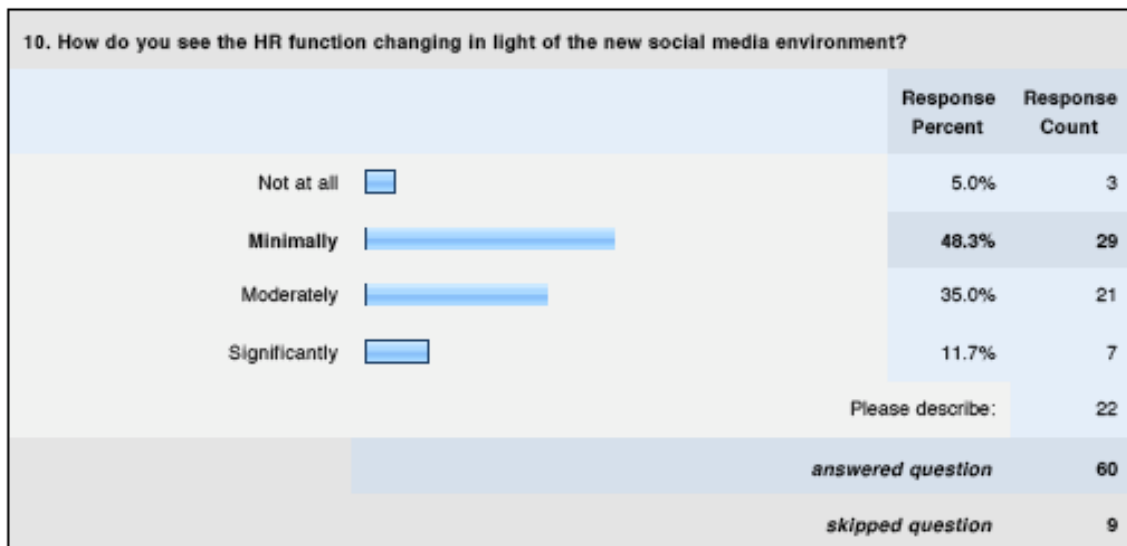


Three Ways Social Media will Change the Role of Human Resources

**White Paper Series
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September 2009**

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Social media are now perceived to be changing human resources departments' roles and functions. A recent CompAnalysis pulse survey, conducted among small and large employers in the S.F. Bay Area, indicated that 95% of the 60 organizations who responded to the question believed that social media (blogging, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.) would change HR's role to some extent:



We expect to see rapid changes in social media usage and perceptions in business and society in general. Consequently, human resources professionals need to be aware of, and plan for, how this new phenomenon will affect their employees and the structure of the workplace. Of course, the social media in general are just one additional form of communication. The material in this article relates solely to the human resources aspects of this topic, not the many other management concerns and opportunities, such as marketing and customer service, that are being impacted by social media.

We expect that the integration of social media into workplace communication processes will occur rapidly, and primarily in the following specific human resources management functions:

1. External Communications, including recruiting new employees, building the employment brand, developing the human resources value proposition and staying in touch with “alumni” and partners
2. Internal Communications, including the facilitation of teams’ and networks’ interactions, the establishment of knowledge resources, employee engagement and organizational culture enhancement
3. Ethical and Legal Issues, including employee privacy, protection of intellectual property, policies concerning employee usage

1. External Communications

Recruiting is one of the obvious, most utilized human resources applications of the social media today. Such use will undoubtedly evolve over time, and more standard usage conventions will emerge. The CompAnalysis pulse survey data show that 49.2% of the respondents are either actually using or considering using the social media to find information on job candidates. Integrated social media technologies (e.g., Facebook, blogs, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) make the recruiting process easier and more engaging than ever before. However, there are a number of legal and ethical concerns about this practice. One big concern is whether obtaining personal information such as candidates’ ethnicity and/or age can potentially be construed as illegal discrimination. One of social networking’s biggest advantages is that it lets you get closer to the people you want to hire ... just make sure it’s not too close. This is largely uncharted territory, so check in with legal counsel.



Recruiters know that a positive organizational image or brand will significantly affect the quality of candidates they source and attract. The social media offer a tremendous opportunity to project this brand online. You should assume that prospective employees will use the Internet to thoroughly research your organization and its employee value proposition. If you're not using some form of social media in your recruiting process, you might be projecting a negative image. Who wants to work for a company that's behind the times? One that doesn't get it? An easy way to get started is to set up a company Facebook page or a blog. You should also check out how the organizations with which you compete for talent are using social media.

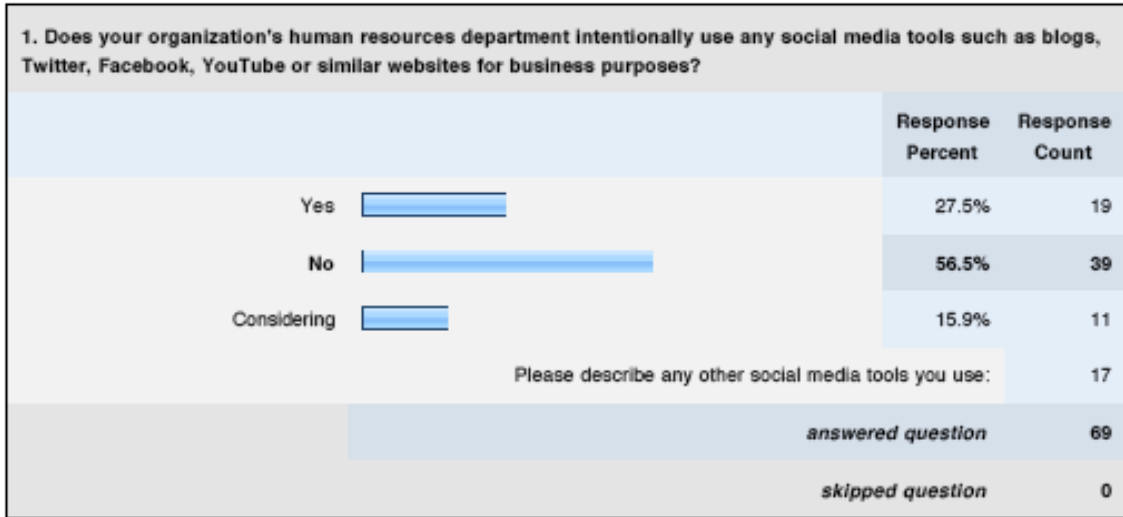
2. Internal Communications

A strong, positive culture supports employee retention and contributes to employee engagement. Critical components of an organization's culture include its internal communications processes and content, both formal and informal. The new social media tools represent opportunities to enhance communications in ways never before available.

They “level the playing field” in a way that gives employees their own voices, voices that are no longer stifled by the lines of communication inherent in the formal organizational structure. Until now, for example, employees’ creative ideas usually had to be transmitted through one’s supervisor to the real decision-makers. As a result, they were often lost in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Social media change this old scenario overnight. Now, everyone’s voice will be heard, and commented upon, in a fresh, open environment, undoubtedly leading to higher levels of employee engagement. Human resources managers need to lead and manage this transition so the new, open communications processes produce positive outcomes, and don’t result in any unintended negative consequences.

Another benefit of communications supported by the social media is the ability to quickly and efficiently aggregate information within an organization in a way that facilitates nearly instantaneous targeted sharing of data and knowledge bases. Such applications of social media can improve both teams’ and networks’ performance in terms of quantity, quality and timeliness.

Of course, other kinds of internal communications, such as employee newsletters and general operational memoranda, can also be more effective through the integration of social media with traditional and Internet media to optimize results. Delivering internal company and employee news, such as new customers, employee awards, and so forth, can now be done instantaneously, before the rumor mill kicks in. The same information may continue to be disseminated on your intranet and with printed media, as needed, but using a private Twitter channel or Yammer.com will assure prompt attention. Although 57% of the human resources professionals who responded to the CompAnalysis pulse survey do not now intentionally use social media for business purposes, we expect to see a big shift in this metric over the next year or two.



3. Ethical and Legal Issues

As is the case with many employment issues, the boundaries between personal and business use of the social media need to be carefully drawn. It's easier said than done! In the San Francisco Bay Area, it is estimated that 45% or more of the adult online population has some experience with social media, and that it is not unusual for heavy users to spend several hours a day posting, commenting, listening and responding. So, it's probable that many of your employees are already using social media in their private lives. And that's where it should remain — private.

Human Resources must take the lead in establishing and communicating policies related to both employee and company privacy issues. Such policies must be updated to reflect the impact of social media usage. Setting the organization's privacy policies is an opportunity to strengthen the culture because the message is "*We respect everyone's individual right to privacy.*" Once any new or updated policies have been established, be sure to include them in the employee handbook and any new employee orientation materials.

In addition to protecting employees' privacy, it's important to protect the company's intellectual property. Prohibiting employees from divulging trade and/or product secrets online should be an explicit policy and practice. Employee usage of the social media during work hours is another issue to address. As always on these matters, checking with an attorney is a good idea. Here are the responses to the CompAnalysis pulse survey relative to policies:

2. Does your organization have a policy with respect to the use of social media?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	20.9%	14
No	55.2%	37
Considering	23.9%	16
<i>answered question</i>		67
<i>skipped question</i>		2

2A. What elements does the policy include?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Employee non-business use of social media during work hours	81.8%	9
Clear guidelines with respect to content that employees may post online about the organization or their jobs	54.5%	6
Using social media content to acquire information about individuals for recruiting purposes	9.1%	1
Other HR functions	0.0%	0
Other	18.2%	2
<i>If Other, please describe:</i>		3
<i>answered question</i>		11
<i>skipped question</i>		58

Some key questions to address in social media policy statements include:

- Are employees allowed any personal social media time during the work day?
- Who is authorized to engage in social media on behalf of the organization? Is there an approval process?
- What guidelines should employees follow when using social media to comment on the organization on their own time?
- Will you post your social media policy publicly?

In conclusion, remember that social media will be a very important tool for crafting the future of your organization. Human resources professionals must educate themselves and their management teams, acting now to set policies, develop training and benefit from this revolutionary new communications channel.

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