Contemporizing the Employment Lifecycle through HR's Deployment of Social Media & Electronic Technology

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Overview

Less than five years ago, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, you name the social networking site, was blocked by my employer. Now, most firms not only allow these pages to be accessed at work, but value having a well-connected organization as a competitive advantage. Companies will spend $6.4 billion on socially connected technologies in 2016, as predicted by Forrester Research (Dewing, McCarthy, Mines, Schandler, Yamnitsky, 2011). Further, a joint study by The MIT Sloan School of Management and Deloitte surveyed 2,600 executives across 25 industries and 99 countries. More than 50 percent ranked their "social business maturity" at a 3 or below (on a scale from 1 to 10), while only 17 percent would consider their company to be at a 7 or above (Kiron, Palmer, Phillips & Berkman, 2013). Overall, this suggests that around the globe most human resources professionals are in the early stages of using advanced technology and social media to support the overall talent and business strategy.

Throughout this paper, enterprise social networking (ESN) is defined as technology that allows transparent information to be shared between current employees (and potential employees) while fostering relationships among the individuals. Examples could be consumer-based social media like LinkedIn, internally developed portals like GE's Colab, or social software that is created by third parties such as Yammer (Kiron et al, 2013). Part I of this paper primarily looks at consumer-based social media for recruiting purposes, while Part II mainly considers internally developed portals for collaboration. Regardless of the specificities of the tool, both IBM and McKinsey & Company, in separate analyses, found that companies with teams that use social networking financially out-perform those that do not (Schweer, Assimakopoulous, Cross, Thomas, 2011).

Although HR currently oversees and manages their firm's ESN in just 4 percent of cases (Kiron et al, 2013), outlined throughout this paper are various ways the function can not only

directly become a prolific user of the technology, but also one who influences stakeholders and the workforce at large to effectively use the tools. As a result, talent will become embedded within the organization throughout their employment lifecycle by connecting with their colleagues to increase productivity and innovation – ultimately maximizing business results.

Part I

Branding & Broadening – Generating Interest and Burgeoning the Applicant Pool

The power of a brand is a familiar concept – marketers have long leveraged the concept to win customers in crowded marketplaces, and branding has become the cornerstone of business strategies for many companies. In its most general sense, a brand is nothing less than the embodiment of all the associations, both tangible and intangible, related to an object (DeLeone, 2006). Ambler and Barrow (1996) tailor the definition of employment brand as "the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment, and identified with the employing company." Significant empirical research demonstrates that a highly favorable employment brand enables a firm to gain a decided advantage in the external labor market by attracting more and better talent, engaging internal human capital and, over the long-term, creating consistency and organizational resolve (Hepburn, 2005; D'Alessandro, 2001).

HR professionals looking to promulgate their desired employment brand through social media must recognize three essential questions: (1) where and in what talent market will the firm compete, (2) what social media channels will be deployed to attack the desired markets, and (3) what level of employment brand is realistically achievable and internally consistent with the organization. At face value, most leaders will confidently assert that their firm intends to attract the "best and the brightest" in every function or discipline, across all geographies, in every market that the firm competes in. But the reality is a well-articulated strategic vision and an appropriate definition of a

firm's core competencies, combined with limited resources force the firm to distinguish talent markets instrumental to current and future success and focus resources on these markets. It is vital for HR leaders to recognize that this may imply that a particular function, such as marketing, or a particular geography, such as Asia or Latin America, could mandate unique approaches. For instance, if a start-up firm operates in a high-tech field, more resources toward trendy venues such as Twitter, Foursquare and Tumblr would attract a targeted population who are presumably users themselves and have high expectations for the firm's ESN integration. Conversely, a manufacturer that intends to compete on low cost in rural areas may take a different approach, perhaps focusing on Facebook, which, on average, has a lower income and education user base (Davison, Maraist & Bing, 2011).

Physical geography is also vitally important. Consider a firm that intends to have a robust growth focus in Latin America, an emerging market that has a low level of smart phone distribution and a lack of familiarity with many US-centric social media channels. Here, the organization would be wise to deploy more rudimentary forms of branding, such as search engine optimization. Indeed, research suggests that where there is low-level smartphone deployment, in addition to a general lack of pre-existing social media campaigns alongside a higher average age of the population, advanced social media will be less effective (Miranda, 2012). Moreover, the firm must then decide what particular functions in the organization it intends to target; engineers may have different expectations for the contemporaneity and ubiquity of social media than hourly production associates.

Once a firm has decided on a target talent market, it naturally follows that the organization must decide what social media channels will be most effective. As previously discussed, different social media channels will yield different candidate pools across different professional functions. Firms must endeavor to target those social media channels that best suit their critical talent needs.

For example, research demonstrates that some social networking sites attract users that hold less formal education than others (O'Shea, 2010).

Finally, a firm must recognize that while the ideal is to be the employer of choice, HR leaders must conduct an honest inquiry to determine where their organization falls on the continuum from recognition (candidates may know the firm exists, but little else is known other than name awareness) to recall (some knowledge of the firm, and its operations and talent needs) to top-tier (one of the most desired firms from a candidate's expectations). It is highly unlikely that an organization will be able to progress from virtually unknown to an employer of choice overnight, and firms must deploy its social media strategy accordingly.

For instance, a firm with low recognition first needs to understand that people are not actively looking for information about them and will be exerting minimum effort to learn more. The keys here are to be unique with simple messaging on multiple venues that attracts interest. Conversely, a firm with a high level of recognition will have job seekers actively seeking out information and looking for thorough insight about the job, so perhaps a 5-minute video on YouTube where candidates can "meet" current employees would be appropriate. Overall, cultivating an optimal mix of social media can result in a significantly expanded applicant pool, as evidenced by the case of TiVo, which attributed an 11 percent increase in referrals to an integrated mix of social media spearheaded by the use of LinkedIn and other prevalent sites (Lauby, 2010).

Organizations must also be cognizant of several factors that can influence candidate perceptions, such as ensuring that the information presented on social media channels is signifying that the company is moving in a forward trajectory, has engaging content and a representative personality, is consistent from channel to channel, and embodies the corporate culture at large (Madia, 2011). Additionally, the firm must make every effort to ensure that the candidate can easily discern where (and perhaps who) to go to in order to actually apply for a job or inquire for further

information. Finally, once a firm has deployed certain modalities of social media, it is absolutely essential that the firm devote ample resources to the timely, accurate, and attentive feedback and communication to prospective candidates after they engage with the organization through social media (Madia, 2011). Some firms even share accountability for social media between HR and marketing, generating a favorable fusion of both functions' respective strengths, which can manifest in a strong candidate experience (Miranda, 2012; Orler, 2013).

Winnowing & Embedding – Screening and Selecting the Best Candidates

While broad reaching and aggressive social media campaigns undoubtedly inflate the applicant pool, research demonstrates that this increased exposure also increases the number of unqualified applicants (Davison et al, 2011). This consequence mandates that organizations examine the unique attributes of social media channels to maximize the selection of the strongest candidates and mitigate the risks associated with social media.

The employee selection sequence can essentially be viewed as a funnel: applicants represent the widest end of the funnel, an initial assessment narrows the pool to those who meet minimum qualifications, a substantive assessment(s) winnows the candidate pool down to the finalists, and a discretionary assessment(s) then results in those candidates that will receive offers – the most narrow end of the funnel (Pulakos, 2005). There are implications for social media channels throughout this process. Because certain social media sources have different candidate compositions, HR leaders must recognize what sources are more likely to yield certain candidates. While there is a general lack of substantive, academic research on the percentage of applicants from various social media channels that pass the initial assessment(s), it is well documented (and somewhat intuitive) that career-oriented sources such as LinkedIn and Jobvite routinely yield a high number of qualified applicants (Doherty, 2010). Often in an initial or substantive assessment, the

resume or online profile will be evaluated in terms of the candidate's experience and education. Research does demonstrate that the number of "deceptions", or candidate falsifications of credentials, is on whole equal or even slightly less on social media sources that are publicly available as opposed to traditional resume posting mechanisms, lending credibility to such recruiting sources (Narisi, 2009; Davison et al , 2011). Finally, as it pertains to discretionary assessments, many firms are experimenting with virtual in-person interviews in order to streamline hiring processes and eliminate the burdensome costs of flying candidates to central locations to interview (Yang, 2011). While the cost savings from such practices are easy to discern, little research exists on the effectiveness of virtual interviews as compared to in-person interviews.

Social media offers innovative alternatives to the traditional, candidate-initiated "seek and apply" application procedures. Perhaps the most significant shift to the tenured recruitment paradigm is passive candidates – qualified candidates who are not actively seeking a new job are now much easier to locate in recent years. On sites such as LinkedIn, recruiters can view candidate's physical location, education, experiences, qualifications and relevant certifications, and review recommendations and endorsements. The readily available nature of this information combined with advanced recruiter search engine capabilities can aid in generating large lists of qualified candidates in remarkably rapid time frames. LinkedIn (2012) estimates that about 79 percent of candidates are passive, and although the actual percentage of candidates who would reasonably consider a job switch may be smaller, it still likely amounts to more than active candidates. LinkedIn also notes that senior level professionals are even less likely to be active seekers: according to a study of 9,906 professionals across several industries, only 14 percent of senior level employees are considered active seekers. As such, the use of social media to greatly accelerate the rate of passive candidate discovery is a compelling notion for HR professionals (LinkedIn, 2012).

HR leaders may also want to explore even more contemporary alternatives for selection

purposes. For instance, depending on the position, firms may want to consider online "gamification". Gamification is defined as the concept of employing game mechanics to non-game activities, which is this case would be selection decisions (Akken Cloud, 2013). Although gamification is still in a nascent stage and far from empirically proven, it holds significant promise. Consider a firm that deploys behavioral based interviews and case assessments and presentations as part of its selection arsenal. This firm may be able to create an online simulation in avatar form, emulating case-based situations normally asked in an interview. This would reflect the candidate's decisions in a real-life scenario as opposed to an interview question or written case analysis. A good example of gamification for hiring processes is Smarterer, an organization that deploys over 900 tests for employment purposes and has been featured on Inc., Mashable, Forbes, The Huffington Post and ere.net. Many firms pay Smarterer in order to use a bevy of their game-related assessments for candidate evaluation and frequently attest to the successful implementation of such assessments.

Using social media to effectuate screening and selection processes clearly has tremendous potential. However, employers should be mindful of some serious risks that exist by using social media tools for these purposes. As previously discussed, the applicant pool is dramatically altered when a firm uses online recruiting tools. Although the fastest growing segment of the population adopting social networking is over the age of 35, a disconnect in demographics still remains. While 32 percent of the population between the ages of 23 to 35 participated in social networking, only 20 percent of the population between the ages of 50 to 65 participated – only 5 percent are 65 and older. In addition, statistics show that race and gender play a role in social networking site demographics (O'Shea, 2012). All of this suggests that HR departments should consider a wide spectrum of social media sites for applicant inclusion and make sure to still employ traditional means of recruitment or face the potential consequences of disparate impact.

Employers should also be forewarned that information on social media sites often includes a

plethora of statistical characterizations about the applicant including those protected by Title VII and ADEA (O'Shea, 2012). Viewing demographic data in and of itself may actually be enough to designate a particular selection procedure untenable or precarious at best in the eyes of the EEOC and the legal process in general. Firms' HR leaders should ensure that they partner closely with the legal department in order to safeguard the organization and limit potential legal liability.

Part II

Organization Optimization –Leveraging Knowledge Permeation

The turn of the century produced the proliferation of the Internet and computer-mediated communication, CMC, commonly thought of as instant messaging, email, teleconferencing and company intranet (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Individuals gained the ability to connect with colleagues and client groups spanning countries. These CMC tools remain convenient and widely used today, but unless an individual is a designated recipient of a particular message, the information is essentially hidden to everyone else within the organization (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Now, with ESN, individuals can contribute ideas and knowledge to a broad audience, without a defined recipient in mind. Power distances regarding job title hierarchy are moderated once behind a screen, and colleagues can bypass boundaries established by traditional offices and become empowered to connect to individuals with relevant resources. Moreover, employees can easily find documents, presentations and spreadsheets, then tailor them to their specific circumstance without spending time exerting duplicative efforts.

To obtain the benefit of reuse, research by Mejova, Schepper, Bergman and Lu (2011) suggests that workers should build virtual relationships, as employees are considerably more likely to reuse a presentation by a "friend." Further, allowing employees to create profile pages with photos, directory information and keywords or a summary of expertise or projects that are searchable will

allow individuals to connect with the right people for the right information being sought and increase the overall tacit knowledge of the organization. Another advantage is that in the past, ideas may have been misattributed and an individual may not have received credit and accolades for their work – but now, content is connected to the creator. HR leaders can monitor usage of the site and identify who from their client group is posting quality content and are high performers. Finally, in addition to the increased access to information, networked technology provides metaknowledge – knowledge about the knowledge (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). In other words: knowing who in the organization knows what.

To test this, an experiment was designed by Paul Leonardi (2012) from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. Two separate teams with similar demographics at the same company were instructed to use different approaches to communication. The marketing group was to use ESN software as their main communication portal for six months, while operations relied on traditional CMC. The results? After six months, the marketing group "improved their ability to find information by 31 percent – and to find people who knew the person with information by 71 percent" (Leonardi, 2012). While this may initially give the impression that employees are spending a significant amount of time using the site, these results occurred even with the marketing team sending, on average, one message each week. Regardless of the minimal messaging, the group was able to see, in a sense, transcripts of colleagues' conversations.

However, depending on the frequency of the posts, employees may begin to feel a sense of information overload when logging onto an ESN. While it would not be practical to have HR oversee all the content, there is a role to influence discussions around sustaining the tool, such as ensuring that IT has provided individuals with a robust search engine to find relevant content. In addition, there could be a way for other users to "rate" content so that it is easier to find and ensures that high-quality information is readily accessible. Without such practices, it would be typical to find

the tool becoming discarded and face the same graveyard fate of many company's wikis (Grudin & Poole, 2010).

While having too many non-quality posts is a challenge, so is the other of that spectrum: people not posting at all. One factor to consider is that not all employees use the tools in the same way and if there is a certain expectation about when/how/why to use, employees should be clearly communicated to and potentially trained. For example, contrary to many articles about millennials, Leonardi (2012) found that younger employees are actually less likely to use an ESN for professional purposes, presumably because these individuals are used to such tools as discernible from work-related communication. Although it may be tempting to offer financial or tangible incentives to contribute to the site, a risk here is that employees may then post without a legitimate reason. To better incentivize those who are participating, HR should consider virtual badges that recognize meaningful involvement so workers feel appreciated. This has an added advantage: increasing pride among the employees. Research suggests that pride builds emotional capital, the key determinant whether a social media strategy will be successful (Huy & Shipilov, 2012).

As HR plays a key role in being the stewards of company culture, they should consider the overall level of the abovementioned emotional capital that permeates through the organization – that is, the comprehensive sentiment of how employees feel. Research by Huy and Shipilov at INSEAD (2012) indicates that in addition to pride, authenticity plays into emotional capital. If the leadership, especially, is not perceived as being genuine, there is lack of trust and credibility of information being presented, and an overall sense of manipulation, which could undermine the goals set out by using social media. Authentic and sincere senior leaders posting on the sites will obtain "improved information flows, collaboration, lower turnover and higher employee motivation." Another factor of ESN success is attachment, building relationships with coworkers through shared interests and values. Social media can accelerate this because it fosters closeness, leading to trust

(Knowledge@Wharton, 2011). In 2010 IBM interviewed more than 700 chief human resources officers around the world and "capitalizing on collective intelligence" was among the top three opportunities for the function. As described here, embracing social media is part of the solution.

Another influential role that HR plays is partnering with the organization's corporate legal team, also mentioned earlier. Seemingly dozens of new social media related cases occur every year, as the law attempts to keep up with technology. Along with this, it is HR's responsibility to organize and promote a formal policy that outlines appropriate behavior for using technology. Forty percent of organizations have guidelines regarding various areas including what is acceptable (and not acceptable) on both professional sites and personal sites, the firm's right to monitor usage, and how to respond to feedback on social networking environments (SHRM, 2012). On IBM's public website (http://www.ibm.com/blogs/zz/en/guidelines.html) there is a Social Computing Guidelines page in regards to blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds and social media that involve a non-IBM audience with three broad rules that would apply to most, if not all, potential situations: (1) Protect confidential and proprietary information. (2) Respect privacy of others. (3) Make it clear that you're posting as an individual, not as a company representative on a personal blog.

Global Virtual Team Collaboration

Our workplace is simultaneously becoming more collaborative and more diverse with colleagues spanning across the world. Together, this provides challenges to companies as these heterogeneous teams are multinational, multicultural and geographically dispersed, while also offering opportunities to share knowledge and deliver a high-quality and innovative solution that will reach a global market (Maznevski & Peterson, 1997). This is not to say that diverse teams will consistently yield these benefits – rather, research shows discrepancy in these purported advantages (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Yet, cross-cultural dialogue is the underpinning of global

business and developing employees with intercultural capability is only becoming more pronounced. Geographic distribution and cultural differences that characterize global virtual teams typically has led to a loss of communication "richness", a loss of "teamness" and an increase in cultural misunderstandings (Carmel, 1999).

But using ESN and strategies in the above section (such as showing people's pictures and describing their interests), will provide the team with more than just swapping ideas and knowledge, but the broader capability to connect disparate individuals and encourage them to table their own judgment in exchange for learning about others' beliefs and values (Baba, Gluesing, Ratner, Wagner, 2004). Further, HR teams can influence positive performance by training employees to collaborate and share bodies of knowledge that develops new, innovative solutions and organizational aptitudes (Baba et al, 2004).

Again, there is a compelling business reason to invest resources in ESN: organizational outperformers are 57 percent more likely than underperformers to use collaborative and social networking tools to enable global teams to work more effectively together (IBM, 2010).

Career Development & Project Management

While much of the advancements in technology are centered on the social media realm, another technology with massive ramifications for changing the workplace is cloud-computing – that is, having a shared network that employees can access practically everywhere. This technology can dramatically impact the world of work in at least three possibilities.

One way is when employees are working in the same organization, just in different locations. For example, documents that are being worked on in Malaysia can be simultaneously worked on and shared seamlessly from Milwaukee. A second way is combining social tools with crowd sourcing and giving employees opportunities to work on projects they may not otherwise have been able to

(potentially because of geographic differences or not being able to match talent to appropriate projects). For example, IDEO, a global design firm, has an internal platform with profiles of the capabilities and performance ratings of its employees. This information is accessible to all leaders and they can tag and search profiles to find talent that may otherwise have gone under the radar. In addition to managers seeking employees, employees are able to target projects (Schweer el al, 2012). This is hugely positive for developing the talent pipeline: employees can work on a project in the cloud when they are not ready for a formal move or promotion, but such a project would be worthwhile for their development.

A third way, and perhaps the one that is most disruptive to business processes and organizations, is having access to a virtual global workforce, except not technically employed by any specific organization. Of course, not all managers are privy to this idea and it is currently used primarily for design work or content generation (Kaganer, Carmel, Hirschhheim, Olsen, 2013). While there may be some efficiencies gained by using this model, HR would want to consider various scenarios. For example, how could this impact engagement of full-time employees? The training and development of full-time employees when perhaps someone with better skills is available to work on a project Risk management? As in most cases, HR wears many hats and thinking through the ramifications on the workforce is a key role here.

Conclusion

Overall, social media infiltrates our personal lives, but the line is becoming increasingly blurred with our professional selves. What starts at employees building virtual relationships could eventually get to the point where it is seamless with other forms of communication as the social business maturity of the workplace improves.

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