

Chapter 6

Social Media as a Mechanism for Engagement?

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Abstract

Purpose — This chapter examines the use of social media within organizations in order to engage with both current and potential future employees.

Design/methodology/approach — It is commonly claimed that social media technologies can help organizations to engage with both current and potential employees. This chapter examines these claims through an examination of the use of social media within two organizations: a UK television company and an international UK telecommunications company. Data was gathered from the company websites and via 34 semi-structured interviews.

Findings — The two case studies confirm that social media has promise with regard to facilitating the engagement of existing employees. However, the findings suggest also that the use of social media to engage employees will not be successful unless the culture and leadership of the organization already embraces open communication and participation.

Research limitations/implications — The findings are limited in that they rely on two case studies and therefore might not be applicable to other organizations. Despite the limitations, this chapter has significant implications for organizations considering the adoption of social media as a means to improve employee engagement. It suggests that when adopting social media for organizations, the very first step should be to assess the organizational readiness with a focus on culture and people rather than on the technology itself. This is because managerial behaviors and styles are central to the level of engagement individuals feel with an organization. For the same reason leaders need to be trained to lead collaboratively, and to be able to understand the new social practices.

Originality/value — The chapter makes an important contribution to an extremely sparse literature on social media as a means for engaging with employees through the

provision of rare empirical data and is therefore valuable both for managers and for HR scholars and practitioners.

Keywords: Social media; Web 2.0; employee engagement; recruitment; employee communication

Introduction

One of the commonly espoused uses of social media for employers is to help them to engage with both existing and potential employees. The precise definition of “engagement” is much debated in the literature and might also vary among organizations. However, employers do agree that engagement of employees is essential if organizations are going to be successful and create competitive advantage (IABC, 2011). Engaged individuals are described as being attentive, emotionally connected, integrated, focused in their performance (MacLeod & Brady, 2008), involved with enthusiasm, and willing to exert greater discretionary effort in his or her work. The engaged employee will typically demonstrate initiative, proactively seeking opportunities to contribute, be willing to share information with colleagues while speaking up for the organization, and trying harder to meet customers’ needs.

The contribution of engaged employees is particularly indispensable during a turbulent period of economic recession such as that currently experienced within much of the Western world, since they have a strong emotional sense of ownership and are willing to do whatever is needed to support the organization (MacLeod & Clarke, 2011). Numerous studies (CIPD, 2008; IABC, 2011) show a direct relationship between employee engagement and business results. Engagement contributes significantly to an organization’s performance, leading to improvements in service quality, customer satisfaction, as well as higher productivity and financial results. By contrast, when employees are disengaged, organizational performance declines. Engagement also serves the individual, fulfilling a basic human need to be connected to worthwhile endeavors and make a significant contribution. Since individuals often prefer to be involved (engaged) in meaningful and challenging work, employee engagement is therefore a classic win–win initiative since it is associated with employee satisfaction as well as organizational success.

Typically, engagement of employees is discussed at two stages of the employment cycle. First, job seekers or potential employees need to engage with an organization in order to feel attracted to that organization and to decide to apply to work there. Second, once employed by the organization, individuals need to develop high levels of engagement with their employer in order to facilitate the outcomes discussed above. At both stages, engagement can be driven by an individual’s perception that they are involved and listened to, and that they have a role to play in the organization. With regard to existing employees, the literature has focused on the need to promote dialogue within the organization in order to facilitate employee participation and

involvement and therefore improve engagement. For job seekers, dialogue is also important in order for the job seeker to perceive a fit between their needs and that of the organization and to understand what the employer can offer them. At both stages of employment therefore, engagement is about building a relationship between the individual and employer. It has been claimed that social media can provide the means by which dialogue and therefore this relationship can be developed. Social media therefore provide a new dimension to the building of relationships between employees, their line managers, and senior management.

Social media may therefore support more collaboration, greater transparency, and increased trust between employees and the organization, becoming an important vehicle for many aspects of internal communications that are relevant to employee engagement. For these reasons, the intersection between digital communication's omnipresence and the emerging culture of deeper engagement provides many opportunities to organizations. Thus, more and more companies are recognizing social media and social networks as valuable tools for refining employee engagement, responding to the greater than ever need to deliver information to employees in a way that creates a sense of community. New social and networking media provide a valuable opportunity for companies to increase engagement with employees through facilitating dialogue, and to integrate employees into the culture of the organization by creating a sense of community. Internal social groups can be connected and engaged through the effective use of social media giving the opportunity to employees to share ideas, replacing the old style suggestion boxes with a more interactive process.

In successful organizational use of social media, social and business functions intertwine: forums spring up to connect people in similar job functions or expertise areas but different locations; people can ask for and quickly get help from peers, or brainstorm ideas; employees are empowered as authors post useful reference material and share their expertise. These corporate social networking platforms offer a variety of engagement and productivity benefits from employee brainstorming, increased collaboration, and knowledge transfer. Therefore, these enabling technologies can have an effect on employee satisfaction levels while creating value for the organization. All of this could be essential to an engaged and productive workforce.

The little research that is available about social media and employee engagement bears this idea out. In 2008 an [Aberdeen Group \(2008\)](#) reported that organizations using blogs, wikis, and social networking tools achieved an average year-on-year improvement in employee engagement of 18%, compared with 1% for organizations that do not use social networking tools. The study reported that organizations that achieved the leading performance designation in the use of blogs, wikis, corporate social networking, and other online collaboration tools throughout the talent management life cycle demonstrated a 39% reduction in training costs while simultaneously improving engagement and quality of hire by 33%. A 2012 study by [APCI and Gagen McDonald \(2012\)](#) reveals how internal social media use can bring major benefits to a number of employee engagement areas, and isolates the key attributes that such programs require. They found that 58% of the workers polled would prefer to work at a company that uses social media; 86% would refer others for employment; 61% felt it became easier to collaborate, while 60% were likely to feel

their company is innovative. Employees were 60% more likely to give their company the benefit of the doubt in a crisis, and two-thirds of employees were likely to support government policies their company supports. They are also 78% more likely to purchase the company's stock. It seems evident, then, that social media platforms and social intranets can offer some positive solutions to the complex problem of employee engagement.

Despite the two consultancy-based studies above, academic research into the use of social media for engaging with potential and current employees is sparse. In particular, there is little in-depth research that looks at the ways in which companies are using social media tools for these purposes and whether these social media satisfy their objectives with regard to improving engagement. This chapter will therefore examine the use of social media for engagement with existing and potential employees through the use of two organizational examples. We will proceed by discussing in more detail the literature on employee engagement and social media before describing our organizational examples.

Background and Literature Review

In order to study the literature relevant to the focus of our chapter, we will concentrate first on what is known about employee engagement generally. We will look at what is known about engagement of both existing employers and of potential employees through a brief analysis of the literature on employee branding, employee value propositions, and the psychological contract. We will then move onto to examine the role of social media in engaging both current and potential future employees.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has emerged relatively recently as a concept within human resource management (HRM) and therefore has, so far, been subject to only a small amount of empirical research. Despite this, the idea of employee engagement appears to have resonated with employers, and so it has already become prominent in the world of HR practice and within organizations (Vance, 2006). Employee engagement can be defined as “the extent to which an employee is psychologically present in a particular organizational role” (Saks, 2006, p. 604). Robinson, Perryman, and Hayday (2004) suggested that engagement is a positive attitude that employees have toward their organization and its values.

Khan (1990) was one of the first scholars to discuss the notion of engagement in relation to employees and HRM. Khan suggested that people have various degrees of engagement or disengagement at work. The consequence of this is that people use various amounts of their personal selves (cognitive, emotionally, and physically) in their working lives and roles. High employee engagement is characterized by

high levels of activation and identification with the organization and employer. Alternatively, [Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, and Bakker \(2002\)](#) suggested that high levels of engagement are represented by “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (p. 72). More recently, [Macey and Schneider \(2008\)](#) divided the concept of engagement into three components: trait engagement, focusing on personal level attributes such as personality; behavioral engagement, focusing on the actions of employees; and psychological state engagement, represented by affect and feelings of energy.

Engagement has been adopted by HR practitioners as a characteristic of employees that is related to high productivity. Specifically, recent research in the United Kingdom suggested that high levels of engagement can lead to lower sickness absence, higher customer service, and better retention, as well as higher innovation and better overall performance ([MacLeod & Clarke, 2009](#)). Therefore most of the attention in discussions of engagement has focused on how employers might develop high levels of engagement in their workforce. As with engagement more broadly, empirical research in this area is generally sparse. However, what research there is has suggested a connection between effective performance management systems and high employee engagement, and in particular one aspect of engagement — employee commitment ([Gardner, Moynihan, Park, & Wright, 2001](#)). In addition, work climate has been suggested as having a relationship with employee engagement. Indeed, work climate, defined as a combination of factors such as perceived organizational justice and trust in their employer, has long been seen as important in affecting employee outcomes ([Greenberg, 1990](#); [Macky & Boxall, 2007](#)). One factor that has been related to both work climate and employee engagement, and is of particular interest to this study, is that of communication ([Cartwright & Holmes, 2007](#); [Lockwood, 2007](#)). Indeed, [Ruck and Welch \(2012\)](#) connect engagement to effective internal communication, underlying the fact that organizations need to evaluate and improve communication especially in increasingly difficult economic pressures. If communication is an important antecedent of employee engagement, then it might be that information-communication technologies (ICT), such as social media, can also be used to promote employee engagement within organizations. In fact one of the most commonly espoused advantages of social media is that it can facilitate more effective communication and collaboration, and therefore has the capacity to build relationships between employees and their employers (and therefore potentially improve engagement). The next section of this chapter will focus on the use of social media for communication and collaboration and therefore its potential affect on employee engagement.

Social Media and Employee Engagement

Since a changing communication environment calls for new approaches with an emphasis on communities, content, and dialogue rather than volume and channels, opportunities for employee voice and participation can be significantly improved by taking more account of the impact of social media. [Groysberg and Slind \(2012\)](#)

indicated that such a more collaborative approach to leadership might be a prerequisite for the improvement of employee engagement and alignment in today's more and more networked (also through social media) organizations. [Martin, Reddington, and Kneafsey \(2009\)](#) provided examples of social media corporate applications to key functions in HR and people management as a benchmark for more effective listening to understand employees and other internal stakeholders. These included the promotion of the use of employee blogs and online discussion forums to raise issues that are important to employees, in order to surface authentic employee voice rather than responses to attitude surveys.

[Murphy \(2010\)](#) reviewed this ability of social media technologies and mobile computing devices to facilitate and encourage knowledge sharing between "silo'd" groups. The cases analyzed indicated that the collaborative and interactive characteristics of social media had provided organizations with increased capacity to share information to facilitate problem solving, reduce duplication of effort, and increase business agility, as well as bringing the side benefits of stronger employee engagement with senior members of the workforce, and the development of a competitive advantage in new talent acquisition. Through social media, leaders can facilitate two-way communication while employees engage in a bottom-up exchange of ideas, and interact with colleagues through blogs and discussion forums.

By allowing employees to voice their concerns and communicate with employers, social media applications can therefore contribute to the improvement of employee engagement. Indeed, [Dahl, Lawrence, and Pierce \(2011\)](#), who took into account the increasing use of social media to broaden the approach to idea generation and innovation both within and outside the walls of the organization, suggested that this provided intangible benefits such as improved internal processes, increased customer satisfaction, as well as employee engagement. [Doherty \(2010\)](#) provided practical advice for HR professionals, suggesting that social media represented a great opportunity for organizations to create a sense of community among employees. Social media allow HR to promote communication and the sharing of knowledge and ideas and, as a result, boost employee engagement and ultimately enhance the internal employer brand, as well as attracting and retaining the most talented individuals.

The potential benefits of social media for communication (and therefore employee engagement) are therefore strongly promoted in the literature. However, these espoused benefits have been cast into doubt by an increasing literature that suggests that achieving improved communication, collaboration, and engagement through social media might not be as easy as suggested. Interactivity is not just a matter of finding and deploying the right technology, equally if not more important is the need to buttress social media with social thinking, in order to avoid that an organization's prevailing culture works against any attempt to transform corporate communication into a two-way affair.

When using social media to better engage employees, managers can tend to focus on installing the technology, rather than on designing a socio-technical system that can meet the organization's goals and foster authentic participation. Therefore, only organizations that learn how to constructively engage their workers are likely to enjoy distinct competitive advantage. Taking a more extreme position, [MacCormick et al.](#)

(2012) question whether the increase in the use of social media via mobile devices could actually lead to conditions under which connectivity was problematic for engagement. However, McCormick et al.'s empirical research suggested that the use of a Smartphone appeared to amplify work engagement behaviors, mainly, but not exclusively, in functional ways.

A number of authors have suggested that the use of social media can only mirror the existing structure of power and politics within an organization and will not transform communication in organizations in which openness and trust are not already a feature of the climate. More specifically, Hodgkinson (2007a, 2007b) suggested that organizations must ask themselves whether they are truly ready to collaborate, create, and exploit knowledge and whether existing social interactions are open or closed. Hodgkinson also proposes that social media will mean an inevitable loss of control in an organizational environment, and recognizes that the cultural aspects, particularly those regarding hierarchy, power, and politics are very different to the peerless, self-managing communities observed in the consumer domain. Although the technology provides an opportunity to build identity, meaning, and trust, he questions whether organizations have the critical mass of users that can spark and subsequently sustain interaction, suggesting that not everyone will be prepared, or able, to participate — a key factor in creating a truly collaborative environment. Tapscott and Williams (2007, p. 276) also recognized that social media, with its sense of openness, democratization, and the ceding of control to the organization at large, all present challenges to the established cultural and leadership norms, asking whether the minds of leaders are truly “wired” for Wikinomics.

Hodgkinson (2007a, 2007b) suggested that the change must be managed using different approaches and that by addressing the psychological and social aspects of communication (and engagement) organizations could truly unlock the benefits of community and collaboration. In order to address the more prominent cultural aspects, Hodgkinson (2007a, 2007b) suggested that organizational leaders needed to provide a facilitative and moderating environment to secure success, suggesting leaders must “let go” of their traditional tight controls, and work to foster collaborative use of social media platforms.

These assertions lack empirical support, therefore we will investigate these ideas in this chapter through the use of a detailed case study of the use of social media within an organization.

Social Media and Recruitment

So far, we have focused on the engagement of existing employees. Indeed, the sparse literature on employee engagement also focuses on the engagement of current employees. However, employers also spend a lot of time and money engaging with potential future employees, or job seekers. We often talk about “engaging” with potential employees or job seekers, but recruitment is rarely thought of in terms of employee engagement. In fact, recruitment is the first step on the journey to engaging with employees as the perceptions that potential employees form about the values of

an employer and what an organization can offer them are vital in developing the psychological contract between employer and employee. It is through the recruitment process that a (potential) employee forms the seeds of their relationship with an employer and also “buys in” to the role that they will adopt. It can be suggested therefore that the recruitment process lays the foundations for whether an employee is “psychologically present” (Saks, 2006) in the role that they may eventually adopt in the organization. It can therefore be suggested that the recruitment process provides the basis for an employee’s engagement with a role and organization. Within this chapter, we will therefore also investigate the use of social media for engaging with potential employees as part of the recruitment process.

In fact, much of the attention given to the use of social media within HRM has focused on the use of social media tools for engaging with potential future employees. Social media potentially could have a significant impact in changing the nature of the recruitment process, by allowing recruiters access to a wider pool of passive, as well as active, job seekers. Girard and Fallery (2010) have described “e-recruitment 2.0” as using social capital to tap into both active and passive job seekers’ online social networks through the use of social media such as Facebook or LinkedIn, as well as other Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, RSS feeds, and virtual worlds. Social media allows employers to directly contact individuals who are not actively seeking work. The evolution of social media means that employers now have easy access to a wide variety of social networks, without the need to employ an executive search agent. Websites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter contain a significant amount of information about potential employees that can be accessed relatively easily.

Miller-Merrell (2012) also underlined the attractiveness of employer branding promoted through social media, since it gives significant opportunities for HR professionals to get involved in activities beyond their traditional HR tasks. Also recruiting can become more interesting and efficient by tweeting a job opening; head hunting can be facilitated by the vast number of Linked profiles; and allowing employees to blog about how it is to work in that company could enhance the organizational image, thus increasing the number of applications interested in that company. The outcomes and benefits of social media diffusion of information could therefore be of major interest for companies willing to establish a strong employer branding reputation in order to influence engagement with both employees and applicants. Recent studies suggest the reasons a company should engage in recruiting and employer branding via social media: 43% of recruiters who use social recruiting saw an increase in candidate quality; and 31% of recruiters using social recruiting have seen a sustained increase in employee referrals (Jobvite, 2012). In other research, 62% of employer information in social networks was considered useful and a third of all online connections with a company happened because of an interest in company culture (eMarketer, 2010). In combination, these data illustrate how, when used effectively, social media are a powerful tool for improving reputation and a stronger employer brand, for both internal and external marketing.

Since members of the newest generation of job seekers and employees constitute the future largest segment in the workforce, it is important for employers to research, plan, and engage in new ways to reach the most skilled members of this generation

because they will be the ones who steer the future of the most competitive organizations. For this reason, Rai (2012) attempts to understand concepts of employee engagement and social media while presenting an outline into the characteristics of Generation Y and their influencing factors in the organizational context. Rai (2012) investigated how specific characteristics of Gen Y and their connectivity to a digital world impact organizational processes like workplace environment, internal communication, employee well-being, in turn impacting their commitment levels and perception toward their organizations. These are all processes vital for the success of employee engagement. Organizations, thus, might have significant benefits to realize through the use of social media in recruitment, particularly in recruiting generation Y.

Research Questions

Based on the discussion above we have two areas of interest, first is how organizations are actually using social media to engage with both existing and potential future employees. We are also interested in how effective these methods are. For this second question we will focus on existing employees due to the ease of obtaining feedback from these individuals. Therefore, we have three overarching research questions:

1. How can an employer use social media to engage with potential employees?
2. How can an employer use social media to engage with existing employees?
3. How effective is social media as a means of improving employee communication and collaboration and therefore promoting employee engagement?

The Case Studies and Method

In order to investigate the research questions above, we collected data from two organizations. The first, a UK television company, has adopted social media extensively as a tool for recruitment. The second, an international UK telecommunications company, uses social media to facilitate communication and collaboration among existing employees and managers. For the purpose of this chapter, these companies will be called TVCo and Telco respectively. We will first describe the two organizations and the method used to collect data from each below. We will then take each of the three research questions above in turn and address each question using data from the appropriate organization.

UK Television Company (TVCo)

TVCo is the largest commercial television network in the United Kingdom. It operates a family of channels and delivers content across multiple platforms.

TVCo Studios produce and sell programs and formats across the United Kingdom and worldwide. Following the Television Act of 1954 which made commercial television in the United Kingdom possible, TVCo first began broadcasting in 1955 in the London area, before moving country-wide. TVCo has recently expanded its family of channels with the launch of new channels in 1998, 2004, 2005, and 2006. TVCo has around 4000 employees on permanent or fixed-term contracts and another 2-300 contractors.

TVCo is governed by a management team who is overseen by a Board of Directors. Human Resource Management is headed by their Group HR Director who sits on the Management Board. Each business area has an HR representative at HRD, Head of HR, and HR Manager level. Centers of Expertise exist within the HR Business Partner structure in Pensions, Reward, Operations and Systems, Learning and Development, Internal Communications, and Recruitment.

Up until 18 months before this case study, TVCo did not have a recruitment function. Recruitment of fixed term and permanent paid employees was undertaken by line managers with support from the HR department and relied heavily on the use of agencies. A new Head of Recruitment was employed in 2010 in order to review recruitment practices within the organization. She created an in-house recruitment team (of nine people at the time of data collection) and facilitated the move from agency recruitment to direct sourcing. The decision to move to direct sourcing was made for a number of reasons: to reduce costs; to ensure ownership of recruitment; and to create a robust recruitment process. In addition, the move represented a desire to take a longer-term view of recruitment and recruit employees for future as well as current company requirements. At the time of writing, 97% of recruitment was undertaken directly rather than via the use of agencies.

Data about TVCo was gathered from the internet and via an interview with the Head of Recruitment. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to gather data about the organization's use of social media for recruitment, the reasons for the adoption of this technology, and the perceived impact of the use of social media. Unfortunately access to job seekers/candidates was not available; therefore data from this organization will be limited only to the use of social media rather than the reactions of candidates.

UK Telecommunications Company (Telco)

Telco provides communications and IT solutions and services to consumer, small medium enterprise businesses, corporate customers, and communications providers in over 170 countries worldwide and employs around 150,000 people. Telco was originally a (once nationalized) UK plc that has experienced significant changes in a relatively short space of time and has been particularly hard hit by the global financial crisis. Telco has long been associated with innovation and the adoption of new technologies, places great emphasis on knowledge work, and has a history of facilitating communities of interests and collaborative working.

Three business units from Telco were selected to be included in this research. The three business units were selected based upon their use of the technology and their overall level of employee engagement in decision making. This allows us to obtain a range of responses to the social media. The first business unit had relatively high use of technology and relatively low employee engagement. This business unit is responsible for IT and network development, employs approximately 18,000 largely desk-based knowledge workers, and comprises of a management team who have pioneered the use of social media both within and outside the organization under study. The second business unit had a relatively moderate use of technology and relatively modest employee engagement. This business unit was responsible for IT and network operations and employs approximately 18,000 people, including a substantial field-force. The final business unit had a relatively minimal use of technology and relatively high employee engagement. This business unit is a market-facing unit discharging the organization's wholesale business, and employs approximately 4000 people including a mix of sales, marketing, product, operational, and customer service agents. A unit with high employee engagement and high use of technology could not be found in the case study organization.

These data were collected as part of a larger study into the impact of social media (see Denyer, Parry, & Flowers, 2011). In order to allow us to investigate the effectiveness of social media technology for communicating and engaging with employees, 33 semi-structured interviews with individual respondents were undertaken. First, 12 interviews were conducted with individuals responsible for policy and business direction to understand the strategic importance of social media and its role within the organization. Second, 21 face-to-face interviews were carried out with members of the three business units, using a standard interview protocol developed from a literature review. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interview data was then analyzed with the support of NVivo in order to identify emerging themes about the perceptions of the use and impact of social media within Telco.

Findings

Information from the two case studies will now be discussed in relation to the three research questions.

1. How can an employer use social media to engage with potential employees?

The recruitment process in TVCo relies heavily on social media tools, specifically LinkedIn and Twitter. The choice of social media tools was based upon the need to communicate the company's brand. It was felt that TVCo had a well-known brand generally, but not as an employer. The primary driver for using social media was to access passive as well as active job seekers.

TVCo subscribe to LinkedIn so that they have access to the profiles of all LinkedIn members. In addition to this access, they have developed a number of careers pages

on LinkedIn. The pages contain information about the employer brand, the jobs that are available, and testimonials from employees. These pages are bespoke to particular job roles or areas. People entering the TVCo careers pages will automatically be directed to the page that is relevant to their work experience (based on an analysis of the information on their profile). TVCo can also search profiles for particular skills and contact LinkedIn members directly. They allow applicants to apply for jobs via their careers website using their LinkedIn profile, rather than having to create a separate CV. The company's use of LinkedIn has been very successful. The company now has over 16,000 "followers" and is the second most popular company with students on LinkedIn.

TVCo also has a careers page and account on Twitter. They regularly "tweet" content and news via this account and link readers to their careers website. They use a Twitter scheduling tool to send previously created tweets at particular times. They also encourage candidates to tweet about their experiences. The tweets are then re-tweeted regularly; the company also makes sure that they use popular hash tags (subject areas) so that they are found by people searching Twitter. For example, TVCo launched a recent graduate recruitment scheme on Twitter, by sending two tweets a day about the scheme for two weeks prior to the launch and then encouraging both recruiters and candidates to tweet during the assessment process. They also provided a number of 30-minute Twitter "chats" for potential applicants. Twitter has also proved to be a successful tool for recruitment. In particular, it is very cheap. Twitter itself costs nothing to use and the scheduling tool costs very little.

The use of social media is supported by an applicant tracking system and company careers website. The company also uses Google Analytics in order to track where applications have originated and therefore assess the success of their social media promotions and has done a lot of work on search engine optimization in order to ensure that they are located by search engines. It is the combination of social media tools and online support mechanisms such as these that allows TVCo to use social media effectively.

2. How can an employer use social media to engage with existing employees?

Telco has made increasing use of social media since 2004, following the appointment of a new CEO for the business unit responsible for IT and network development and operations. For example, blogs and podcasts are frequently used by senior leaders for the purpose of corporate communications, corporate blogging policies have been developed, social media guidelines and tools have been established, and standardized tools have been selected and deployed across the organization to support project or organization-based wiki's. Existing communication channels have been extended to include RSS news-feeds. Other interventions include an internal version of Wikipedia, an internal version of MySpace, and the extension of the online news service to include spaces for discussion. Many of these tools can be accessed directly from the organizations' intranet homepage. The professional communities of interest have also extensively deployed social media technologies to share information and create communities of interest and more recently an initiative to encourage people to create video podcasts as part of the learning and development agenda has

been piloted. Second Life style avatars are being used as part of a Web 2.0 talent academy. In addition, a number of campaigns have been launched to encourage usage and a range of social media was used during a recent consultation on the future of the company pension scheme.

Interviewees described a number of uses of social media technologies, mainly within professional communities of interest. These included collaboration, maintaining contact between individuals, learning, and professional development. Interestingly for this chapter, none of the interviewees saw social media as a means by which to engage employees.

3. How effective is social media as a means of improving employee communication and collaboration and therefore promoting employee engagement?

Despite the extensive development of social media tools the success of these tools within Telco has been mixed. In some departments, web social media have proved to be a cost and time efficient means of promoting communication and collaboration and therefore might have promoted employee engagement. However, in other departments, little evidence of any positive impact of the technology on communication and employee engagement was found. This was due to a number of reasons.

In all three business units, some of the interviewees were reluctant to speak up because they were not convinced that it was “safe” to express their opinions without any negative consequences.

It all depends what you mean by safe ... I still think people tend not to because they are not confident it is safe. It's encouraged obviously but people would think twice about posting certain things I would have thought.

In addition, the level of comfort that employees felt in speaking up was dependent on the leadership style of both their line manager and senior leadership. So in some, cases, interviewees felt that social media were used as a vehicle for propaganda from management. In particular, people commented on the way in which some individuals exploited the channel to serve their own purposes, and the way in which the technology was treated as part of a “corporate machine” so that “*leaders get to tell you what they want you to know*” and the “*party line.*” Leaders, too, acknowledged that social media were used to distribute propaganda, with one stating that some blogs are:

clearly a management propaganda tool. It is like [newsdesk] on the web, you know it is sunny and upbeat and it never rains ... people just see it as just another media medium for management to get the message across.

In other cases managers suppressed debate. One leader explained:

We generally try to close things down. What we will try to do is answer in such a way that no one else feels that they should comment on it, or ask another question. Generally the response has been to try and close it down rather than allow it to run and let people have their say.

In other cases, interviewees explained that conversations that managers were not happy with had been continued offline. It was also noted that managers tended to select the topics included in any debate so that they were setting the agenda. In other

cases, leaders chose to avoid the conversation completely by not engaging with the technology. Other interviewees suggested that many leaders felt the need to be “*seen to be doing something*,” so tended to adopt the technology for the sake of it, or because it was fashionable. One middle-manager felt that

people hardly left any comments, but I think that was done for the wrong reasons, I think it was trying to get discussion taking place without any compelling subject matter.

A number of interviewees suggested that even when workers did engage with the technology, it was to discuss topics that were not of any great importance to the organization. It can therefore be seen that overall many interviewees were of the opinion that workers were not engaged with the technology in such a way as to make use of it in the way that was intended.

Some differences were observed based upon the level of engagement of the employees in each business unit. In the business unit with high levels of employee engagement people suggested that a key reason for implementing social media was to help leaders to be more open and accessible. Many of them argued that using social media to engage employees was “*the right thing to do*.” However, in the business unit perceived by actors to already have low levels of employee engagement, little interest in the use of social media for the purpose of increasing employee participation in decision making was described. Indeed, many people felt that the technology was used to inform employees, rather than to facilitate two-way conversations and that the organization itself, rather than the employees, was the ultimate beneficiary of social media. It is of course difficult to establish cause and effect between these attitudes, but these observations do suggest that it is impossible for social media to facilitate improved employee engagement in departments or organizations where the will to engage with employees through increased communication or participation is not already present.

Discussion

This chapter has examined the use of social media within organizations in order to engage with both current and potential future employees. An increasing number of companies use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to promote communication and collaboration among employees, announce job openings, and search for potential qualified personnel as well as marketing their employer brand both internally and externally. We have examined how two UK companies are using social media for the engagement of current and potential future employees and also examined the effectiveness of social media for internal engagement.

Social media can allow organizations to promote themselves externally to a large number of potential employees with little effort or expense. In contrast to more traditional recruitment advertising techniques, social media can allow companies to access passive as well as active job seekers, as our examination of practice in TVCo showed. Indeed, the experience in TVCo appears to show, anecdotally, a certain degree of success in engaging with potential employees via the use of LinkedIn and

Twitter. The Head of Recruitment in TVCo suggested that the use of social media had enabled the company to move from recruiting predominantly via agencies to a system whereby 97% of recruitment was conducted in-house, therefore reducing costs substantially. Unfortunately, little empirical data is available regarding the actual success of recruitment via social media or the impact of using this media of potential employees, but the TVCo experience seem to suggest that this provides valuable alternative to more expensive traditional methods of engaging with job seekers.

TVCo have focused their recruitment efforts to date on just two social media channels — Twitter and LinkedIn. They could of course expand this to other channels such as Facebook, the use of YouTube to post original and creative videos on YouTube about the everyday life of an employer within that company, or creating a blog for the current employees and management to post stories about the company. These factors could all represent a successful employer branding strategy. Indeed, information about a company as reported through any media outlet, including social media sites can have an influence on public perception and help an organization to engage with potential employees.

Of course, the impact of social media in creating an employer brand is not limited only to potential future employees. As social media becomes integrated commonly into employee engagement strategies the differences between internal and external communication are blurring. Organizations that communicate effectively through social media might find that it enhances a positive workplace culture and improves employee engagement as well as enforcing a positive external reputation. Also for this reason and in order to gain competitive advantage, more companies are investing in creating an identity inside and outside the company. The basic principle of employer branding is therefore that all employees are consumers who must be recruited and retained. This is because existing employees (as well as customers) like to be associated with distinctive organizations. One aim of employer branding should be then to distinguish the employer in the minds of the employees, creating commitment, satisfaction, and developing emotional attachment — and employees who are committed and satisfied also create better relationships with customers.

In the future, social media may not only influence recruiting processes and employer branding value proposition, but also internal marketing, making it become a more effective back-up for external marketing. Through social media employees can be ambassadors of the organization, agents of the company who make part of the employer branding outside the company in way which are not even always conscious.

Moving on to focus on the role of social media in engaging with existing employees, the popular media has espoused that social media can increase the degree of involvement and engagement of employees, by creating an open, inclusive, and collaborative environment, as well as a sense of belonging to a community, identity, and organizational citizenship. Making employees feel a part of the company and a part of the decision-making process has been suggested to have a large impact on the employees' behavior.

We took a more in-depth focus on the use of social media to promote the engagement of current employees. Popular media has suggested that social media can improve employee collaboration and communication and promote employee participation,

therefore leading to higher levels of employee engagement. Indeed, our examination of the use of social media within Telco demonstrated that this company had widely introduced social media, including blogs and wikis, with the purpose of increasing employee collaboration and communication, building a greater sense of community within the organization and therefore ultimately improving employee engagement.

However, and more importantly, our analysis of social media use within this organization showed that the introduction of social media technologies does not necessarily lead to increased engagement, or indeed collaboration, even in an organization such as Telco that has a long history of using cutting edge technology. In Telco, despite several campaigns to promote and encourage the use of social media, use of these tools was still patchy at best and there was little, if any, evidence that the widespread introduction of social media for employees had any great impact on collaboration, communication, or employee engagement.

Our examination of social media use within Telco demonstrated that the success of social media in increasing employee engagement is dependent on the existing culture of the organization and the attitudes and behavior of the organization's leaders. Our interviewees suggested that employees were not embracing social media technologies because they did not feel safe to speak up openly without retribution, because the tools were being used to facilitate propaganda and promote company messages rather than genuinely create two-way communication channels and because, in some cases, leaders were actively suppressing or controlling the online debate. Our evidence from Telco suggests that social media can only be effective in promoting employee engagement and communication if the existing culture and leadership style is already conducive to employee voice and participation. In fact, it appears to be impossible for social media to facilitate improved employee engagement in organizational environments where the will to engage with employees through increased communication or participation is not already present.

This is not to say that social media cannot improve communication processes and therefore also have a positive impact on employee engagement. The fact that social media can allow employees and managers to communicate quickly and easily can have a positive effect on organizations. Indeed, in Telco, we saw that social media were being used within communities of practice to maintain contact between individuals and for learning and professional development. This is in support of the idea that social media tools and technology can enhance internal communications, while supporting the development of internal communities. Indeed, communication between employees pursuing similar interests and the creation of internal workplace communities can spur innovation, improve processes, and help to break down "silos." We might also expect that this would contribute to a high sense of engagement. Indeed, effective communications processes have been suggested as a key driver of employee engagement (Cartwright & Holmes, 2007; Lockwood, 2007; Ruck & Welch, 2012). However, no real impact of the use of social media for communication and increased employee engagement was obvious within Telco. It is likely that this is because of the tension between the ethos of social media and the culture and leadership of the organization, as described above. Indeed, it appears that social media cannot work miracles but can only operate within the existing organizational

culture. If open communication and employee participation is not already part of this culture then the impact of social media will be limited.

Conclusions

This chapter has provided some evidence of the way in which social media can be used within organizations in order to engage with both existing and potential future employees. For engaging with potential employees, anecdotally at least, social media appear to be a useful means of reaching a large number of both active and passive job seekers in a cost-effective manner. We provided a more in-depth analysis of the use of social media for engaging with existing employees and found that, while this technology had the potential to increase internal communication among employees and managers, this did not necessarily translate into increased employee engagement. In fact, the culture of the organization and style of the leaders were more crucial than the technology itself in dictating whether employees engaged both with the social media and at a wider level with the organization.

This chapter has provided only an initial exploratory analysis of these factors in two organizations. Indeed the use of only two organizations means that our findings might not be applicable to other organizations and other adoptions of social media. In particular, the information about TVCo was based only on secondary information available from the website and an interview with the Head of Recruitment. Further research should provide a more in-depth analysis of the actual effectiveness of social media in recruitment and should also examine the reactions of job seekers to the use of social media for recruitment. Future research could also compare the effectiveness of these channels at engaging with potential employees with other methods such as headhunters, agencies, or more traditional recruitment advertising. With regard to the use of social media to engage with existing employees, it would be interesting to examine the use of these technologies across other organizations, particularly those with a more participatory culture.

Despite the limitations and need for future research above, this chapter makes an important contribution to an extremely sparse literature. The popular media has espoused the impact of social media as revolutionary with regard to communication and collaboration and therefore potentially employee engagement. Our contribution has been to add an important note of caution to these claims. Employers cannot expect social media to have a significant impact on the participation and engagement of their employees unless they are also willing to create an organizational culture that promotes open communication and employee voice.

Practical Implications

This chapter has significant implications for organizations considering the adoption of social media as a means to improve employee engagement. We might suggest that

the social media can enhance employee engagement when it is aligned with the organizational culture and vision. Indeed, social media provide organizations with the means to share knowledge and expertise, enabling people to communicate directly with each other and cross boundaries between different departments. But when adopting social media for organizations, the very first step should be to assess the organizational readiness with a focus on culture and people rather than on the technology itself.

Not all companies are comfortable with a world where employees can speak so freely with each other, express their thoughts, and where management has increasingly less control over the information available within the organization. This is a matter of leadership attitude, as well as organizational culture. Our findings confirm that managerial behaviors and styles are central to the level of engagement individuals feel with an organization. Social media technologies enable forms of communications and collaborations that are much more pervasive, fluid, free, and transparent. And increasingly, this calls for the creation of collaborative cultures, and, thus, of a collaborative leadership. So far few leaders have been trained to lead collaboratively, and in many cases the culture and reward systems in organizations discourage collaboration. Senior management might not engage in social media for reasons such as being reluctant to give away their power, not knowing how their actions relate to larger changes in an organization or not understanding the new social practices. Thus, success in social media adoption depends on creating an environment of trust, mutual respect, and shared aspiration in which all can contribute openly. Many companies are just now recognizing the need of a new mindset and different skills, as well as a consistent set of systems and processes that enable participants to communicate, learn, and work together.

Employee engagement depends on strong, effective communications. Furthermore, senior management communication and open, effective communication strategies are recognized as having a crucial role in the development of positive employee engagement (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011; Bindl & Parker, 2010; Saks, 2006). Nevertheless, top managers are too often out of the conversations, and while they may use a wide array of communication methods, including social media, these are often in the form of “top-down” communication, rather than giving employees a voice. It is important for employee to have their contributions recognized by their superiors and to receive credit for any ideas they share in the organization. Previous studies, for example, indicate that employee recognition from senior management directly motivates people to share knowledge (Oliver & Kandadi, 2006). Inclusive leaders, by including employees among relevant organization stakeholders, turn those employees into experienced conversation partners, enabling them as frontline content providers, and raising thus the level of employee engagement.

Social media is in fact not something that can be managed by just a dedicated team or a department. Every individual can play a role in the social media arena, in facilitating participation, communication, and sharing. The use of social media as a tool for employee engagement should not be perceived as a matter of exclusive interest of a charismatic and visionary leader or of a specific and determined organizational function. Notwithstanding, the adoption of social media by the organization might

have a big impact on the way that HR professionals perform their duties therefore needing different capabilities, skills, and knowledge. HR professionals should enhance their communication, IT, Internet, social, and business knowledge and, in particular, an in-depth knowledge of the social media concept, what can and cannot be achieved with it, and how it can be used effectively. Through the use of social media to attract and recruit candidates, some HR departments have already understood the power of information sharing. To make sure the capabilities and skills to use social media are truly embedded in an organization, HR needs to think innovatively and coach the entire organization in social media use. They should also provide precise guidelines and teach employees how to behave in the social media space. Therefore, HR has to be a role model for their employees on how to use social media devices effectively.

The evolution of social media both outside and within organizations represents an exciting time that could have a great positive impact on organizations and employees. Our research has shown, that in relation to communication, participation, and employee engagement, achieving this positive impact is not simple or revolutionary as some media suggest. Instead, it requires significant work on the part of the organization to ensure that the culture and leadership of the organization supports the effective use of social media to improve employee engagement.

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