombie—it will kill your spirit and stifle those around you.

To be a Mutant Learner, or someone who spends their time in the four positive learning links, you need to build a Mutant Learning Lab.

What is a Mutant Learning Lab™?

A Mutant Learning Lab is a customized learning lab where you access, organize and share relevant learning fragments for your personal learning needs. This is typically an actual online tool or website connecting you to relevant social media sites and networks where you can continuously discover new knowledge.

So, what does a working Mutant Learning Lab look like? While there isn't one definitive tool right now, there are a handful that, when used in combination, do the job quite nicely. (See the call-out box "Mutant Learning Lab Examples.") Just like a science lab doesn't have just one piece of equipment, the Mutant Learning Lab has many digital tools, such as blogs, groups and online communities, to equip you with everything you need to be a Mutant Learner.

Whatever tool (or tools) you choose for your Mutant Learning Lab, ensure that it meets the following criteria:
- Helps you focus on a topic of interest
- Can be customized to your learning needs
- Connects to relevant social media, research and other relevant learning sites in one place (if possible)

> **MUTANT LEARNING LAB EXAMPLES**
> - Netvibes.com: A social media dashboard tool that organizes relevant information, sets up alerts and shares your dashboard with others.
> - Alternion.com: Aggregates all of your social networks in one place. Instead of having to go to Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn (and dozens of other social and business sites) to read your activity stream, Alternion feeds all that information into one combined stream, making your connection strategies easier to manage.
> - Google Reader: With this tool you can link to several learning fragment sources via RSS feeds in one place and then share it from there.
> - Hootsuite.com: This tool not only links to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and RSS feeds, but also allows you to schedule tweets and status updates in advance.

- Aggregates, organizes and provides accessibility to learning fragments
- Enables you to share knowledge with others

There are two main reasons why we each need a Mutant Learning Lab, which we define through the Zac Principle and the Mutant Learning Paradox.

The Zac Principle. About a year ago, Zac came to us for a job interview. As we talked with him, it became very evident that his knowledge was limited and he wasn't keeping up with trends related to his career path—even very basic ones. It was obvious that he had been living as a Zombie Learner for many years. In technical terms he was obsolete. He didn't have the bandwidth or skills required to get the job done. In order to stay relevant in your industry, you need to keep up with the trends and technologies your industry uses. Being a Mutant Learner means your skills and

abilities are ever evolving and being applied in new ways, which will keep you from becoming obsolete.

The Mutant Learning Paradox. Another reason you need a Mutant Learning Lab is to focus your learning attention on relevant learning fragments, instead of the millions of other fragments that can draw your attention away and lead you down wasteful tracks. For example, the average worker loses 2.1 hours of productivity every day to interruptions and distractions, according to Basex, an IT research and consulting firm. With so many distractions and so little time, it is imperative that you streamline your attention in order to maximize your productivity.

With these two reasons in mind—keeping your industry knowledge and skills up to date and focusing only on learning useful content—let's start our Mutant Learning Lab by coning in on what we want to learn.

Your Mutant Learning Lab requires dedication to an identified course of study. Before you start diving into the steps to build your lab, take a moment to identify what skills you would like to learn, or develop.

> **ASK YOURSELF:**
>
> "What is the topic or subject in which I want to be competent?"
>
> For example, as an HR professional you may want to focus on social learning, talent management or blended learning.

5 Steps to Create Your Mutant Learning Lab

With a basic understanding of the criteria required for an effective Mutant Learning Lab tool, we are now equipped to move into the five steps needed to build your own Mutant Learning Lab.

> **STEPS TO CREATE YOUR MUTANT LEARNING LAB**
>
> Step 1. Connect
> Step 2. Systematize
> Step 3. Plan
> Step 4. Learn
> Step 5. Share

Step 1. Connect: Join the relevant few

As we have already suggested, learning is exploding everywhere—you can find information on any topic no matter where you are. But knowing where to find what you are looking for is essential, not only for saving time but also for saving your sanity. To connect means to create your Professional Online Presence (POP), which constitutes the groups, social media and networks you belong to and your online appearance. Your POP is your profile and holds the key to your online influence.

You must first establish your POP in order to benefit from this new world of learning, and to effectively build your Mutant Learning Lab. According to a Nielsen Social Media Report, "in 10 major global markets, social networks and blogs reach over 75% of active Internet users." (http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/social) Which means most of you reading this white paper are probably already socially connected in the traditional social media sense. However, we hope to introduce you to a new way of thinking about social media, and a new skill set on how you utilize social media for learning.

The mantra for this step is to "join the relevant few" because you can very easily get caught in an online web of irrelevance. According to British anthropologist Robin Dunbar, there is a limit to the number of people with whom one can maintain stable social relationships. While there is not a precise number, "Dunbar's number" averages between 100 and 230. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunbar's_number)

While we are not suggesting that you have only 150 social connections, we are saying that there is some merit to only joining the relevant few. This will ensure that your connections are manageable and strong (as opposed to unmanageable and weak) and will enable you to join only those sites and be connected to only those specific groups that help you become competent in the topic you choose. It's important to also keep in mind that Dunbar was studying social relationships in which people kept in touch through traditional means; social media has largely expanded our social networks by allowing us to keep in touch easily with people we rarely see or barely know. Maintaining stable social relationships on Facebook could be defined as "liking" your friends' interests, businesses and posts, even if you don't actually like them. Within this new social stratosphere, clicking a "thumbs up" icon qualifies as an appropriate social interaction, and it is very possible to maintain stable social relationships with hundreds of people. However, for your Mutant Learning purposes we suggest keeping your connections to only a relevant few, which we consider to be between 60 and 150.

> **3 CONNECTION STRATEGIES**
> SOCIALIZE
> SPECIALIZE
> COLLABORATE

Socialize. By October 2011, the total number of people who had joined Facebook would have qualified it as the world's third largest country (preceded by China and India), had it been a country. The number of members joining Facebook and other social media sites continues to grow at a staggering rate. Social media is clearly becoming the new normal, as stated by Nielsen's *State of Social Media 2011 Report*. Social media can be an effective form of informal learning, if you take the right approach.

> **MUTANT LEARNING TWITTER TIPS**
> - Think of Twitter as a microblog—a place to get a summary of the best thoughts and relevant learning nuggets.
> - Utilize Twitter tools wisely. Twitter has a plethora of wonderful applications that many people do not take advantage of such as following relevant topics, thought leaders and trending hashtags; facilitating or participating in tweetchat; organizing your learning fragments by lists; and responding and direct messaging effectively.
> - Harness the power of links. A powerful component of Twitter comes in the links posted within the Tweets. Because Twitter posts are limited to 140 characters per tweet, use tools like bit.ly and TinyURL.com to keep these links short, so that you leave room for your tweet message.
> - Smart Messaging. Keep your messages short. Leave enough room in your message for someone to retweet. Use humor and creativity. Think of your tweets as headlines.
> - Don't plagiarize. Ensure that you always give attribution or credit to the source of the information you are sharing. You can do this by just retweeting someone else's tweet, or by adding "via @theirtwitterhandle."

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For starters, you should join the Big 3 social media sites if you haven't done so already. They are Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn (Google+ is making a serious push to break into this elite group, but is not quite there yet.) While LinkedIn is not your typical social network, it does share many social media characteristics, making it the number one method of connecting to other like-minded business professionals. The power of this network is found in the groups that are founded and run by experts in a wide variety of industries.

As you start connecting to the Big 3, make sure you separate out the benign, banal, and boring things that are so prevalent in some social media circles. Don't waste your social time on irrelevant people or topics. Avoid the self-centered individuals who erroneously think the rest of the world cares what they are eating. Dump these folks from your Mutant Learning Lab. If you find them entertaining or interesting you can always follow their "adventures in suburbia" in your personal entertainment lab (not covered in this white paper).

Choose to follow, like and join only relevant thought leaders, research sites, trade magazines and knowledge brokers that can help you become competent in the topic or area that you have identified as your focus area. As we have already suggested, keep your Mutant Learning Lab manageable by keeping the number of overall sources and connections between 60 and 150 and organize them into functional groups. A simple way to accomplish this is to utilize the tools found within your respective social media platforms by creating appropriate lists, circles, or groups.

MUTANT LEARNING LINKEDIN TIPS
- Join only relevant and strategic groups (no more than 4 to start). There are nearly a million groups, so be very selective.
- Search possible groups by the Groups Directory Page. Also, ask other peers interested in similar topics for which groups to join.
- Monitor interesting discussions in your groups and contribute when possible. You can determine how often to receive email notifications from your groups (daily, weekly, etc.)
- Utilize LinkedIn Answers. The answers section is a great place to position yourself as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) or thought leader. Answer enough questions and you can drastically increase your exposure on LinkedIn as the "go to" person. It's also a great place to get fodder for blog articles and to re-purpose blog articles you have already written!

Specialize. Connect to specific professional sites related to your topic of interest. If you are in Human Resources, for example, you may want to frequent the website of the Society of Human Resources Management (shrm.org).

You should also set-up online memberships and RSS feeds to relevant trade magazines, research or business sites. An example for an HR professional could be Talent Management's site (talentmgt.com), or for techies, Gartner.com provides excellent research reports.

Want to know what a RSS feed is and how to set one up? Practice Mutant Learning by going online right now and asking the online community. You will find answers in the form of tutorials, "how-to" lists and videos within seconds.

Collaborate. Collaboration is essential to Mutant Learning. You need to be connected to the right collaboration sites and networks in order to fully benefit from today's wealth of information and knowledge. Collaboration could mean joining and contributing to a few relevant wikis, networking sites like LinkedIn or internal communities like Yammer or Chatter.

The result of collaborating within the right groups and on the right websites can be extremely beneficial. There are even a few sites specifically dedicated to answering your questions using the combined wisdom of the community. Besides LinkedIn, other online answer sites include Quora, Yahoo! Answers and Answers.com.

CONNECTION ACTION (PERSONAL)
If you haven't already done so, join the Big 3: Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn

CONNECTION ACTION (ORGANIZATIONAL)
While a Mutant Learning Lab is, at its core, a personal experiment, there are certain aspects that can be applied at an organizational level. Connection is one of these areas that actually fits quite smoothly into an organizational structure. For example, Yammer, Chatter, and LinkedIn can all be set up as private or public networks.

Step 2. Systematize: Capture the Chaos
Once you are connected, you need systems in place to help you capture all of the online chaos (see the Mutant Learning Paradox for why you want to do this). This step in your Mutant Learning Lab helps you know how to access, aggregate and organize new information in an orderly fashion. There are three organizing systems that you will need to understand and master.

3 ORGANIZING SYSTEMS
PUSH
PULL
RETRIEVE

Push. This is automated information flow. With a push system, your selected information comes to you in the form you want it to. A typical push process involves you receiving RSS feeds in the form of an email that is pushed to you whenever a learning fragment is posted to one of your chosen sites. You could also have RSS feeds automatically streaming to your website. An excellent push tool is Smartbrief.com which actually aggregates relevant stories and information for you by topic and then emails you a summary of those fragments daily or weekly.

While automation and the apparent ease of a push system can seem like the best solution, be careful not to fill your inbox with so many push emails that you are back to information overload. Remember to capture and control the chaos, not contribute to it.

Pull. This is manual, self-initiated information acquisition. With a pull system you must go to where the information you are seeking is hosted. One example is Googling a topic and then searching and digging to uncover the answer to your questions—something at

which we all are becoming very good. The secret of a useful and effective pull system is to use tools that aggregate relevant information from a lot of sources in one place—like Google Reader, FlipBoard, Pulse, Netvibes and "smart" news sites like the New York Times.

Retrieve. Acquiring knowledge through push or pull systems is a good thing, but having a system where you can easily save, retrieve and share that information is even better. Think of a retrieval system as your learning home base, the one central location you can store all of the knowledge you acquire.

The most basic yet effective way you can create a retrieval system on your desktop is by utilizing your browser's bookmarking folders. You already have easy access to bookmarking, but do you really know how to use this functionality? Try setting up a primary folder called "Learning Lab," and then create sub-categories for each topic you need to learn about. When you come across a pertinent news site, blog article or research site, be sure to add it into your Learning Lab folders so that you can return to this learning fragment often.

You can create a similar retrieval system on your mobile phone. Most smart phones allow you the ability to create and organize apps into folders. Organization is key, so group similar apps together to make information retrieval easy.

SYSTEMATIZING TOOLS

- Evernote works with nearly every device. It functions as an extension of your brain, letting you keep notes, ideas, snapshots and recordings that instantly synchronizes to your desktop.
- BlinkList.com is a powerful productivity tool that makes it easier to share and save links for later. Links are also automatically organized and searchable and can be downloaded to your desktop.
- Clipmarks.com is a throwback to the days of cutting clippings out of newspapers and magazines for research assignments and homework—allowing you to tag, store and organize the clips. You can then share snippets of Web pages by email, on websites and more.
- Hooeey.com will track your surfing history from any browser on any computer so if you surf from work and home, you will have a complete history.
- Wists.com adds images to bookmarks as well as its name and URL, allowing you to browse bookmarks by image and access them from any computer.
- Tweeted Times aggregates news in your Twitter stream and ranks it by popularity among your friends. You can create a newspaper based on your Twitter stream, lists and Twitter search results.
- Paper.li allows you to create a newspaper based on your Twitter account, any hashtag, list or your Facebook account. You can also add your editorial comments to any of the updates.
- FlipBoard is a "social magazine" for iPad and iPhone that makes social media updates from friends much more fun to read. It also pulls updates from connected sources, like magazine and research sites, and re-arranges them in an easy-to-navigate format in a mobile tablet touchscreen environment.
- Trapit discovers topics that grab your interest through your online activity and automatically searches for other relevant information and saves it—or Trapit—when you're ready.
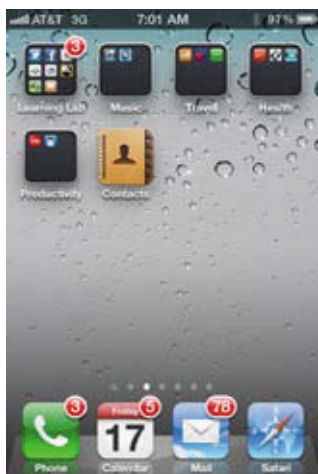
Learning Lab example on iPhone

In addition to the basic use of bookmarking and folders, we have already introduced you to several possible Mutant Learning Lab Tools that also have the ability to push, pull and retrieve learning fragments. In addition, the Systematizing Tools on the previous page can be a huge asset.

> **SYSTEMATIZE ACTION**
>
> Think of the best systems—Push, Pull, Retrieve—to use for the connections you have made in Step 1: Connect.

Step 3. Plan: Schedule Lab Time

Fact: Life is busy! Your time has been claimed by many unimportant pursuits. It's time to reclaim it!

Fact: If you don't reclaim your time it will be consumed by something else, or nothing else. So, reclaim it with these three simple actions.

> **3 PLANNING ACTIONS**
> 15 X 5 RULE
> BLOCK OUT
> STICK TO IT

15 x 5 Rule. Plan to spend 15 minutes five times a week in your Mutant Learning Lab. While there is no precedent for how long is long enough with regards to social and informal learning, and fifteen minutes is not a scientifically proven amount of time, it is our suggested time based on the average person's time restraints and through our own personal testing. However, you can choose to spend more time if you are able, or take less time as you become more efficient in performing your Mutant Learning Ritual (see Step 4. Learn).

This is a very simple concept to understand but a difficult one to execute. You may have the best intentions, but how often do you get in your car at 5:00pm and realize you've learned nothing around the topic you wanted to learn? Remember the Zac Principle? This is the same cycle he found himself in as well.

Block Out. If the 15 x 5 rule is the theory, blocking out time is the suggested practice—the action you should take.

Think about your week and your schedule and identify when is the best time to block out 15 minutes a day. It could be early in the morning, late at night, or even throughout the workday. It's not important when you schedule your time, it's only important that you use your time wisely.

Notice that this rule doesn't include the weekend. While this is always your choice, we recommend taking the weekend off to avoid burnout.

Stick To It. Now that you have all of your connections and systems in place, do not be distracted by shiny objects. Focus on your learning objectives and remember that you are only dedicating 15 minutes to this important endeavor, after which you can turn your attention

to other worthy subjects. Choose now to keep this time sacred and recommit yourself often.

There are several handy applications, tools and browser plug-ins/extensions that can help you stay on track. (See call-out box "Time Tracking Tools.")

PLANNING ACTION

Block out your 15 x 5 on your calendar of choice.

Step 4. Learn: Perform Your Ritual

At this stage in the game, you are connected and have time set aside to learn. You are now ready to start performing your ritual and start working in your Mutant Learning Laboratory. This is the step where you actively start learning, creating and initiating with your key question in mind, "What is the topic or subject I want to be competent in?"

With so many possible learning fragments, so many sites and so little time, it is essential that you use your Mutant Learning Lab time wisely. To do this we suggest a three-step Mutant Learning Ritual.

MUTANT LEARNING RITUAL
SCAN MANY
REVIEW SOME
STUDY THE FEW

Scan Many. The first ritual behavior is to scan the many learning fragments coming to you (push) or that you are turning to (pull) via the various connection strategies you have linked yourself to (Socialize, Specialize and Collaborate). In this ritual you skim over the discussions and topics you are following, glance over blog posts of favorite thought leaders and flip through favorite trade and research sites. You'll be surprised at how many headlines you can scan in such a short amount of time.

Review Some. The ritual of scanning will inherently lead to this second Mutant Learning ritual, because while you are engaged in the process of skimming and scanning you will naturally be attracted to some learning fragments more than others. Reviewing some means you will select, from the many learning fragments, only a handful that you will take time to review by reading the summary or abstract.

Study the Few. After scanning dozens of learning fragments and reviewing some that interested you, you will want to study just a few relevant ones. The rest of your Mutant Learning Lab time should be spent in this ritual actually diving down and reading the entire study or article. Choose wisely, as your time is valuable.

> **MUTANT LEARNING RITUAL ACTION**
> Keep track of how many learning fragments you can scan, review and study in your 15 minutes over a week or two. You may have to make adjustments, such as scanning more in order to get more relevant information or review less so you have time to study more.

Step 5. Share: Contribute to the Community

Why share? Sharing what you have learned is an essential part of Mutant Learning. Not only does it reinforce what you have learned, but it places that learning fragment into the online space where it can be accessed and modified by other Mutant Learners, creating a more robust fragment that is perpetually growing and contributing to the community at large.

With regards to the Five Links model, you may have noticed that in the first four steps we were primarily participating as Learners and Initiators. We were learning how to build and perform our Mutant Learning Labs, and initiating contact with relevant learning resources, networks and people. In this last step we are engaged as Wanderers and Creators. If you remember, Creators are dynamic contributors of knowledge, and Wanderers are the active contributors of knowledge, but both are contributors not just consumers of knowledge. This is the last and most important step in building a vibrant Mutant Learning Lab, because it contributes to the community, keeping it alive and flowing.

Contributing as opposed to just consuming can be compared to two prominent seas in the Middle East, the Red Sea and the Dead Sea. Both can be found in fairly close proximity to the other (380 miles) and are surrounded by arid land, desert and semi-desert. While there are some similarities, even in their names, they are actually bipolar opposites. The Red Sea is alive with a thriving reef system while the Dead Sea lives up to its name and is void of most water life. It is dead.

Why are these two seas so starkly different when it seems they have every reason to be similar? Simply put, the Red Sea gives as much as it receives, while the Dead Sea just takes and consumes everything to itself. Both the Red and the Dead Seas have inlets that feed it fresh water, but only the Red Sea exchanges its water with the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean via the Gulf of Aden. It gives back by passing water along, contributing, and therefore flourishing. The Dead Sea, on the other hand, consumes and consumes fresh water, but because it doesn't have an outlet or a way to contribute, it poisons itself and dies. It's a Zombie Sea.

This is why this last step is so important. It is not only acceptable to consume knowledge, but, as we have seen in the first four steps, it is essential to our growth; it is also imperative to then share that knowledge with others. Only once we share what we have learned is the Mutant Learning process complete. So, let's see how you can contribute to the online community as
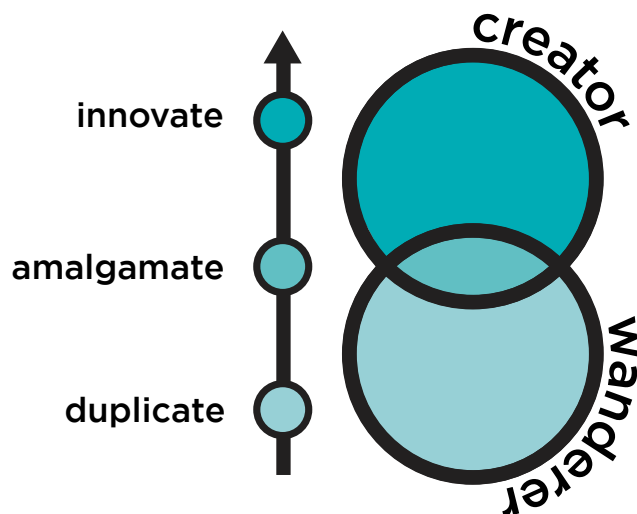
a creator or wanderer by looking at the Contribution Continuum.

Duplicate. To duplicate is to copy. It is to share a learning fragment in its original form, completely

The Contribution Continuum

unchanged. Duplication is a common Mutant Learning practice. For example, a Mutant Learner will re-tweet or link their learning fragment to a source website, blog, or research paper. Mutant learners also give attribution and credit where it is due.

We have all witnessed this form of contribution recently in the wake of worldwide natural disasters and uprisings. Information (or news) has been shared, re-tweeted and linked to by millions of people. Not just experts or journalists, but even the average Shane and Sheila can contributing to the knowledge base of the online community.

In some cases, the duplication of information has resulted in the major overhaul of governments, like in the case of the Egyptian Revolution, or the ruin and taint-

ing of famous brands like Kenneth Cole, who tweeted out an insensitive comment about the aforementioned revolution, which then led to a negative smear campaign ironically using the same social media tool. Clearly, the power of the Mutant Learner is greater than ever. While it has been said that "The pen is mightier than the sword," (Edward Bulwer-Lytton) in light of what we have recently witnessed, we propose that the CLICK is mightier than the sword, or *can* be mightier than the sword. (We all know how much wasted time and energy can be spent clicking on distractions and wasted activities.)

Amalgamate. When you amalgamate, you combine your opinion, comment or perspective to the original learning fragment, creating a composite result that is a fuller, more robust form of the original. The composite result being a fuller, more robust form of the original. Some mutant learners may have expertise or experience they can contribute to a knowledge fragment that would enhance the learning experience for others who

THE PRINCIPLE OF TRIANGULATION

There is so much great information available to you today. A common problem is knowing whether learning fragments are accurate and reliable. While online collaboration and contribution is generally reliable, we must warn against believing everything you read online.

When in doubt, we recommend the Principle of Triangulation. Search for answers from at least three independent and reliable sources. If all three sources support one another, you know the information is correct. Move on. If one or more of the sources make divergent statements, you may need to spend more time researching the topic before knowing which argument is correct.

are also interested in that topic. This is how Mutant Learning flourishes and continues to grow.

A prime example of this form of contribution is Wikipedia—the free online collaborative encyclopedia. At first, some questioned the validity and accuracy of a system that encouraged the average Joe to add to a knowledge base. That paradigm soon changed as numerous studies concluded that the combined wisdom of the community was as accurate, if not more so, than a hardbound encyclopedia or traditional academic expert.

Wikipedia and its army of average Joe's has now become a full-fledged, highly accurate research site thanks to the very active participation of the aforementioned academic experts, who also see the value in the amalgamation of knowledge. In most cases, the community will not tolerate mistakes or inaccuracies, and takes the initiative to either fix the inaccuracies report them.

Reminder: Anytime you are citing someone else's data, be sure to always give proper attribution and credits. For example, on Twitter you can add or cite the user's handle, and on blogs you can cite the study and/or link to that site.

Innovate. To innovate in the Mutant Learning Lab means to produce and introduce new ideas, insights and learning fragments into the online community. Innovators are the subject matter experts (SME's), the thought leaders, authors, scholars and imaginative souls who spend their time wondering what is possible and then set about making it happen. Being an innovator can take time, but thanks to the web, anyone with an imagination, drive, and brains can contribute. For example, you can easily group some of the amazing blogs written by stay-at-home mothers into this category.

These "diaper warriors" are innovating how to be a mother and how to run a household and then contributing their newly found knowledge to an online community of learners who can benefit from their sharing. These bloggers may not have an advanced degree or have authored a book on the subject, and while they aren't seen in the traditional sense as experts and don't spend their days in university lecture halls, they are experts to many because of their experience. If you find the right mutant experts to follow and collaborate with, the quality of your learning experience can rival that of a private institution.

> **SHARING ACTION**
> Identify where you spend the majoriy of your learning time—duplicating content, amalgamating it or innovating ideas.

The Mutant Learning Challenge

While being an effective Mutant Learner will not require all your time and energy, it will demand discipline and dedication because mutating requires a concerted effort and ongoing adaptation.

STEPS TO CREATE YOUR MUTANT LEARNING LAB

Step 1. Connect
Step 2. Systematize
Step 3. Plan
Step 4. Learn
Step 5. Share

Once you have connected to the relevant few, created effective systems to access relevant learning fragments and blocked out at least fifteen minutes five times a week, you are ready to start mutating. Actively perform your Mutant Learning Rituals for the first week so that you know how many learning fragments you need to scan and review before finding the real nuggets. And ensure that you always look for ways to contribute to the communities you are connected to.

Most importantly, shed your Zombie tendencies and embrace your inner Mutant.

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The Author

Treion has spent the past two decades helping some of the largest Learning & Development companies in the world with their behavior change and digital transformation initiatives, including serving in the following roles: Chief Solutions Architect, eLearning Brothers; CEO & Founder, The Modern Learning Architect; Chief Product Officer, Korn Ferry; Chief Product Officer, Strategy Execution (Formerly ESI); Chief Product Officer, TwentyEighty (Private Equity holding company made up of some of the largest L&D companies—Miller Heiman Group, ViltalSmarts, Strategy Execution and Achieve Forum); Chief eLearning Architect, FranklinCovey (Key contributor through digital transformation phase).

Treion is also a go-to expert, author, and problem-solver, who can align market and customer demand with successful product creation, CX, and go-to-market initiatives. He knows what your learners want, how they want it, and what to do about it. Treion has a master's degree in Instructional Technology and Learning Science and is currently a Ph.D. student in the same field. Treion is the author of several books and publications, including:

- The Getting Things Done Workbook: 10 Moves to Stress-Free Productivity, with David Allen (Ghostwriter)
- The Power of Small Things and Baby Steps: 7 Reasons Microlearning Works Today!
- The Learning Explosion: 9 Rules to Ignite Your Virtual Classrooms
- The Webinar Manifesto: Never Design, Deliver, or Sell Lousy Webinars Again!
- 7 Consumer Realities That the Learning Industry Can No Longer Ignore
- Mutant Learning: How to Develop a Social Learning Lab

LEARN MORE

eLearning Brothers Learning Solutions Process

Did you know that less than 10% of all learning and development solutions today deliver on the promised behavior changes and business results? While research has shown how technology can improve the way adults learn, retain, and apply information, many organizations choose not to apply modern learning best practices to their instructional design and solutions. In today's economy, your business can't afford to provide training that doesn't work. You need effective learning solutions and technologies that change behaviors, reduce costs, and deliver results.

eLearning Brothers can help! We can help you design, develop, and launch effective learning strategies, technologies, and solutions for the modern learner using our 3-Step Learning Solutions Process.

If you need to address one or more of the following L&D needs, challenges, or opportunities, let's talk!

- Short-term training emergencies & deadlines
- Long-term learning strategy & roadmap
- Transform your learning solutions for the modern learner & digital native
- To show ROI and business impact on your L&D initiatives
- Help getting senior management buy-in
- Assistance launching your L&D initiatives internally & externally
- A quarterly or annual review

Learn more and schedule an appointment with Treion and his team:

LET'S TALK

3-STEP LEARNING SOLUTIONS PROCESS

1. **ASSESS:** We start with a FREE assessment of your existing training plan, offerings, and technologies and identify training needs, objectives, and behavioral change gaps.

2. **ARCHITECT:** We design a custom learning plan for your specific training needs and objectives based on what is discovered. This includes selecting the right solutions, technologies, partnerships, and modern learning approach.

3. **ACTIVATE:** We launch your modern learning training solutions, accountability processes, and success tracking system to assure your goals are achieved.