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The role of Social Media in Human Resource Management

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Topics:

Researching Social Media Use

Social Media in the Digital Age

Abstract

The impact of Social Media on Human Resource Management (HRM) strategies and practices is increasing and has not been fully explored yet. This research focuses on understanding the role of Social Media in HRM, specifically the contribution of Social Media utilization to the strength of HRM. Viewing Social Media as a User Generated Information System and HRM as a Communications System, the presented three dimensional framework combines the hierarchical structure of HRM, temporal nature of HRM process and directions of HRM communications. It allows the assessment of vertical and horizontal alignment of HRM practices which emerge through utilization of Social Media. As part of a PhD research project two pilot case studies use the model to map Social Media utilizations in two diverse organizations. The empirical findings demonstrate differences and surprising similarities of Social Media utilization in HRM and the apparent dominance of bottom-up Social Media utilization in HRM.

Purpose

High-Involvement and High-Engagement Human Resource Management (HRM or HR) received a significant amount of attention among practitioners and academics with over 30,000 articles on scholar.google.com published in the last 10 years. However, the impact of new technologies on HR practices, policies and strategies has not been sufficiently evaluated: Guest (2011) for instance, critiques insufficient research into emergence of HR practices, Brown and Vaughn (2011) as well as Roth et al (2013) stress the lack of empirical studies and peer-reviewed outlets investigating the use of Social Media in selection and staffing decisions.

Business Horizons magazine ran a special issue dedicated to Social Media in 2011. Eight out of nine articles were focused on marketing, highlighting the lack of research of Social Media utilization in other organization areas. This confirms Eppler's (2004) findings about the lack of cross-disciplinary research in his review on information overload. Roth et al further state that "*there is a need for a systematic agenda for research on Social Media in organizations*" (Roth, Bobko et al. 2013).

Current research focus on technology in organizations is adopting the interpretative approach and is considering the usage of the technology rather than separating the human and the "hardware" factors. The term "Sociomateriality", introduced by Scott and Orlikowski, arguably moving "beyond separation and towards fusion" of different technology research streams (Orlikowski and Scott 2008). Cross-disciplinary research will contribute to a better understanding of impact of Social Media on HRM.

The Role of Social Media in Human Resource Management

Research on *human* resource management is lacking technology focus as is the research on management in general. Orlikowski and Scott state that their analysis confirmed that *"over 95% of the articles published in top management research outlets do not take into account the role of technology in organizational life"* (Orlikowski and Scott 2008). Similarly many HR change studies in the past decade e.g. (Baird 2002, Guest 2002) have not considered technology as an influencing or mediating factor in HRM. Guest identified three core HRM models, namely High Performance Working Practices (HPWS), High Commitment and finally Strategic Fit model, none of which considered the required Information Technology (IT) and Information Systems (IS) infrastructure, IS adoption and IS practices to support/disrupt the implementations of these models in practice(Guest 2002). In a six-year case study of organization change from the view point of HR practices the technology to support the change and the adoption of such technologies was not considered at all (Baird 2002). Collins and Clark (2003) focused on information availability to top-management-team and viewed "technology" as a tool for information management, namely to gather, process and distribute information. In their research IT capabilities for building and maintaining social networks were central to emergence and re-affirmation of HRM practices, however, the actual use of the IT and concrete features offered were not discussed.

As IT continues to play a vital part in organizations more interdisciplinary research is needed (Orlikowski 2001, Eppler and Mengis 2004, Roth, Bobko et al. 2013). One specific field of IS that has not yet been sufficiently explored is Social Media, specifically its use by organization for internal (i.e. employee-focused) communication (Leonardi, Huysman et al. 2013).

This paper suggests a framework for assessing levels of utilization of Social Media technologies in HRM with the view on employee engagement and involvement. The aim of the framework is to provide a comprehensive basis for understanding what role Social Media is playing in enabling, supporting and transforming HRM as a strong communication system.

Development of such framework will enable further research into HRM Development and Business Transformation with the view on technology adoption and technology imposed change.

Linking Social Media to HR Management – Systems View

For the development of the framework the research focused on three areas, namely (1) Social Media as Information System (2) HRM as communication system and (3) utilisation of Social Media in HRM.

Social Media

Definition and characteristics

Social Media is a contemporary social phenomenon that is yet to be fully explored(Roth, Bobko et al. 2013). In the following section Social Media is paced within the framework of contemporary research and juxtaposed with the concepts of Web 2.0, Social Networking Sites and User Generated Content/ User Generated Information Systems.

There is still no clear definition of what "Social Media" actually is. Kaplan and Haenlein use a somewhat technical description: *"Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content"* (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

Boyd and Ellison take a less technical approach (also cited in (Brown and Vaughn 2011, Roth, Bobko et al. 2013)) and define *"social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system"* (Boyd and Ellison 2008).

Kietzmann et al define Social Media based on seven functional facets: Identity, Sharing, Relationships, Presence, Conversations, Groups and Reputation (Kietzmann, Hermkens et al. 2011). Common themes in all definitions are the direct implication of users in the content generation and information exchange. This leads to focus on "user" or "usage" in research aimed to understand Social Media phenomenon.

Social Media as an Information System

Technological advances in Web 2.0 and open ideology allowed User Generated Content (UGC) to emerge as an Internet phenomenon (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Philip DesAutels'(2011) definition of User Generated Information System as a *"set of*

component services, integrated by the user into a novel configuration such that the resulting information service is (1) qualitatively different from its components and (2) offers unique value to the user over and above the value of its inputs" goes beyond a single application, site or technology.

In this paper Social Media is viewed not as a single application, but as a set of interconnected and (however loosely) integrated information technologies: a User Generated *Information System* formed through unification of single components to offer its users unique value.

Social Media opens new avenues for communicating by (1) increasing *distinctiveness* of messages through transparent communication and trusted sources (Fieseler, Hoffmann et al. 2010, Hauptmann and Steger 2013), (2) allowing *consistent* universal (multiple devices, multiple protocols) and egalitarian (ease to join, free access, affordable hardware) access to communication channels and information for participants at all levels (e.g. in organizational context this includes potential and current employees, middle- and top-managers, alumni etc.) (Boyd and Ellison 2008, Kaplan and Haenlein 2010) and by (3) providing accessible and uncensored two-way communication platforms which contributes to dialogue and *consensus* building (Lim 2012, Hauptmann and Steger 2013).

In the context of this research, Social Media will be defined as an Information System (IS) that has the properties as defined by Boyd and Ellison: profiles, connections and ability to traverse the connections (Boyd and Ellison 2008) and extend this definition by including the ability to create user generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, Leonardi and Barley 2010, Leonardi, Huysman et al. 2013).

HR as a Communication System

Three distinctive theoretical perspectives of HRM have been recently identified in the literature (Guest, 2002) namely High Performance Working Practices (HPWS), High Commitment and finally Strategic Fit model. Using the HPWS conceptualisation of HRM (Walton 1985, Lawler 1988), this research investigates emergent practices, looking "inside the black box" (Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville 2011) and focusing on enacted HR-practices through technology use (Orlikowski 2000).

Bowen and Ostroff (2004) presented HR as a socially constructed system. The actual HR practices are defined as "communications from employer to employee". It is

argued that to maximize the impact the system needs to be "strong" – that is distinctive, consistent and high in consensus.

A strong HRM system therefore "facilitates interactions, interdependencies, and event cycles such that fewer event cycles are needed to develop shared interpretations" (Bowen and Ostroff 2004). In addition, communication strength is supported by provision of processes and rules for two-way symmetrical communication (Kent and Taylor 1998).

In this paper HRM is theorized as a three dimensional communication system with (1) vertical alignment of HR hierarchy levels (practices, policies and strategies) ensuring *distinctiveness*(Bowen and Ostroff 2004); (2) the Employee Life Cycle – representing *consistency* of message over time and space (that is complementary HRM practices in different HRM areas) (Wright and McMahan 1994, Boxall and Macky 2009). Finally, (3) employee involvement in decision-making and problem-solving (Walton 1985, Lawler 1988) would allow for two-way dialogic communication and ensure *consensus* (Kent and Taylor 1998).

Theoretical Framework and Model

Viewing HRM as a Communication System between employer and employee and Social Media as an Information System which can facilitate, even enable and enforce communication, this research focuses on the question how Social Media is being utilised by HRM and what is the role of Social Media in HRM.

Understanding that there are three main attributes of system strength (Bowen & Ostroff 2004) , the framework emerges from the theorization of (1) HRM hierarchical levels as representations of distinctiveness, (2) the Employee Life Cycle as representation of consistency over time and (3) uni- and bi-directional HR/Employee communication as representation of dialogue (or lack thereof). The aim of the framework is to provide understanding on how HRM as a communication system is utilising Social Media as IS for continuous employee engagement and involvement.

The Employee Life Cycle is understood as the time span starting at the point in time when an employee becomes a "potential employee" (talent pool) and extending beyond the employment termination (alumni). A snapshot of HR-practices across the Employee Life Cycle should capture the entire sequence of this communication

process over time(Salvato and Rerup 2011). Arguably, the Employee Life Cycle can be split into a multitude of stages (e.g. Attraction, Application, Selection, Interview, On-boarding stages etc). For the purpose of the clarity the presented framework will simplify the Employee Life Cycle to three symbolic stages: pre-employment, employment, alumni.

HRM function hierarchy is abstracted into Strategy, Policies and Procedures, and Practices directed at employees and with individual practices manifested in communications. This abstraction is vaguely based on Wright's model of human resources as a source of competitive advantage (Wright and McMahan 1994) to the extent that HR activities are happening at the "Practices" level and that they are directed towards the "human capital pool", represented as a number of "pools" in the model – employees at different stages of their working life.

The communications are grouped according to the direction and source, indicating whether the message originated from HR or Employee and where the message was directed to. Finally, Social Media applications are "mapped" based on their utilization for any form of communication.

Theoretical Framework

The framework identifies three dimensions for utilization of communication channels. The model in "Figure 1 – HPWS as Communication System" illustrates the relationships between Social Media, HRM, Employee Life Cycle and Communications. HRM utilizes Social Media to communicate with the employees.
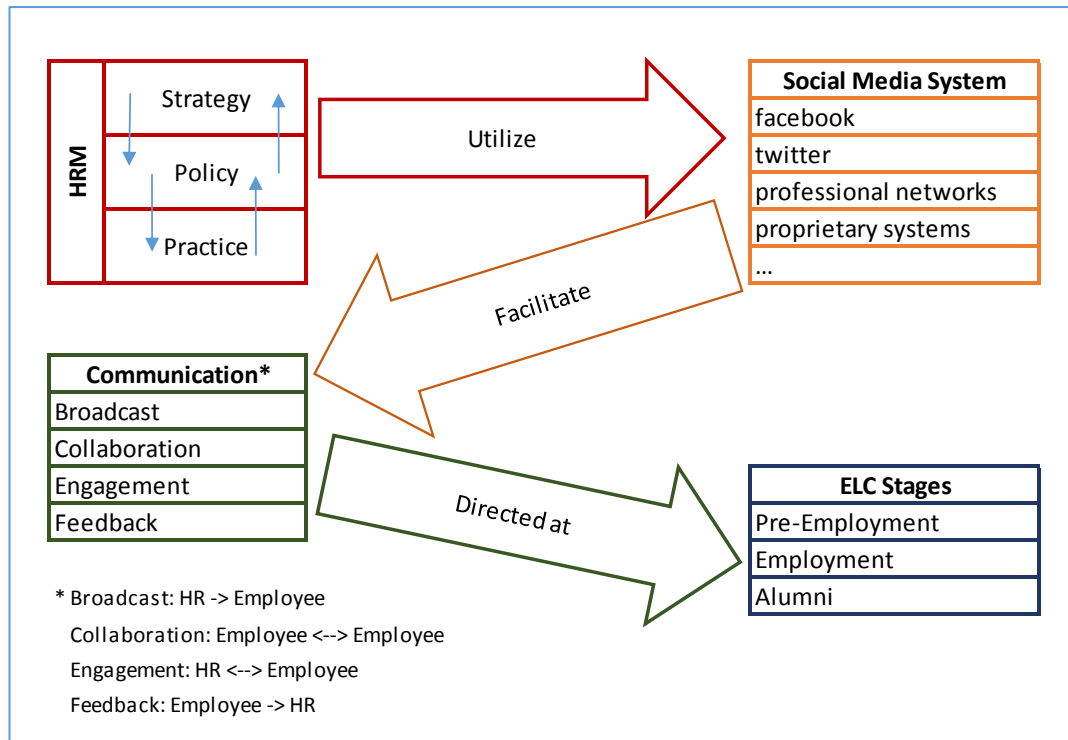
Figure 1 – HPWS as Communication System

There are certain limitations to this representation. Firstly horizontal alignment between complementary practices (and subsequently policies and strategies) directed at employees is not accounted for. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate the strength of the system based on its consistency. Considering the necessary requirement for correct mix of HR practices (Wright and McMahan 1994, Saks 2006, Boxall and Macky 2009) the mapping of the practice-mix would be necessary for the HR system evaluation.

A further limitation is the inability to validate or represent the vertical alignment across strategy, policy and practices. This is a significant critique point in so far as vertical misalignment would mean that strategies are not resulting in appropriate practices. Practices are applied without guidance and strategic support, outside policy frameworks and potentially working in opposite directions, weakening the system.

Extended Model

We suggest to theorize HRM as a three dimensional system of communications between employer and employee as presented in Figure 2. Two dimensions represent vertical and horizontal alignment of HRM communications; the third dimension represents type of communications between the organization and employee.

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The intersections of the three dimensions allow mapping of Social Media platforms and services utilized for the respective purpose.
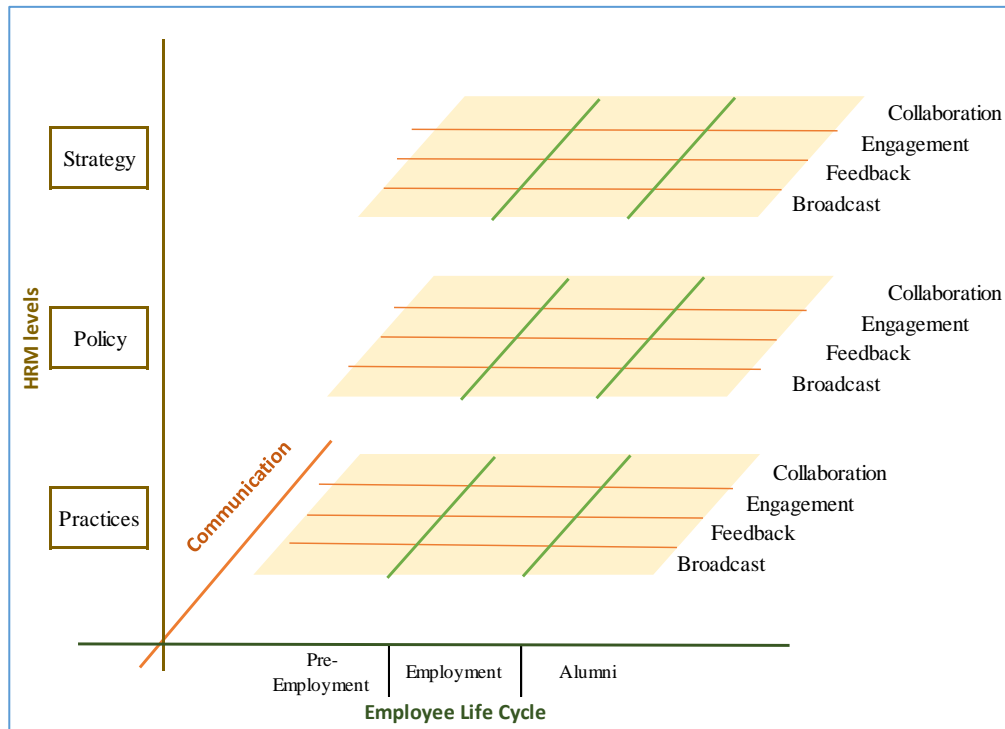

Figure 2 – High-Performance Work System as Communication System: evaluation model - illustration

Viewing HPWS as a system of communications directed at the employee, the origin of the message can be traced to different management layers between practice and strategy. For the definition of the Communication values, four communication scenarios are used, based on their origin and direction. *Broadcast* is unidirectional communication originating from HR (e.g. policy announcements), *Feedback* is unidirectional communication originating from employee (e.g. submitting a CV for an application or recruiter performing a database search), *Engagement* – bidirectional communication between HR and employee and *Collaboration* – bidirectional communication between employees. The direction of the communication represents the level to which employees are involved, i.e. does the employee have a voice at a certain stage in the Employee Life Cycle and how far reaching is her message. Social Media tools, systems and platforms involved in the communication process at each stage can be mapped according to the communication direction and Employee Life Cycle stage, thus supporting sense making of the practical utilization of Social Media in any given organizational environment.

Following the strong situation / strong system approach by Bowen and Ostroff (2004) the strength of the HPWS is assessed on three strength criteria.

Distinctiveness requires the communication to originate from a *legitimate* source – thus the "strategy"-level provides visibility on whether the communication has its origins in and support of senior leadership team. A further requirement for distinctiveness is *visibility*. The continuity of the communication across strategy, policy and practice levels supports the notion of the message actually being received by the intended recipient. Breaks along the vertical chain would indicate that messages from employees might not reach strategic decision makers and vice versa. Finally there is a *relevance* requirement, meaning that different communication types and levels of information and engagement are necessary at distinct or overlapping stages of Employee Life Cycle.

Consistency requires that communications sent at different levels do not carry contradicting messages. This is jeopardised, if strategy is not consistent with practices or, indeed, practices are not backed up and governed by appropriate policies. A further indicator of stability is the avoidance of double-bind communication (that is incongruent or contradicting messages) across HR practices. Here again, a framework of controlling policies would be required to coordinate the communication flow. A final dimension is the stability over time – in the model the "time" element is represented through the Employee Life Cycle stages, so that consistency of communication flows across Employee Life Cycle stages would reflect consistency of communication over time.

Consensus is achieved when there is an agreement among employees and management (HR). Firstly, an agreement at a management (i.e. strategy) level contributing to *visibility* will ensure that there is a consensus between senders. Ensuring that the messages are consistent, consensus – i.e. the accuracy of message understanding and its acceptance – can be promoted between employees and HR. Consensus and consistency are linked together. Secondly, consensus is influenced by employee's perception of "fairness". Besides distributive and procedural justice (e.g. fair pay and equal treatment) the communication channels can contribute positively to perception of fairness by providing transparency, introducing feedback loops into the

HR-employee communication and facilitating employee's contributions in form of employee-HR communication channels or bi-directional communication channels.

The above model allows the evaluation of any given Communication System across all these criteria. Utilisation of actual Social Media solutions can now be mapped along the communication paths and evaluated in terms of consistency, level of penetration and application.

Case Study

In order to demonstrate application of the framework described above, two exemplar case studies are presented here showcasing different approaches and attitudes towards utilization of Social Media in the field of HRM. Two large UK organizations from different sectors – "UK Bank plc" representing the financial services sector and "Consumer Goods plc" representing the production sector were interviewed about their use of Social Media tools for employee engagement and communication.

Method

To address different possible utilization scenarios, two companies known to the researcher to engage with Social Media are selected to showcase and evaluate the usability of the proposed framework. The ability to contrast findings from individual case studies would add to construct validity by providing different sources of evidence (Yin 2009).

The central question of the study is to evaluate how Social Media is being utilized by HR to engage and communicate with potential, current and former employees.

The first case study focuses on Consumer Goods plc – a UK based international producer of fast moving consumer goods with an employee force of 173,000 in 190 countries with about 8,000 based in the UK. The company is home to some of the most well-known consumer brands and is therefore very publicity conscious. Just recently Consumer Goods plc introduced "Chatter" – a Social Media application to encourage internal communication and collaboration.

The second case study involved UK Bank plc – a UK based international bank with involvement in private and investment banking; its workforce is about 140,000

operating in around 50 countries; almost 25% (around 33,000 employees) are UK based. Being active in private and commercial banking sectors the organization is very much aware of its public image. Following restructuring attempts after the most recent financial crisis, UK Bank plc is in a process of consolidating many of its IT systems to create a more uniform IS landscape.

Both case studies focus on UK based companies with large and diverse workforces. The organizations are different in the composition of their workforce and in their approach to employee engagement and openness which was also made clear during the interviews.

Two open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with mid-level HR managers who are involved with implementation and selection of tools used by HR. The respondents were not presented with a list of Social Media tools: all tools listed in findings were named by respondents. By choosing interviewees at this level it was hoped, that the respondents will have enough insight into what tools are currently being used and how, but also understand the strategic requirements of the business. It was a conscious decision not to interview HR directors at a more senior level to allow the practitioners to express their views on how technologies are actually utilized as oppose the more strategic view of how technologies should be used(Orlikowski 2000). Another decisive selection criteria was the technology-oriented position of the respondents – both were involved with selection and implementation of information systems in HR environment. Finally, both respondents are personally known to the researcher from previous work and private encounters whilst at the same time not involved with the interviewer at present and are unlikely to enter a business or dependency relationship with the researcher in the future. It was hoped, that through personal yet loose connection the openness of the respondents will be ensured and that the researcher will be able to access information which would not have been available otherwise.

For the coding Respondents are coded "CxRy" for "Case x Respondent y", the Interviewer is coded "Iv". Quotes from the interviews are verbatim with minor grammatical corrections and minor pauses and filler words such as "hmm" omitted to increase readability.

Analysis and Discussion

Both organizations are utilizing Social Media to engage with potential, current and former employees. The levels of Social Media utilization vary significantly depending on organization and on the Employee Life Cycle stage. The case study findings are discussed according to the Employee Life Cycle stages in the theoretical model, with attention paid to HR hierarchy levels and communication types.

Consumer Goods plc

Social Media is used at all Employee Life Cycle stages at Consumer Goods plc.

Pre-Employment Stage

Probably most publicly visible element is Consumer Goods' careers page – it is fully in the public space and is accessible by any internet user without the need of login. Social Media is being used for a variety of communication types.

Pre-Employment Stage – Engagement

The website links to a number of Social Media applications, displaying live content from Twitter, Facebook and YouTube and links to a blog. Consumer Goods tries to broadcast authentic information to the potential employees and also to engage them in a conversation.

> C1R1: "((YouTube videos were)) uploaded fairly recently […] it's interesting that it is not just videos on ''Hey what is it like to join Consumer Goods' Graduate Scheme'', it's videos that are showing what our graduates are doing on a daily basis or showing something current…"

> Iv: "The candidates and the Talent Pool, what options do they have to go back to you and to have a conversation?"

> C1R1: "That's the idea of our Facebook page and our various channels: it's about interaction. We would have someone in the company whose job it is to interact…. Social Media – it's about having a dialogue."

Pre-Employment Stage – Broadcast and Feedback

Another Social Media platform in use is LinkedIn. There appears to be no tight integration between these platforms and no clear guidance on how to utilize them:

C1R1: "…all our jobs are advertised on an internal job board, but when we go external they should also be uploaded onto LinkedIn."

Iv: "Is there a company-wide policy or is it something you just do in HR?"

C1R1: "I do not think it is a company-wide policy, but depending on the area of the business, if it's difficult to recruit, then it might be a strategy we would use."

Pre-Employment Stage – Feedback and Engagement on Linked In

The utilization of LinkedIn for broadcast is conditional at best ("should be uploaded", "might be a strategy we could use") and appears to be based on loose guidelines rather than well-defined policy or strategy. On the other hand, the utilization of LinkedIn to collect information about potential employees is more extensive:

C1R1: "… we use LinkedIn also to search for these people with kind of the technical skill but able to lead and business partner and drive initiatives forward but also for women, 'cause there aren't many women…"

taking this forward to a one-to-one conversation:

C1R1: "… recruiters might contact them and put them in a pool and say 'ok, you might not be ready to have a job now… but we keep you in our pool and our network'."

The employees, including HR team members who are not directly involved in recruitment, such as the respondent, have limited insight into the communication channels utilized for engagement with potential employees. This confirms, that employees, other than recruiters, are not involved in any communication with potential employees.

C1R1: "… here we have links to our Twitter page, our Facebook page and YouTube. I have not been on here …"

Iv: "((on LinkedIn))… what are your options as an employee?

C1R1: "I mean, if it was me, then obviously my first port of call would be our internal job board…"

Employment Stage – Collaboration and Engagement

Internally, a completely different set of Social Media tools is utilized to communicate to and with employees. A recent addition to the Social Media mix is "Chatter"- a web based communication and sharing platform developed by Salesforce:

C1R1: "This was introduced pretty much in the last year. Essentially it is Facebook for businesses…"

The roll out of the application was triggered at the strategic level and happened at stages, whereby currently all employees have access to the desktop and mobile version of the application. This platform use is actively encouraged by senior leadership and some stories confirm successful employee engagement with senior leadership as well as across functions.

Iv: "Who has access to that?"

C1R1: "So everybody did. […] it was launched in stages. I think HR were one of the last, by the time it came to us, we knew about it from all the people we business partner…"

C1R1: "…If you think of the work associated with Marketing: so maybe one of them have come up with an advert for television and they want some thoughts and views on that. Which they would normally get from hiring in Joe Bloggs to come and view their TV advert, they can just post it on the website and from comments – ideas spring off each other."

C1R1: "…((department within Consumer Goods)) is recently being redesigned and structures changed right from the top. Before that was happening […] we decided to look at the strategy and as a part of looking at the strategy the senior leaders set a framework and then went out to the business through Chatter to do, using quote marks here, an online jam on Chatter on each of the five areas they've selected, to get employee input. It was a live thing we did for twenty four hours […] and that actually worked very well."

The uptake and active engagement does not come naturally and there is a distinct absence of guidelines, policies and training:

C1R1: "I feel like I put pressure on myself to be an early adopter. It does not naturally come to me to logon yet, but I will make a conscious effort every week and try and post something. […] in Facebook, when you are posting with friends, this comes a lot easier, 'cause you know what you are posting won't come back and haunt you."

C1R1: "I don't think the company has developed a policy yet. With Consumer Goods everyone is reasonably well behaved."

C1R1: "Have we created kind of rules and guidelines? Have we provided formal training? I think this is something we could do more of."

Alumni – Engagement and Collaboration

LinkedIn is also utilized for keeping in touch with alumni, there appears to be in implicit policy of "keeping contact" with former employees. Alumni are also seen as potential future-employees.

C1R1: "… we add ourselves as contact, whenever we leave the organization; we can see where everyone else has gone as well…"

C1R1: "… because it is a relationship based company, I am sure there are many of us who are keeping contact with those who left the organization…"

C1R1: "… we also get a lot of boomerang hires ((employees who have left and came back))"

All Stages - Collaboration

At the same time, some Social Media applications are being used without a conscious effort and without support or endorsement from the management team. Combination of Skype (online telephony, chat and conferencing) and Dropbox (an online file sharing application) is being utilized to communicate with current employees, alumni and friends.

C1R1: "I have two Skype accounts – one business and one home and I regularly get friends added to my business account and vice versa. It's such an easy application […] in terms of it working technically, like not having any issues – it's awesome! […] My preference is Skype because it's easier. Our IT department doesn't support technical problems with Skype but we don't disallow it and actually everybody uses it."

The picture presented shows that a variety of Social Media application is being utilized at all Employee Life Cycle stages. There appears to be some discrepancy in the vertical alignment of Social Media utilization, especially the lack of policy (formal or otherwise) as well as the mix of platforms utilized for engagement and communication. Interesting is the two-way utilization of Social Media tools: on one hand the top-down implementation of Chatter to encourage collaboration and on the other hand emerging practice of using Skype and Dropbox for communication and sharing.

UK Bank plc

Following the financial crisis of 2008, UK Bank plc is in a process of restructuring. With six different organizations working under the same brand now merging into a larger more unified organization covering many aspects of financial services such as private and investment banking, insurance service etc.

All stages - Engagement

The specifics of the financial sector and the fact that the organization is currently in a process of re-definition are used as a justification for the fact that focus on employee engagement is somewhat secondary in its HR operation.

C2R1: "… the first piece to understand about the organization is that we are in a tremendous period of change we pretty much integrating six different parts, massive parts of organization, into one organization, so the way Social Media is used in one part of organization can be different to a different part."

C2R1: "Traditionally we are not really good at engaging people through Social Media or any direct sources should I say. The job board is the only prominent direct sourcing channel."

Pre-Employment – Feedback

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There is some scepticism about the value of Social Media engagement prevailing in the organization.

> C2R1: "…the investment banking side, the money making side, it will be very difficult to find anyone via social media."

> C2R1: "Facebook is a great example: I used to be very active on Facebook but now I think I have done too much, too much time spent on it […] it is almost now going to regression in terms of people re-evaluating what they are doing, I almost think this has to happen with people using tools to attract someone."

Pre-Employment Stage – Engagement

Engagement and conversations do happen on LinkedIn. Encouraged and supported by the organization as well as outside organization's control.

> C2R1: "The main tool we started using to attract candidates directly is LinkedIn and that's probably the only tool we started using in a more consistent manner. I know there are some plans to have a something in Twitter and other channels."

> C2R1: "It's only recently that we have created our own page, prior to that you could find probably tens and tens of different groups created by other alumni and different people but not really managed by our business."

> C2R1: "Direct Target team […] that team's target is to source people, LinkedIn being the most prominent ((tool))…"

Pre-Employment Stage - Broadcast

Despite some engagement activity, the focus of Social Media utilization is placed much more on broadcast information rather than engagement.

> C2R1: "… I mean it's more of a 'we publish and then we receive' rather than we source…"

> C2R1: "… the key will be getting personalized content ((to the employees))."

Employment Stage - Engagement

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Internal use of Social Media tools appears to be not wide-spread and taken sceptically, which partially appears to be rooted in the corporate culture:

> Iv: "How would that feedback be sought during implementation or due diligence process?"

> C2R1: "Well, I mean, it's addressing stakeholders, you don't really go and engage the whole population, you have select groups of people of parts of organization…"

> Iv: "Do you utilize any internal communication tools?"

> C2R1: "Yes we have: it's called b-chat, nothing but a messenger tool …"

Alumni Stage

There are no active initiatives to use any Social Media tools for Alumni engagement. The respondent was aware of some active Alumni groups, however not participating and the groups were outside of organizational control.

In this early stage of Social Media utilization certain practices have evolved in parts outside organization's control and at present without visible vertical alignment. It remains to be seen if the adoption of Social Media tools will lead to creation of policies and strategic initiatives.

Case Comparison

Social Media appears to become entrenched in HR practices and with that the importance of understanding this phenomenon increases (Hauptmann and Steger 2013). Both organizations utilize Social Media at the practice level. Emergent practices and popular tools and applications of these tools become visible. The findings are summarized in Figure 3.
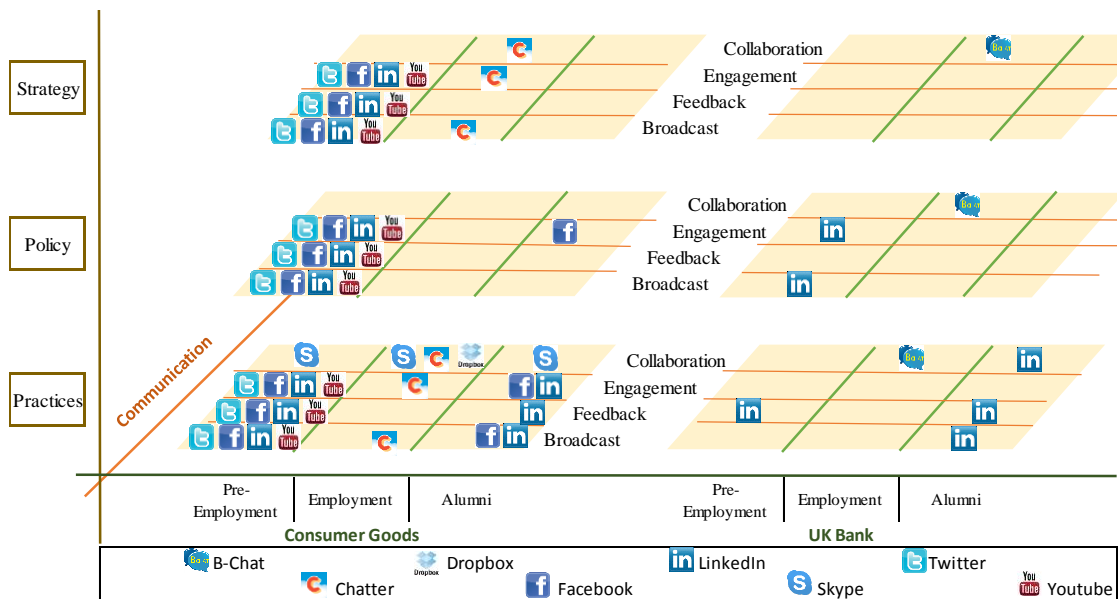
Figure 3 Social Media utilization comparison: Consumer Goods and UK Bank

Interestingly, same Social Media tools are used differently by different organization.

Pre-Employment Stage

Consumer Goods engages with potential employees using a variety of Social Media tools and platforms. There is a clear strategic position and a strong policy governing use of Social Media tools for broadcasting information to potential employees, collecting information about potential employees and engaging in a dialogue.

On the contrast, UK Bank has a policy about broadcasting information to potential employees (posting jobs to LinkedIn) and engaging with them via LinkedIn groups, however on the operational "practice"-level LinkedIn is only used to collect information about potential employees through searches for matching candidates.

Employment Stage – Engagement and Collaboration

Strategically and on practice level both, UK Bank and Consumer Goods use in-house tools for bi-directional communication as well as to broadcast information and, in case of Consumer Goods, to collect employee's opinions. UK Bank polices and regulates the use of internal Social Media platform, whereas Consumer Goods lacks the policy and training, which results in low levels of adoption.

Employment Stage - Collaboration

The Role of Social Media in Human Resource Management

Employees at Consumer Goods utilise public Social Media tools for internal and external communication and information sharing. There is no support for utilisation of external Social Media tools, however employees just use them "because it is so easy". It needs to be noted that Consumer Goods does not explicitly disallow access to these tools.

Alumni Stage

It appears that LinkedIn is actively used by both organizations to collect and broadcast data from and to former employees. Additionally, UK Bank's alumni organize themselves into groups where they continue to keep in contact, albeit outside the organization's control.

One common factor is that the utilization of Social Media tools appears to happen "bottom-up", with practices emerging first and triggering the necessity for policies and strategy adjustment. Public Social Media tools appear to be predominantly used for engagement with external groups of employees (future or former employees) and this type of engagement also seems to acquire a greater level of attention from policy and strategy makers within the organizations. In case of Consumer Goods it is notable that publicly available Social Media tools are being utilized for internal employee to employee collaboration without support from higher hierarchy levels.

In terms of strong-system evaluation, neither case displayed a consistent and distinctive message. Consumer Goods utilises several Social Media tools and combination of these into an integrated IS at the pre-employment stage. At later stages they do not employ the same system for employee or alumni engagement. The vertical alignment of communication is broken for example in Chatter, where employees are unsure of "what is expected" due to lack of policy and guidance. UK Bank is currently in a re-structuring phase and is lacking consistency of tools across different parts of organization as well as Employee Life Cycle stages. At present there is no indication of a strong communication system in either case.

Conclusion

The proposed framework encapsulates HPWS as a system of communications between HR and employee. It allows for evaluation of vertical alignment of HPWS as

well as horizontal alignment of HR activities across Employee Life Cycle. The framework was used to analyse the qualitative data from two pilot studies and supports research on High Performance Work Systems allowing understanding of vertical and horizontal alignment of HR practices as well as uni- or bi-directionality of communications (compare(Boxall and Macky 2009)). Evaluation of system's strength and resulting climate, as well as research into intended, implemented and perceived practices as suggested in Bowen & Ostroff (2004) is strongly supported by the framework: the two case studies demonstrate how gaps in vertical alignment of practices, policies and strategies and horizontal alignment of practices over time can be identified. Focus on technologies in practice, on what technologies are really being used as oppose to what technologies could and should be used, allows deeper understanding of real-life current and ongoing phenomenon of Social Media in organizations(Orlikowski 2000),(Silverman 1993). Finally, studies on genesis of practices (Guest 2011) which are supported, encouraged and enabled by new technologies will be able to utilise the proposed framework and models for further research.

Limitations

The case studies presented here are used as a trial application of the proposed model. The findings are very limited and, considering the organization sizes of well over 100,000 employees, the interviews conducted have not revealed a holistic picture and represent just snapshots of reality. The juxtaposition of the two organizations is not unproblematic in itself insofar as despite the fact that both organizations are UK based international corporations, the workforce, market and consumers of each organization are different and the approach to recruitment, training and retention as well as alumni engagement are therefore different. Finally, respondents were not presented with a list of possible Social Media applications and it is possible, that some Social Media applications that are being utilised by these organizations were not mentioned. Further data collection within these two and across multiple organisations and involving more respondents will provide a fuller and more consistent picture.

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