



Social Media as a Tool for the Development of Young Employees

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Abstract: Employee development is one of the key processes constituting human resources management. Due to rapid progress in technology and accessibility of the internet, a significant part of human activity is being transferred to the virtual world. One of the most popular tools used on the internet is social media. It is beyond any discussion that the role of the internet and social media in employee development is increasing. Social media offer clear advantages for teaching employees from new generations (like Y or Z). Attributes, such as openness, collaboration and user-generated content, combined with social media's increasing popularity among young employees, are the reasons why the use of social networks in human resources development garners substantial interest among employers. This paper attempts to analyze how social media are used as a tool for supporting the development of young employees. This study was designed as an exploratory analysis of current practices, concerns, and perceptions of the use of social media in the training of young employees. The conducted research showed that only a small group of young employees equate the use of social media with development in the opinion of respondents. As a result, it is suggested that attention be paid not only to the effects of consciousness and unconsciousness on the developmental nature of these activities, but also to the positive and negative effects of their deepening.

Keywords: *Social media, human resources development, employees, collaboration*

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INTRODUCTION

Employee development is a multi-dimensional process. It may be realized through formalized activities like training courses and managing employees' career paths, but also by informal education activities. Nowadays, more and more actions taken by people take place on the internet. As a result of rapid technological advances, people have started using the internet for communication, entertainment, and various professional purposes. It is beyond any discussion that the increased use of the internet for entertainment, socializing, and education will continue to grow. One of the most powerful tools on the internet is social media. Social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn aggregate over 2 billion users. Much attention has been paid by researchers to investigate the usage and impact of social media on marketing, sales, and entertainment. Yet, very little academic research has been conducted on this phenomenon from a human resources management perspective. This exploratory study examines the impact of using social media on human resources development through interviews with 14 Human Resource (HR) Professionals to gain their views and experiences of using social media as a tool in developing young employees. The decision to investigate this topic was due to both scientific and professional interests of the author who, in his research work, focuses on the use of the internet in employee development. The purpose of this paper is to present arguments substantiating the use of social media in the development of young employees. The first part of the article is devoted to theoretical considerations, whereas the other presents the results of the research conducted by the author.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

For several decades, researchers have been undertaking numerous attempts at categorizing employees. The main objective that lays behind applying such divisions is to make a clear distinction among different attitudes, expectations, and behaviours of members of each group. The names of generations are inspired by important events, large-scale social movements, or well-diagnosed demographic changes. One of the most common categorizations is divisions into generations, such as Baby Boomers, X, Y, and Z (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). Slightly different classifications have been proposed by (Howe & Strauss, 2009) who distinguish a generation subsequent to Generation Z - Generation C, and yet others see Generation C as part of Generation Z. Another distinction was suggested by (Prensky, 2001), who decided to divide people into digital immigrants and digital natives. The labor market now is dominated by people born in the years 1960-1995, so those belonging to the generations of Baby Boomers, X, and Y. In the coming years, a new generation will enter the market - those who were born after 1995 - the so-called digital natives. There is widespread conviction in literature regarding the differences among these particular generations and the impact they have on the working environment. From the working environment point of view, young employees who grew up surrounded by modern technologies (those belonging to Generation Z and C and digital natives) are characterised by a different attitude towards work, expectations, and needs in comparison to previous generations. In addition, what is quite commonly pointed out are the young employees' expectations in the area of training methods. More specifically, it is concerning the rejection of methods for competency development which are seen as 'traditional and old-fashioned' in favour of modern computer-based methods, such as social learning or social media (Cewinska, Striker, & Wojtaszczyk, 2009; Fazlagic, 2008; Matchar, 2012; Nugraha & Indrawati, 2017; Sheahan & Sheahan, 2005). Members of the youngest generations that will soon enter the labor market are the people who, unlike the previous generations, did not have to learn how to use new technology. They cannot live without networks, mobile phones, e-mails, and social networking sites. Their world is multimedia (Friedrich, Peterson, Koster, & Blum, 2010). Employees belonging to the youngest generation are commonly labelled as "digital natives" or "the Net Generation" (Bennett & Maton, 2010). The main cause of this generation's designation is the close relationship they have with communication and information technologies. These relationships result from continuous exposure to modern technology stimuli (due to their ubiquity in everyday life). This relationship also refers to the way young people perceive technology - as a natural part of their lives and a fundamental tool of functioning (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008). Digital natives need interaction, emotion, and a stimulating ambience in their surroundings (Hojnacki, 2006). On the other hand, the information that comes to them should be condensed as compared to a text message or a headline. The normal environment, in which young people interact and communicate is social media. Social media is where they meet, read, discuss, observe, and analyze the activities of other users as well as comment on them.

Social media is the virtual space that allows people with similar interest to meet, communicate, share content, and discuss ideas (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; El-Den, Adikhari, & Adikhari, 2017). According to the Statista website, Facebook has 2.07 billion monthly active users while LinkedIn boasts over 467 million users. Social media could be used as a training tool in two different ways dependent on whether the development is a conscious, planned, and coordinated process initiated by the employer (formal learning), or based on social education (the exchange of information between members of the virtual community and is characterized as a unscheduled, uncontrolled activity without formal curriculum). Social media can be used as a separate Learning Management Systems (LMS) environment and as a normal communication space. Using social media as a separate space is based on creating groups, forums, chats, etc. crafted especially for learning purposes. Another way of using social media for human resources development is social learning. It should be mentioned that both ways of using social media have many advantages and supporters. Those who are for using it as an LMS claim that LMS environments possess numerous benefits, such as the ability to shift the focus from content-based learning to process-based learning (Vogel & Klassen, 2001), change passive learning to active learning (Herse & Lee, 2005), increase the student's engagement (Nunes & McPherson, 2003), and promote interaction between learners and teachers (West, Waddoups, & Graham, 2007). In addition, those promoting the use of social media as a social learning tool gain many advantages and strengths from such a solution. This includes promoting a more student-focused course allowing students to interact and collaborate with each other (Hoffman, 2013), enhancing learning of the subject, greater enjoyment of the learning module, concise and useful communication, timeliness, and greater realism. This also includes, in general, social media having a positive impact on the student's engagement and learning outcomes (Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011). In addition, it should be noted that research also does show some disadvantages of using social media as a learning environment. This

includes learners not willing to engage in discussions and be active on social media if all other elements of the training are held on a separate platform, such as Moodle (DeSchryver, Mishra, Koehler, & Francis, 2009). Sometimes, social media fail to provide a safe environment for collaboration (Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang, & Liu, 2012). Without structure, social media can negatively impact student learning (Light, 2011), and personal posts should be published carefully because they could affect the way in which tutors are perceived by students (Evans, 2014).

The evolution of social media means that all forms of learning in the virtual world gain in importance-as the place where many areas of human activity are being transferred. One of the fastest growing trends of electronic learning is informal development based on sharing knowledge in the virtual world. Learning through social media is undoubtedly a part of this trend of social learning.

The term “social learning” refers to both the theory of social learning and the place where educational processes are implemented-to social media. According to the concept of social learning, almost all the manifestations of learning resulting from direct experience have a positive effect. This is thanks to being able to observe the behaviour of other people and the consequences they have for others. The ability to learn by observation enables people to acquire behavioural patterns, without having to shape them gradually, by tedious trials and errors (Bandura, 2007).

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as an exploratory analysis of current practices, concerns, and perceptions of the use of social media in the training of young employees. Based on the review of literature and previous research, the author of the article has set the following research hypotheses:

1. Some social media are widely used by young workers, while there is considerable resistance from other groups.
2. Most employees and employers do not equate the development activities undertaken in the virtual world, such as information gathering, discussion or communication through social media with the process of employees developing knowledge and skills.
3. Young employees often unconsciously use the knowledge and skills acquired in the virtual world at work.

Given that there is relatively limited research on the area of using social media, it was decided to use qualitative methods to explore the research questions. The qualitative data reported in this article were collected during free-form interviews with 14 Human Resources Specialists. Interviews were unstructured, based on a list of data and information that the researcher needed. These types of interviews were chosen to ensure that all participants were asked questions regarding their opinions, assessments, and concerns as well as to encourage them to raise other issues they felt were relevant to the research.

Requests for participation in the study were sent to the 45 potential participants through a LinkedIn message in August 2017. Potential participants were selected in a way as to represent the most diversified group of employers with criteria, such as: the size of the company, the area of the company’s activity, and the level of education of the employees. The main criteria for participation in the study were the position held by a participant - HR Specialist or HR Manager, interest in the subject of the development of young employees, and consent to participate in the study. A total of 14 HR Specialists and HR Managers from 13 companies agreed to take part in the interview. Interviews were conducted between August 2017 and October 2017. Five of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and nine were conducted by telephone or Voice over IP (VOIP) application.

Five interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and checked for accuracy by the researcher. The other participants did not agree to record the conversation because they did not have official permission from their company to take part in such research. The interviewer took notes during the interview. It should be noted that in the case of the unrecorded interviews, it was not possible to quote the interlocutor’s answers precisely, but only to indicate their general meaning and message.

RESULTS

The vast majority of surveyed respondents indicated that young employees use social media in their professional work. It should be emphasized that there is a noticeable tendency to only use selected social media. According to respondents, LinkedIn is a widely used social network by white-collar workers employed in the business sector. According to interviewees, this social media platform allows you to make business contacts, take part in discussions, and follow business news from companies and experts. Only one of the interlocutors did not indicate LinkedIn as a tool commonly used by young people, but it should be emphasized that the respondent himself pointed out that this

may result from the industry in which his employees work (fashion, beauty, hairdressing, and Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG)), and indicated that Instagram is a much more adequate medium. Quite a large group of respondents (10 out of 14 people) also pointed to Facebook as a tool commonly used by young people to broaden their knowledge and skills. However, attention should be paid to what was pointed out by one of the participants - this medium is seen primarily as a platform intended to build private relationships. Therefore some employees reject the possibility of using it for professional development purposes. Similarly, the employer's point of view echoed caution they would like to avoid being accused of entering the employee's private sphere. Over half of the interlocutors (8 people) emphasized the importance of such social media as YouTube or TEDx in the development of employees.

Also, worth noting is the phenomenon that some of social media are not, in the opinion of the interlocutors, useful in the context of the development of competencies of young employees. Almost none of the respondents indicated the use of social networks, such as Twitter (2 people), Instagram (1 person) or Flickr (1 person). Some of the main factors of "low usage" of these media platforms was indicated by the respondents because of their construction and the way they can be used (the way the content is delivered to followers). Twitter allows the transfer of only synthetic messages (approximately 160 characters). Basic content shared by users on Instagram and Flickr are photos that do not allow the transfer of much knowledge.

As the respondents pointed out, young people quite often do not equate their activities on the internet with development. In the opinion of almost all of the respondents (11 out of 14), young people surfing the internet and browsing newsfeeds are not associated with any development and improvement of their knowledge and skills, even when they are getting familiar with new, previously unknown information. A very similar view, from respondents, of young employees appears in the field of being a member of professional communities and taking part in discussions in the virtual world - which are not considered to be development activities. As the respondent R14 pointed out, the majority of young employees, when discussing on forums and professional groups on social networks, see such activities in the category of entertainment or creating their personal brand, rather than in the category of developing their competencies. However, it is worth noting that in the opinion of some HR Specialists, such an unconsciousness is beneficial for the employer. The respondent R7 said: "they do not know that their surfing on the internet is developing them, and we are not allowed to say that to them, because they will not do it so willingly anymore." The respondent R11 emphasized: "thanks to the fact that they do not combine this with the development and training; they are doing it even after working hours or just all the time." On the other hand, another respondent pointed out, that people working in such areas of a company as Human Resources or Marketing are more aware of the developmental character of the activities undertaken on the internet. Another aspect that has been indicated by the respondents was that many young employees choose the internet and social media in a conscious way as the primary source of new information for professional purposes. Respondent R3 pointed out that in her industry; following profiles of various companies, being a member of groups associating people with similar professional interests, jabbering and commenting in these groups is basically a common practice. Other respondents spoke in a similar tone indicating that the internet and social media should be treated as an extremely useful tool not only in the context of acquiring knowledge, but also networking and seeking the source of inspiration.

Most of the respondents also indicated that many times, while working with young employees, they noticed that a large part of their knowledge comes from social media. In the opinion of the respondent R3, most of the knowledge about novelties and current trends is obtained from social media, and this is a good way, because it allows an extremely fast transfer of knowledge. In R3's opinion, in principle, a few minutes after the publication of a new report or news by an entity, its employees already have knowledge about it. A similar point of view was presented by the other participants. It should be noted that respondents pointed out the need to preserve a large amount of caution in the use of social media as a tool for the development of employees. Respondents' fears were raised by some aspects of social media in the context of employee development. One such aspect was the necessity to verify the truthfulness and substantive quality of the information obtained through this channel (as some respondents pointed out, sometimes a quite significant problem is the low credibility and quality of publicly available information on social media). Another aspect was the issue of using social media during business hours and the employer's fear of abuse of this privilege by an employee. In some industries, such as the IT sector indicated by the respondents, it does not constitute a problem, while in other sectors, it may be a big issue. This is why some employers impose a ban on using social media during business hours.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The research conducted by the author of the article was exploratory and designed to deepen knowledge about the described phenomenon. His goal was to indicate the directions of further research on the issue. Research carried out by the author of the paper confirmed the research hypotheses set at the beginning. Undoubtedly, the internet, and especially social media, is an important tool in developing the competencies of young employees. In the days of technological progress, young people replace traditional forms of communication and building relationships by doing it in social media, so it is natural that they are also looking for opportunities for development there as it is a natural environment for them. So that is the main reason why the importance of social media should not solely be limited to its use to connect people for entertainment purposes. It should also be considered as an employees development tool.

The development with the use of social media, regardless of whether conscious or unaware, puts a burden on the learner by selecting the knowledge he or she wants to acquire and making sure to check its value. Generally, learning with social media should be considered as being based on self-education. It requires independence in the field of education and the initiation of the learning process. It is also worth emphasizing that nowadays, every social media member using it for training purposes is becoming less and less of a passive recipient of knowledge and information. They are becoming more and more often its full-fledged creator. Therefore, it seems to be necessary to shape the ability of young employees to assess and value content available on social media, as well as to create them on their own. These skills are closely related to so-called “technological maturity”, which means readiness for independent, effective, and responsible use of information and communication technologies in innovative ways, and to formulate expectations for technologies for the current and future needs of its members.

An area that requires further exploration is certainly the awareness of the developmental character of such activities as acquiring knowledge and skills in social media. The conducted research showed that in the opinion of respondents, only a small group of young employees equate the use of social media with development. Therefore, it seems to be necessary to focus on the effects of consciousness and unconsciousness of the developmental character of these activities itself, but also on the positive and negative effects of its deepening.

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