



THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO
**DEMOCRATIZED
LEARNING**

Lessonly

Your employees want to feel valued, and crowdsourcing their knowledge provides a proven and viable avenue for them to help your company express their value. According to [a recent report](#), 85% of the top-branded companies have used crowdsourcing in the last 10 years. We've seen the impact democratized learning can have on our own culture, as well as countless examples from our customers. Because we believe in the value of this concept so much, we've created this guide so that you can easily replicate our process of crowdsourced learning at your company.

What is democratized learning?

We think of crowdsourcing as a general term where we ask for and organize input from several sources: from customers, freelancers, department heads, employees, or any group of significant size. Democratization focuses in more narrowly when applied to learning. Rather than dictated knowledge transmitted from the top down and few to many, democratized learning shifts to knowledge communicated among peers. That's why the term stems from the word democracy: It's not coming from an autocratic source (like King George III), it's coming directly from the citizenry (like Thomas Jefferson and the Continental Congress).

Why is democratized learning useful?

Because democratization occurs within an organization, both the company and the employees reap rewards from the ideas you source and put into action. When applied to learning, you're engaging those employees who work every day with your customers, product, and processes. By collecting their working knowledge and qualifying it into best practices, you can disseminate it to their coworkers and new employees.



So why is it so difficult?

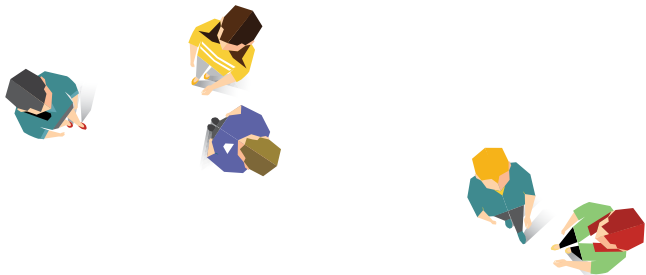
One word: logistics. We love how quickly the internet and all of our connected devices connect us with people. However, gathering a group of employees to produce democratized learning isn't always as easy. You need to set up a plan, lay out some rules, create the content, and spend time editing it. That's a lot of moving parts, and when you throw 15, 50, or 500 crowd members into the mix, things can get out of hand quickly.

Thankfully, this process doesn't have to be so difficult. Using this guide in combination with Lessonly's learning automation software can help harness the power of your people.

Your 6-step guide to democratizing learning

We've sifted through our own experience as well as many articles, journals, and posts to create this handy guide for you. We'll walk you through these six straightforward steps with real-world examples to help you successfully set up your own project, harness the knowledge of your team, and craft quality learning content.

Each step explains the process and why it's important to the overall learning democratization process. So let's get started.



Lessonly



① PLAN



② COMMUNICATE



③ MONITOR



④ SOURCE



⑤ EVALUATE



⑥ IMPLEMENT



step one: **PLAN**

What is it:

Get all your ducks in a row to make the rest of the process infinitely easier on you and your team. First, you need to ask three main questions:

- *What learning are you democratizing?*
- *Which people are you sending it to?*
- *How are you democratizing it?*

As priority number one, decide what you're crowdsourcing. Are you looking for suggestions on new content for your new hire onboarding process? Or maybe how to improve your sales team's efficiency? The possibilities are endless, but you need to nail down a specific question or problem before you go any further.

With your question in mind, figure out which people to ask. Your five-person outbound sales team? The 20-member company board? Or all 500 company employees? Your audience depends on the question you'll be asking. Reigning in the boundaries of your crowd will eliminate any unnecessary complications that could arise.

Next comes the question of logistics: What method should you use to best gather input from your crowd? Your options range from a bare-bones Google Survey document all the way to software that specializes in this type of thing, like Lessonly. The size of your crowd and the depth of the question will influence this choice. If you're expecting longer, thought-out answers, choose an option that allows your people to answer the question sufficiently.

How to accomplish it:

Write your plan down. We find writing out your plan either physically or digitally will reveal areas your mind simply can't sort through on its own.

In addition to the considerations above, you'll also need to determine a few rules in this stage. How long will you give your crowd to supply their answers? If the questions are quick, yes or no questions, you could keep it to two days. But if you're looking for longer written answers, we recommend a week or more.



step one: **PLAN** *cont.*

In the end, the amount of thought you put into planning your learning project will reflect on how well the overall operation shakes out. Thinking through the process beforehand and smoothing over problems before they occur will save you time in the future. Don't skimp on effort here.

How Lessonly can help:

While you're building your plan, Lessonly provides easy collaboration between your team leaders. Lessons can hold text, photos, and videos in a clean format that's easy to present to your eventual crowdsourcees. As you build the plan for your crowdsourcing project, the Lesson that explains it will slowly take shape. If you're planning this democratized effort with multiple people, you can share the Lesson by just sending a link and letting them edit and add content.

This Lesson will explain everything to your team members: why you're doing it, what their role is, and how they should participate. Anyone with an email can access Lessonly, so spreading the Lesson throughout your company will be as easy as importing your team and sharing.

“ They needed to crowdsource their onboarding material to the people who knew it best: their employees.

Real-world example:

Starting out, [Gusto](#), a cloud-based software company that manages employee payroll and benefits, was only 50 people strong. But as the company started to grow, they realized that their onboarding and training material was out-of-date and not meeting their needs. Gusto knew that if they wanted to keep up with growth, they needed to crowdsource their onboarding material to the people who knew it best: their employees.

Gusto came up with a plan that included Lessonly to encourage feedback and ideas on training material. Their team had to decide who would provide responses and when those would be due. In the end, their project succeeded as training content increased in quality and kept their new employees sharp. With a boost in new-hire productivity, Gusto expanded to more than 300 employees in just one year.



step two:

COMMUNICATE

What is it:

Now it's time to unveil your new plan to democratize! During the communication phase, you inform the crowd of their job and where they communicate back to you. In some ways, this step is just as crucial as the planning stage because what's the point of drawing up an awesome plan if the people it's meant for don't get to hear it? During this phase, you need to relay as much information as possible to the participants.

How to accomplish it:

Get in touch with every member of your intended crowd and clearly let them know of your upcoming plan. Ideally, this communication is sent through learning software like Lessonly so that you don't have to repeat yourself in person and you can track who's engaged with the lesson and who still needs to.

During this time, inform your participants what they'll receive for their efforts. This key piece of your crowdsourcing effort keeps people engaged and producing at a high level. If the

crowd includes employees at your company, don't fall back on the excuse "your salary is the benefit." Incentives like ordering in lunch or a gift cards for their time can create welcome surprises for your crowd's participation.

How Lessonly can help:

Instead of sending an email and hoping that your participants open it, assign a Lessonly Lesson instead. Easily add photos and videos that describe the upcoming training project to make sure your point comes across clearly. To ensure that your team fully understands what they're about to do, Lessonly can track progress throughout the Lesson. This way, you can identify any points that team members find unclear and gives you a chance to set everything straight. This is a great way for your participants to respond and provide feedback. Lessonly's quizzes and question boxes can funnel any comments straight back to you for review before moving on to the next step. Assigning these Lessons through Lessonly is as easy as writing an email. Just pick a date, and Lessonly's automation takes care of the rest.





step three:

MONITOR

“ Be available. It’s as simple as that. If you’re AWOL, your participants could get lost and the quality of responses you receive will vary.

What is it:

Steps Three and Four occur at the same time. This step belongs to the project owners, leaving the next step for participants. As you launch your democratized learning project, you need to monitor your participants. They may have questions during the process, and without timely responses, the whole process may come grinding to a halt. As the leader and coordinator of the project, you should focus on coordinating and managing feedback during this phase. Even though you’ve laid out a plan beforehand, you should still be prepared to provide clarification.

How to accomplish it:

Be available. It’s as simple as that. If you’re AWOL, your participants could get lost and the quality of responses you receive will vary. A separate email address dedicated solely to your project can give your participants an easy help line if they’re confused. If you use a company chat application like Slack or Flowdock, create a new channel for your crowd participants. This gives you a chance to monitor their activity as they ask you and their peers questions. However, avoid the temptation to take this as an invitation to guide the formation of their answers. We find untainted responses to be the most valuable.

How Lessonly can help:

One of Lessonly’s strongest features is its progress tracking. By using Lessonly Courses and Triggers for your democratization effort, team leaders can build related Lessons that automatically display responses when your participants are finished. When



step three:

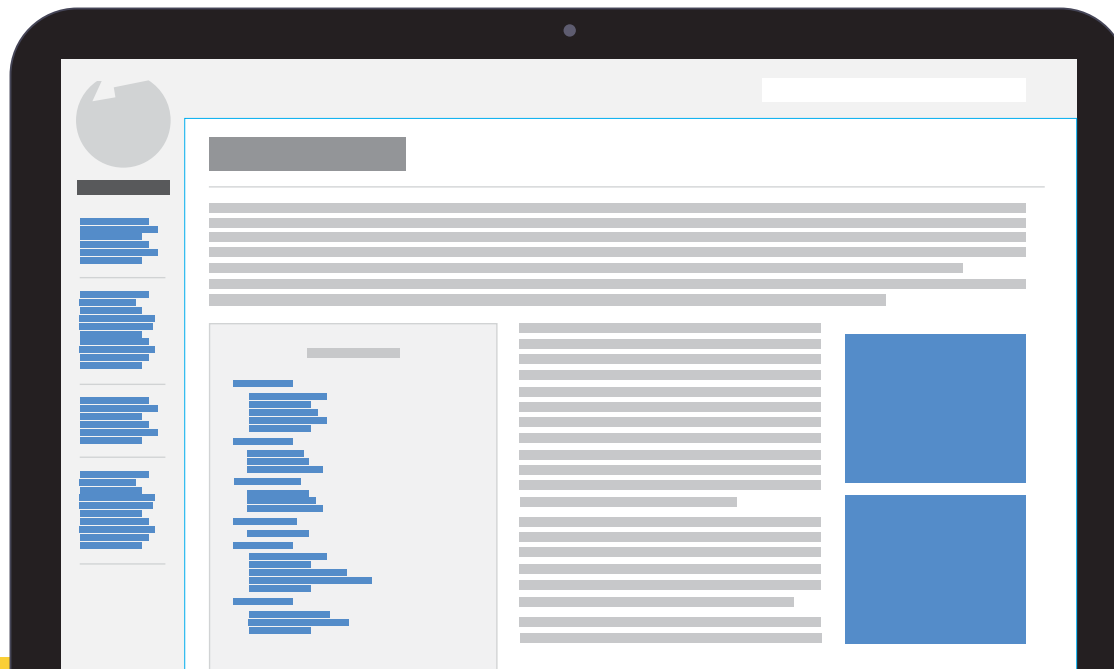
MONITOR

cont.

they read through your Lesson that explains what you need them to do and how to do it, they can move right to the next topic. With answers collected in our Gradebook, you can see your team's progress at a glance.

Real-world example:

For the best example of monitoring a continually crowdsourced project, just look to the online knowledge base, [Wikipedia](#). Launched in 2001, Wikipedia quickly became a staple of the internet thanks to its seemingly endless amount of articles on all manner of subjects. It also became [the flagship for large-scale crowdsourcing](#). Users can contribute, filling in gaps of knowledge on whichever page they wish. However, these edits are constantly being moderated, monitored and fact-checked for relevance. Many times, the edits add plenty of value to the existing topic and don't need editing, but the process exists to weed-out the wrong and misleading entries. This is the gold standard for monitoring democratized answers for relevancy and accuracy.



What is it:

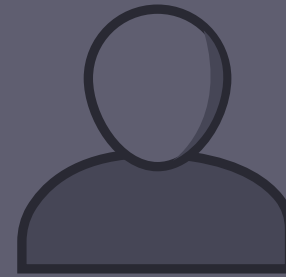
For participants being called on for their services, it's finally time to get down to it. During this stage, they create the responses you'll wrangle into learning content. This puts the crowd in crowdsource, the democracy in democratization. Once you've distributed the plan and set up the means of communication and monitoring, the real work happens.

How to accomplish it:

The secret to this step is letting your people do the work. Stick to the plan that you laid out in Step 1 and let the answers come in as they will. Be sure to monitor the process as it happens (refer to Step 3), but allow as much time as you communicated to your participants earlier. If that's a few hours, a few days, a week, or even a month, let your people respond on their time.

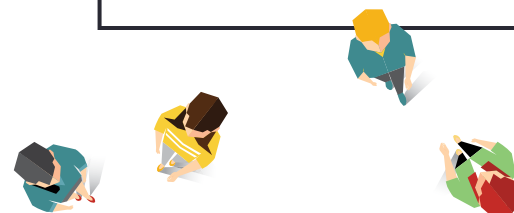
How Lessonly can help:

You can add questions and quizzes into Lessonly Lessons as easily as writing an email. If you're collecting input for your democratized effort, you can build multiple-choice questions by listing responses and adding an asterisk next to the correct answer. With short-answer text boxes, your crowd can type their responses right into the Lesson. You'll eliminate those cumbersome pen-and-paper records that have a tendency to get lost. Using Lessonly to keep all your records digitally ensures everything happens as quickly and securely as possible.



step four: SOURCE

“ Stick to the plan that you laid out in Step 1 and let the answers come in as they will.”





step five:

EVALUATE

What is it:

Congratulations! You've made it through the most chaotic phase of your democratized learning project. Receiving input, feedback, solutions, or content back from your crowd can feel magical, but also a bit hectic. At this stage, take a breather and evaluate what just happened. Focus your assessment on the quality of the responses you received from your crowd. Sift through these and decide which ones you want to use and how you'll use them.

You should also be evaluating the process itself. Sit back and assess what worked with your democratized effort and what didn't. These notes will come in handy next time you choose to crowdsource learning. Did you give your participants too much time or too little? Could they have received more clear instructions on what you wanted them to do? The best time to note these possible improvements is soon after the bulk of the project ends.

How to accomplish it:

Ring the bell. Sound the alarm. Send out the closing email. Whichever way you can, let your participants know that their time is up. This should all be laid out in your plan, but don't feel out-of-place reaching out and following up if it's passed the deadline. If your plan called for selecting winners from the group of responses, inform them and explain how you'll use their contributions going forward.

On the process evaluation side, think of the times you felt frustrated with the process. These will usually point you to things that didn't work. Sit down with your team leaders and a few members of your crowd and dissect how it's gone so far. After you know the strength of your democratized responses, you can judge if the time invested was worth it for your particular project.

“ Focus your assessment on the quality of the responses you received from your crowd.



step five:

EVALUATE *cont.*

How Lessonly can help:

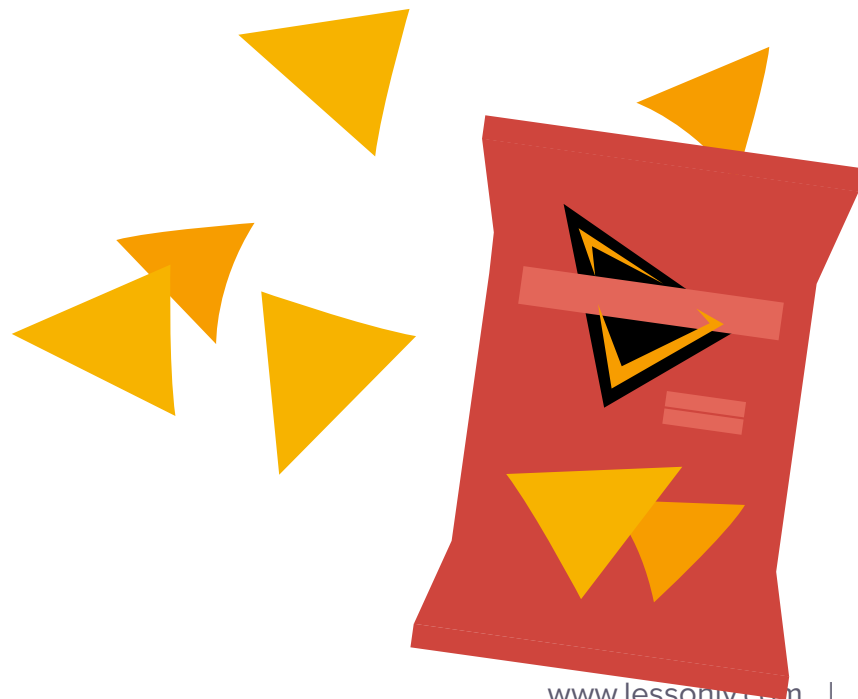
For sourced content evaluation, Lessonly's Gradebook makes your life easy. You can quickly navigate through responses in our application, or you can export responses into a CSV to do more complex analysis.

When you're documenting the process, send Lessons back out to your crowd to gauge their feelings on how it went. A quick Lesson with a few multiple-choice questions can easily gauge how well your democratized project was received. When the feedback comes in, you and your team can make adjustments accordingly.

Real-world example:

[Doritos' Crash the Super Bowl Challenge](#) provides a great example of content evaluation. Instead of creating an advertisement for the NFL Super Bowl in house, Doritos opened up the creative process to the public. For the creators of the best commercial featuring the snack, their advertisement

aired during the most widely viewed block of television in the world. Tens of thousands of directors answered the call, giving Doritos plenty of video content to look through. After weeding out the weaker entries, Doritos employed a second level of crowdsourcing by letting the public vote for their favorite. Given the amount of entries, this process took months to complete, but fans and viewers alike ate it up.





step six:

IMPLEMENT

What is it:

It's go time! Now that you have all this great democratized learning content, you can put it to good use. Even though you're wrapping up your democratized project, you're just beginning what you set out to accomplish. Reaching out to your participants and asking for their help is only the means to get where you want to go. Whether your new content focuses on employee onboarding or a new way to improve your customer support team's performance, now you need to act on it.

How to accomplish it:

Armed with a harvest of great knowledge and best practices, you have the raw material to create a more useful training program that will garner much more engagement, excitement, and retention from your team. You prove your employees' value when you use their accumulated experience for indigenous content in Lessons targeted to their coworkers.

“ With Lessonly's simple, but sophisticated learning software, you can quickly turn your new crowdsourced content into a beautiful, branded learning experience.

How Lessonly can help:

With Lessonly's simple, but sophisticated learning software, you can quickly turn your new crowdsourced content into a beautiful, branded learning experience. Leverage text, images, videos, documents, and interactive quizzes to bring your crowd's concepts to life. Automate your administrative work with advanced assignment rules, Triggers, and reporting functionality.

Democratizing learning content provides an efficient way to learn what your company needs and unlock the tribal knowledge held within the minds of your subject matter experts on staff. When you use Lessonly, you make this process more efficient.

We've helped empower hundreds of thousands of Learners, and we'd love to empower yours, too. Contact us to request a demo or sign up for a 15-day free trial.

SIGN UP TODAY



info@lessonly.com

407 Fulton St., #302,
Indianapolis, IN 46202

(317) 469 - 9194

