

Social Media in Organizational Human Resource Management (HRM): Benefits, Risks and Challenges

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Why Social Media in HR?

In today's times, organizations have to deal with a rapidly changing environment. Organizational learning and agility are perhaps, the only way to succeed in this kind of environment. Organizations are seeking to enhance these capabilities by formulating learning communities, as well as making use of advances in technology, such as, social technologies. Social media has opened up several opportunities for HR professionals to improve communication and connect on a more personal level with both employees and clients. There are many social networks available that enable a range of opportunities such as information sharing and internal branding to research and recruiting. There is a lot of potential of social technologies that is not fully understood and utilized, in any function of organizational management, be it HR and Learning & Development (L&D) or marketing and branding. There are potentials, as well as challenges and risks in adopting social technologies, and best practices to make them work.

HR Areas Leveraging Social Media

Social Media platforms can be used in four major HR areas: Hiring, Collaboration and Communication, Talent Management and Learning and Development, and Internal Branding.

A lot of readily available research suggests that broadly, social media capability, readiness, and use in the various areas in organizations has been found to be as follows:

- Hiring: 60%
- Communication and collaboration: 44%
- Internal branding: 43%
- Talent management: 22%

Recruitment and hiring are the areas where HRM is most widely and most successfully using social media tools.

The primary social media tools being used by these companies are the following:

- Linked In
- Facebook
- Google
- Yahoo
- Twitter
- You Tube

Benefits

There are numerous benefits associated with using social media in HRM.

It can help reduce the costs of hiring talent and also increase the speed of recruitment. It can also provide access to a wider talent base and pool of applicants, as also a gender diverse talent pool. It can help increase brand visibility to potential employees and also increase internal awareness. It can provide a boost to creating an open corporate culture, fostering greater communication. It can give employees an opportunity to provide feedback to HR. The social media benefits include inclusiveness, instant and quick feedback on different HR aspects or issues, finding new talent on the job market and reducing the communication and marketing costs for Human Resources.

According to a 2013 Acas online panel survey of HR decision makers, social media sites can be used to identify potential applicants with certain characteristics or qualifications and to reach non-traditional applicants – i.e. those who are not in the usual target groups, or who have different backgrounds and experience – quickly and easily. A strong and creative social media profile can be a great brand builder and reflect positively on an organisation's image for potential candidates.

Risks and Challenges

Overall, there are two categories of risks associated with using social media in organizations.

Internal:

- Information security: Employees might leak privileged information that belongs to the organization, unknowingly or intentionally.
- Lack of control on ownership: Employees might discuss business issues or information with customer outside of approved framework for such discussions.
- Public disclosure of internal policies or issues: Internal organizational issues or policies might be made public.
- Disclosure of Personal information: Disclosure of sensitive personal information into the workplace (political views, sexual orientation, lifestyle issues, etc.)
- Diversity: Potential issues around equality and diversity across applicant pool
- Accuracy: The accuracy of information available to organizations through social media cannot be guaranteed.
- Variability in type and amount of information available across an applicant pool could be an issue.

External:

- The potential for rapid or viral growth of negative sentiment about an organization is a big risk. This could be either in response to a communication by or about the organization or market discussions on products or services.
- Inappropriate or inaccurate commentary on an organization's performance, including financial performance is another external risk.
- Misrepresentation or misconceptions around an organization's position on public issues can cause harm to the organization's reputation or brand image.
- Data privacy breach related to lost personal identifiable information (PII) is a threat.
- Perceptions of invasion of privacy of applicants can be difficult to manage.

To utilize the full potential of the opportunities social media presents in HRM, it is important to address the risks, build frameworks that leverage the strengths and mitigate the risks, and have clear policies defined. Organizations that succeed in doing so are able to gain the much needed competitive edge in today's environment.