Harnessing social media for organisational effectiveness

A collection of thought pieces
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Harnessing social media for organisational effectiveness
A collection of thought pieces

The CIPD has produced this collection of thought pieces to explore the potential opportunities for organisations arising from developments in the fast-changing area of social media. We suggest a range of business and people management issues where new as opposed to traditional media can make a real difference to practice and results.

Social media offers different ways to communicate with, engage and network with all stakeholders, and not least with employees and potential job applicants. The contributors to this report – from a range of business, consultancy and academic backgrounds – share their views on the ways in which HR professionals and their organisations can realise some of the benefits social media presents.

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Introduction

The influence of social media on our work and home lives is present and growing. Back in 2007 over 22% of UK adults had a social networking profile. According to Ofcom’s latest research (2012), six in ten of all adult internet users now have their own social networking profile. And if you number yourself among this group, there’s a one in three chance that you visit social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn more than once a day.

Social media is changing the way we engage in conversations and exchange knowledge about the kind of service we get, the quality of the products we buy and how we want to be treated as consumers, citizens and as employees. Communication has shifted from a monologue to a conversation; a conversation over which the organisation has little control but from which it can glean vast amounts of information to make the organisation more effective.

Businesses recognise the influence of social media and are adapting their marketing approaches and investing resources accordingly. Research by PwC for the Internet Advertising Bureau (2012) shows spending on advertising on social media platforms was up 75% in 2011 compared with 2010 – contributing to the biggest increase in online advertising in five years.

Initially seen by some employers as a potential threat to their reputation or as a distraction for employees, many workplaces are now embracing social media – and recognising the benefits it can mean for networking and collaboration. The CIPD Resourcing and Talent Planning survey 2011 shows 46% of respondents used new technology/media to recruit (up from 28% the previous year). From an internal perspective, organisations are taking advantage of opportunities to build social capital or networks for knowledge exchange and creation. Social media tools such as wikis, blogs or web conferencing are increasingly used to facilitate knowledge exchange, communication and project working with implications for the way in which teams interact and relationships are managed. This can be particularly beneficial for organisations with complex organisational structures, requiring a mobile workforce, operating across large geographies or with global offices.

At the CIPD we are increasingly interested in how technology is driving organisational effectiveness by enabling better and different forms of communication and access to knowledge and information. We are interested both in the ‘hard wired’ technology – what is available and how it’s being used now and in the future – and the ‘soft wired’ networking and communications systems – how we can harness this to drive knowledge exchange, ensure consistent messaging and instant access to the latest information and reinforce behaviour and cultural values. We’d also like to drive the debate not just around the opportunities presented by social media to manage people more effectively and drive organisational performance through people, but also the challenges of managing in an increasingly connected and chattering world.

About this report

As a first step in our investigations the CIPD asked a number of individuals already actively engaged in the use of social media to give us their thoughts on how it can be harnessed to drive new and innovative workplace practice. The contributors to this report have a range of backgrounds including HR and learning and development, the recruitment industry, research and consultancy. With each author taking a different area of focus – from engagement through to project and team working – together they consider the opportunities and challenges social media presents to organisations and for HR professionals.
Their views and insights are given below and a common theme running through them is the potential of social media to shape the way we work, manage and are managed.

One thing is clear: ignoring social media and its increasing influence on our daily lives is not an option. Even without an official Facebook or Twitter site, your organisation will have a presence in the social world via others’ contributions to discussion boards, blogs, ratings sites and wikis. With the proliferation of smartphones and tablets, our ability to network ‘on the go’ is rising and this will only increase the impact of social media on the way we interact both inside and outside of work with friends, colleagues, suppliers of the goods and services we use and our employers. Engaging with social media is a must. The active involvement of HR professionals in this discussion and on this journey will be important to realise the full potential of social media to support organisational effectiveness and business performance.

Join the conversation

We’d love to hear your comments and reactions to the viewpoints presented in this report. Get involved and talk to us on twitter @CIPD.
Viewpoint 1: Raising business performance

Social media offers us many possibilities for changing the very nature of the way we do business. It offers instant access to a network of contacts, more and more opportunities to connect with customers, a means to build relationships with suppliers and access to potential recruits. In an increasingly global environment, the impact of being able to easily and quickly converse with stakeholders across geographical boundaries cannot be underestimated.

Neil Morrison of Random House gives us his view of the potential of social media to drive innovation and creativity and support business priorities.

Imagine the scene; you’re sitting in a board meeting when the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) starts talking about a new technology that can help your business engage with customers in real time, it can help you understand what people are saying about your company at anytime, in any place in the world. It can help teams to collaborate, to share information, to share knowledge. It can help you understand trends, to test ideas. And it can help you to connect with your current and future workforce. The Finance Director starts to shake her head, seeing the pound signs stack up in front of her eyes. But, seeing this, the CTO stops her in her tracks. The great thing is, it doesn’t require any server upgrades, it doesn’t require significant network capability and more than that... much more than that... it’s free.

Does this sound like a dream? The technology based on the foundations of Web 2.0 allows us to do all of these things and more. The opportunities are endless and yet many businesses are reluctant to embrace them. Historically, most technological advances have been embraced by business before the general public, such as the telephone, the computer and the mobile phone. We realised the business potential BEFORE we realised the social potential and therefore it felt a lot more comfortable. Had it been the other way around I wouldn’t mind betting that businesses would have been as reticent to use them as is often the case with social media.

But just because social media has a recreational use, it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t have very real and very valuable business uses too. Imagine the power of teams sharing developments on their projects in real time for others in the organisation to see and learn from. Imagine testing ideas with customers, receiving their input and ideas, without the need for expensive focus groups. Imagine the engaging effect that this would have for both customers and employees. And imagine the positive effect that could have on your business. But, of course, you don’t have to imagine, you can watch other companies doing it right now.

We know the power of customer engagement, we know that collaboration and teamwork lead to greater innovation and creativity. We know that employees that feel engaged, motivated and connected to their organisation, employees that feel trusted
are not only more committed and less likely to leave an organisation but are also more likely to demonstrate discretionary effort.

Social media goes beyond marketing, it goes beyond recruitment. There are uses in almost everything that we do as organisations, both internally and externally. When we talk of social media we are talking about applications, we are talking about tools. Tools that can enhance the ways in which we work, learn, communicate and lead. We understand and recognise the business benefits that can be obtained by focusing on these areas, there is nothing new there. So why would any forward thinking organisation hesitate to use free tools to support recognised business priorities? Why indeed?

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Viewpoint 2: Project and teamworking

Over the last decade work has shifted inexorably towards a greater emphasis on knowledge sharing and creation, team and project working. This presents challenges for organisations, particularly when they are often geographically as well as functionally distant from each other. Social media is constantly developing platforms to enable real time discussion and knowledge exchange between individuals anywhere in the world. This provides a real opportunity for organisations to make fundamental shifts in the way they work.

Hayley Brown from Big Lottery Fund (BIG) discusses some of the innovations which BIG have made to connect across their organisation and harness social media to drive their preferred way of working.

Social media has been on the radar at Big Lottery Fund (BIG) for some time, and for me it isn’t ‘good’ or ‘bad’, it’s simply something that can be useful for some people in certain situations. The response of some organisations to think about social media in these black and white terms isn’t helpful to anyone and as a learning and development professional, if I’m not helping people or my organisation to develop then I’m not doing my job!

During the last five years BIG have implemented two internally built, low-cost social media tools for staff. The first was a Wiki, an area where documents and information could be stored, updated and discussed in a democratic fashion.

The learning experiences from implementing a Wiki were fed into the design of BIG Connect, our latest internal social media tool. We knew that it needed to address three main areas – communications, groups and projects – so we included the opportunity to tweet views, information articles and general questions. All staff are able to create and join groups which could be about non-work or work interests and they also have the option to create projects about discrete business requirements. The system allows you to tag skills to your own personalised profile page which automatically includes your job role, email address, phone number and line manager. I think we have to recognise that using social media should be a choice and though many people are making that choice, we understand that not everyone wants to engage with this type of communication tool so all of the corporate information on BIG Connect is available through other communication channels.

So far we have noticed interaction with the system is surprisingly weighted more in favour of business topics though that’s not to say some of the more casual groups aren’t popular too! People use the travel group to talk about the best hotels and restaurants in the surrounding areas of our offices for travelling colleagues for example. Regional staff who are responsible for promoting and explaining our programmes to customers are increasingly posting information about visits to project launches on BIG Connect that more internally focused staff can read, ask questions about and comment upon.
The system has brought a huge advantage in learning and development too. Our Leadership Development group is one of the most active, and staff share and comment on information and articles about the latest thinking as well as free events in areas local to the office. We’re also beginning to use BIG Connect as an area to carry on the conversation outside of the training room with induction cohorts being among the first to have their own group to ask questions and share things they discover about BIG.

The uptake after three months of informal launch was around 20% of the colleagues, and recently a formal message announcing the system’s arrival has seen this rise nearer to 35%.

From experience I can safely say that making social media tools relevant and beneficial to an organisation isn’t instant and it won’t ‘just happen’ from the bottom up. We’ve adopted the stance that a relaxed approach to groups like the ‘real ale appreciation society’ and ‘cake club’ will help people to ease themselves into social media tools without feeling like they have to say anything about our work and functions first.

You need to give people the freedom to experiment and reward them for sharing their knowledge and experiences. You need to make the system simple, easy to access and user-friendly.

So far benefits are still emerging, but informal evaluations are overwhelmingly positive. Staff are using the tool to talk to people they would not normally come into contact with from other offices, and existing teams who work across different sites are beginning to set up groups to continue their conversations after meetings and VC appointments. This all helps us to reduce duplications and silo working.

This not only promotes the development of ideas, it also helps to drive engagement as a result of the trust we have put in people to use this tool responsibly.

There are many possibilities for using BIG Connect for learning and development in the future, not least exploiting the skills tag functionality to identify mentors, setting up groups as knowledge forums, and doing pre-course research could all have their own place. At BIG we will remain open to social media opportunities to help our people be truly outstanding at what they do.

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Viewpoint 3: Attracting talent and managing the employer brand

In order to successfully attract talent, organisations today need to consider a wider range of communication channels than ever before. Developing expertise in the use of digital and social tools is becoming increasingly important for organisations who want to make connections with potential new recruits as well as to engage and retain existing talent.

The risks associated with employee experience not living up to that promised by the employer brand are greater than in the past. Thanks to social media, would-be candidates can find out not just who you are, what you do as an employer and your espoused values, but also how you are rated and what it’s going to be like to work for you. Social media can make or break the employer brand and encourage talent to come knocking or re-direct it to the competition.

Frank Durrell from resourcing business TMP shares his views on using social media to make sure you’re part of the conversations which determine the way your organisation is perceived.

At TMP, we believe ‘what you say to audiences about yourself is far less important than what audiences say about you’. Social media gives those audiences a forum to comment louder and clearer than ever before. It is about listening, participating, building communities and creating conversation. The goal – great applications!

Audiences choose to become part of communities, based on interests, personalities and behaviours; and to build useful and relevant relationships. With nearly half the UK population on Facebook, 7m on Twitter and 6m on LinkedIn, the opportunity is vast. It has become part of our daily lives – on our mobiles, computers, at home, on holiday; we rely on it to keep in touch.

The key difference between traditional and social media is monologue compared to multi-logue. Social lets you talk to audiences, and audiences talk together about you. They answer (or ask) questions, engage with promotions, share, provide and absorb relevant information, and are exposed to messaging in the pursuit of their own interests. Conversations happen about organisations, whether those organisations participate or not. Now is the time to influence those conversations and build communities of segmented prospects, employees and applicants.

Benefits of social media are:

- awareness and loyalty
- customer service and customer interaction

Frank Durrell is the TMP Worldwide Head of Digital. He has over 13 years experience in digital marketing communications agencies including OgilvyAction and Syzygy. At TMP, he ensures clients are in a position to deliver award winning, unique and valuable recruitment solutions.
There are five main ways to use social media.

1. **Content** – using social media to broadcast content, without engagement or community building. It's impersonal, and is the least likely to succeed, but it does get you out there.

2. **Listening** – using the social chatter to understand what people are saying. We have used this to help clients from a large retail bank to a mobile operator, from a leading UK broadcaster to a local government body. We understand what people say, where they are, and gain an insight on how to engage them in the future. It's like getting access to a focus group of millions of people, honestly sharing what they like, and dislike, about organisations.

3. **Community** – BT used Facebook to create a community for graduates, using the promise of a financial incentive, exclusive content and access to like-minded individuals, to increase the level of engagement (measured in ‘Likes’). This ensures graduates join a talent community, repeat visit, and converse with BT about their graduate careers.

4. **Journey** – for Jaguar Land Rover, they created a personalised experience (Caricature) that built relationships with the target audience and drove advocacy. A video could be personalised by individualising an image of themselves and then having created the personal content, it could then be shared on social media. It supported all functional hiring and was then used in an installation on campus for graduates.

5. **Experience** – GCHQ launched a code-cracking campaign to attract cyber security specialists. If the candidate could crack the code, they were directed to GCHQ's website to apply for the job. It resulted in a huge level of candidate interaction and a publicity blanket that virtually covered the world.

In summary, social media is growing; audiences are conversing daily using it and companies are finding new and exciting ways to effectively and profitably be a part of it. For the risk-averse, the biggest risk would now seem to be not taking part.

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Viewpoint 4: Managing the ‘employment deal’

The concept of the ‘employment deal’ relates to the perceived value of the social and economic exchange between the employer and employee. A balanced employment deal is perceived to deliver fair and sustainable benefits to both parties. Employees who feel that they have a voice, are involved in decision-making and are fully aware of the impact changes are likely to have on them personally are more likely to behave positively. They are also more likely to behave in a way which enables high performance working and drives agility and flexibility, cornerstones of sustainable performance.

Dr Martin Reddington gives us his view on how HR practitioners can harness social media to re-conceive and re-negotiate the employment deal to drive productivity and change.

The emergence of social media technologies provides an opportunity to shape better conversational practice, leading to the embedding of behaviours that support high performance working practices.

This is important for UK productivity because the pressure to do ‘more with less’ resources is a key feature of the changing context of organisations with very little ‘slack’ in work systems – organisations increasingly rely on good will and high levels of employee contributions. The current climate of austerity if not managed well can exacerbate workplace tensions between employers and employees.

In response to these pressures, there is now increasing focus on the ‘employment deal’ or employment value proposition (EVP), which represents the perceived value of the economic and social exchange between organisations and those who work for them. The value and fairness associated with this exchange are shaped by the perceptions of both parties to the employment relationship, and the particular organisational contexts in which exchange relationships are formed. Balanced deals are seen as supporting the achievement of sustainable high performance through people.

Modern approaches to measuring this performance are moving away from a statistical reliance on the measurement of ‘engagement’ to one which views the ‘employment deal’ as a dynamic, social and economic exchange between employer and employee. To know that your ‘engagement index or score’ has risen two points may be interesting but that kind of information is seldom actionable because it fails to identify important components of the process by which performance through people is produced. Insights into these performance recipes are captured through conversational practices, which depict the ‘deal in action’.

Conversational practices enabled by social media can be seen as genuine opportunities for surfacing of multiple perspectives and logics at the strategic, management and front-line levels of an organisation. The term practice draws attention to the dynamic...
interplay between action and language which tends to be ignored in management research and education. So a well balanced employment deal supports the *constructive tension* needed to simultaneously help leaders, managers and employees take reasonable risks to encourage better people performance (a sense of entrepreneurship) whilst operating within the situational constraints presented by the organisation.

Notwithstanding the reputational concerns held by organisations in relation to employee ‘misbehaviour’ on blogs and social networking sites, there is growing evidence that these media have enormous potential to change the way people collaborate, communicate, organise their work, and give voice to their opinions and expectations, especially when they are physically dispersed across time and space.

In the context of re-conceiving and re-negotiating the employment deal, social media can be used to drive two-way communication around how employees are treated and managed and what role they play in the overall success of the business. Organisations are now using discussion forums or other forms of *virtual conversational arenas* to penetrate and surface the differences of interests between employees and their employers – something that is often treated as the ‘elephant in the room’ amongst strategists and policy makers. This approach can influence and support more pervasive forms of conversational practice that deliver sustainable, high levels of employee performance and well-being.

**Martin Reddington**

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Viewpoint 5: Building social capital

One of the core components of intellectual capital is social capital. Just having skilled and knowledgeable individuals – human capital – and good organisational knowledge – organisational capital – is not enough. Organisations also need to build networks which encourage and enable individuals to access and build organisational knowledge by sharing their knowledge and experiences productively. While in the past the main focus for this has been organisational design, social media is now offering us new and exciting ways of building social capital to create intellectual capital, manage relationships and facilitate internal and external knowledge exchange networks.

Jon Ingham, consultant and prolific blogger, discusses how social media can be harnessed to produce the kinds of outcomes and benefits that we want as organisations from our social capital.

Social media provides exciting opportunities to improve and transform a wide range of HR and management processes. However, we are always best off focusing on the outcomes we are trying to create, rather than the activities we are trying to upgrade.

These outcomes include the human capital created from individual employees including the value of their capability, which can potentially be increased by using social recruitment and social learning and so on, and their engagement, which can also be increased by using social media as people generally find this provides a compelling way to work.

But the most important outcome which can be improved through the use of social media is social capital. This is the value of the connections, relationships and conversations taking place between people, rather than of the individuals themselves. There are two reasons for this.

The first of these reasons is that most organisations succeed or fail as a result of the way their people work together rather than because of the quality of the individuals. So social capital is probably a more important outcome than human capital.

In many cases social capital is probably also less well developed. Our levels of human capital may be quite low (with engagement levels of half of what they could be and people suggesting they are working at half of their potential) but at least these are things we have been trying to increase. Most organisations have never really done much to improve the relationships between their people, so social capital is often in a very poor state.

The second reason that social capital is the most important outcome to focus on when thinking about social media, is that there is such a direct connection between the two things. Using social media helps to get people working together, and by doing this, they can often develop more and better relationships.
Sometimes, before the use of social media, it had just not been possible to create these relationships at all, such as when workforces are spread across the planet, or simply include a proportion of virtual workers. But even when people are located in the same office, employees in different functions, and those seated more than just a short distance apart, often do not communicate with each other. Social media can be used to bring these people together and help them get to know each other—as people rather than simply as holders of a role.

These relationships can then help organisations do a broad range of things:

- share out work more effectively through enhanced collaboration
- innovate more easily, as innovation is such a social process, requiring the connection of people with different perspectives, experiences and skills
- execute faster as people who already trust each other can come together to get work done, rather than having to get to know each other first
- share knowledge better, as when people trust each other, they are more likely to value the knowledge that each person provides as well (so social networking systems often work much better for knowledge sharing than traditional intranets)
- develop better relationships with customers and external stakeholders (as being better connected internally helps organisations connect externally more effectively too).

The key for me is that organisations focus on which of these social benefits they want to create, and then use social media as a means to create the outcomes that they need.

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Viewpoint 6: Gaining insight through employee research

For the next generation of HR professionals, having real insight into what makes their organisation ‘tick’ is crucial. In order to have this, deep understanding of your organisation, its culture, its people, leadership and change dynamics is required. Employee research is an important means of gaining this understanding and insight and social media offers new opportunities to make this a meaningful and engaging process.

Michael Silverman gives us his views on how social media is changing the nature of employee research and how it can facilitate global conversations with employees about how to reshape organisational policies and working practices.

The interactive nature of social technologies is a common feature across many definitions of social media. Tools that facilitate mass collaboration in global organisations have huge implications for employee research because interactions between people, when captured and analysed effectively, offer a new and rich source of insight which can help shape effective organisational structures and processes.

Social media is slowly edging its way into ‘traditional’ employee research – the vast majority of which is currently conducted using surveys. Yet, because surveys do not facilitate any interaction between employees, they are actually rather anti-social. There is an important point to be made here about the transparent nature of social media: lots of organisations talk about giving employees a voice, but few are happy to allow uncensored and anonymous conversations online. In order to elicit the authentic voice of employees, there needs to be a transparent mechanism by which employees can evaluate each other’s responses – and it is only through social media that the authentic voice of employees can be heard.

Obtaining the authentic voice of employees is crucial because people want to make meaningful contributions to organisational processes, policies and products. This can help organisations structure themselves in such a way that allows leaders to build authentic leadership and business units to effectively communicate with each other. For example, collaborative research platforms can be used to hold global conversations with employees about how to reshape organisational policies or facilitate cross-functional working. It’s not only the speed with which social media can provide insight (in hours as opposed to weeks), but also its inclusive and transparent nature that means that employees are afforded a better understanding of the issues. If people can understand the diversity of opinion that exists, in addition to the complexity of the issues, it becomes much easier to instigate change.
The rise of social media has also been matched by significant advances in the field of text and sentiment analytics. This opens up a range of possibilities to understand complex issues such as diversity and culture which are so important in driving global structures and policies.

Social media is also opening up new ways of thinking about employee research – in particular, Organisational Network Analysis (ONA). Many leaders acknowledge the importance of networks and informal relationships particularly in complex global organisations, but few actually put any effort into assessing and supporting these connections. In addition to a lack of understanding about ONA, one of the main issues is that the majority of data that HR collects is attribute data – these relate to the properties or characteristics of employees, for example, attitudes and behaviours. In contrast, relational data are the ties that connect employees to each other – they cannot be reduced to the properties of employees themselves. ONA uses relational data to shed light on patterns of information flow and collaboration in strategically important groups. Organisations can use this insight to deal with bottlenecks, improve the ability to identify opportunities or support important connectors. Analysing network statistics can also provide insight about levels of cohesion and connectivity in various groups throughout an organisation – pinpointing exactly where organisational structures need to be better linked-up or dispersed.

As social media becomes more entrenched in organisations, the way that research is conducted with employees will change dramatically. Collaborative research platforms, social listening through text analysis and organisational network analysis will become much more widespread particularly in large globally diverse organisations. For this to happen, HR will need to push their organisations to adopt a much more collaborative and open-minded approach.

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Viewpoint 7: Driving Engagement

Social media presents a whole range of new and exciting – even challenging – ways to engage with organisational stakeholders. In an increasingly complex world of diverse relationships and permeable organisational boundaries, social media can be instrumental in building engagement both with employees and customers. It can facilitate meaningful communication and enable knowledge exchange and creation at a faster pace than ever before.

Doug Shaw from What Goes Around tells us ‘social’ is here, for better and for worse and gives his views on enabling people to engage with your business via social media.

Social media is not the answer to all our prayers, nor is it the Armageddon that some like to make out. Social exists and is happening and growing right now; power shifts are taking place and there are some useful ways of engaging in this rapidly emerging new way to work. There are loads of ways to experiment, some will work for you and some won’t. And you won’t know unless you try, which is what your smart competitors are already doing.

I believe the companies who shut their eyes and ears to the social world risk their ability to recruit and retain great people and are more likely to suffer from reputational damage. They miss an abundance of feedback and the co-creative power of communities.

Isn’t it better to be engaged than to have engagement going on around you – to allow and encourage engagement and participation, not inside or outside the organisation, but in both? Increasingly the edges are blurred and being aware of this brings the chance to build deeper relationships with others who wish to. I see huge opportunity for HR to participate in this space and help build a reputation as great collaborators and influencers.

For social media to work it has to be authentic. It’s all about your true voice. Be yourself. I’ve been in companies where the CEO hands responsibility for his or her blogging and tweeting to other people. And without exception this has undermined their social integrity. If you want to do this stuff – do it yourself. Peter Wanless, the CEO of Big Lottery Fund is a great example of authenticity in this respect.

Another important point on authenticity is the trust it can help build when your words and actions are aligned. Very simply, where what you say and what you do overlap, you get trust. And that’s cool. Where they don’t, you get trouble. And that’s what you deserve.

The use of social tools can be a great way to help break down some of the barriers of hierarchy and help to get communication and ideas to flow in all directions. Here’s a short extract from an article I wrote last year for Commschat on this particular point.

Doug Shaw is an experimenter and facilitator. He runs the consultancy firm What Goes Around, which uses conversational and collaborative techniques to help companies make work more social so that in turn, they can sell better and deliver better service. Doug writes the HR blog Stop Doing Dumb Things to Customers, and he also writes for HRZone and other publications.

Prior to setting up What Goes Around, Doug spent 12 years at BT, excelling in sales before setting up the CSR and sustainability team for the Wholesale Division and helping BT top the Dow Jones Sustainability Index. He then moved to BT Global Services to lead on change management and employee engagement.
'Far too often the role of employee communication is in fact a broadcast role, not a communicating one. The company predominantly wishes to get its message across and is not particularly interested in hearing back the other way… That’s not communicating, that’s telling.'

Giving people tools and platforms to share information and ideas across departments and projects can be extremely powerful. I like to think that participating in the social world is a little like riding a bicycle. You need help at first to learn the skill and then support and encouragement to get good at it. The more you practice, the longer and faster you can ride. In turn, you become one of those encouraging and supporting as well as being encouraged and supported.

Great opportunities begin to emerge. Instead of the clunky, static and frankly horrible annual staff survey, companies and teams can use social tools to move to a much faster, free-flowing way of asking for, capturing, and acting upon feedback.

People can connect over Skype and other channels to converse and share in real time. There is a mountain of content on YouTube and other places which people can add to and use to enhance and broaden learning experiences. And that’s just for starters.

Social is simple, just have a go. The best time to start is now and you will soon find plenty of helpful people to engage with and learn with and from.

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[http://stopdoingdumbthingstocustomers.com](http://stopdoingdumbthingstocustomers.com)
Viewpoint 8: The future of social media

The world of social media has moved so fast in the last few years that it is difficult to predict where it is likely to go in the future. However, unless we make the effort there is an ever present danger that organisational practice including the management of people will end up being driven by technological innovation instead of enabling us to harness technology to drive the kind of organisations we want to create.

Gareth Jones from BrubakerHR gazes into his crystal ball to consider where next for social media.

The thing we have to come to terms with in relation to social media as organisations, is that we are only at the beginning of the curve. Right now we see social media as a curiosity, even a threat within the organisation. We see it as something that gets in the way of productivity. Worse, we see it as something that can ‘damage reputations or brands’. This is to be expected from anything we see as new, or different, particularly where it challenges the construct of the organisation as we currently know it.

Social media is a demonstration of the power of the Internet as it matures. But rather than being a simple extension of the network, or simply a supercharging of the information superhighway, it represents a fundamental shift in the way we want to communicate. As Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom point out in their book The Starfish and The Spider, the internet, and in particular, the social layer, has unleashed the ‘dormant force of decentralisation’. This force is having an unprecedented effect on organisations and the world we live in, and it’s being driven by peer-to-peer relationships, not traditional top-down hierarchies.

If we look around the organisation, we can see parts of the business responding to this in a very tactical way, attempting to embed ‘social strategies’ into customer-facing activity in the form of marketing and customer service initiatives. This movement has been forced on the organisation as customers, over the last 15–20 years, have started to connect and talk about their experiences with the company and ultimately its products and services. In the early days of the Internet, organisations could largely ignore this trend. But as connectivity has grown, so has the customer voice. And it cannot be ignored. A quote from Seth Godin in one of his recent blog posts entitled The Tripadvisor tail wagging the real world dog, captures it nicely.

‘Travelers (sic) ranted about poor service for a generation, but once the internet makes it easy to rank and sort and connect, the service has no choice but to change. Some businesses see Yelp and others as a tax, a burden they have to pay attention to in order to stay relevant, and they grumble about it. Others see these sites as the opportunity of a lifetime, a chance to deliver service (which takes guts and care, more than money) to get ahead.’

However, in my view this external environment is not where the battle will be won or lost, or where the organisation’s biggest opportunities lie. More importantly for the
organisation and HR, is how we address and embrace the social evolution internally, amongst the employees. Organisations have been forced to address the customer voice – as pointed out in Seth’s blog above – because the customer is king. The customer drives revenue and, en masse, cannot be ignored. However, with a few subtle word changes the paragraph above could easily be changed to describe an organisation’s journey in coming to terms with the employee voice.

There is no doubt that as social media matures, employees will force the conversation internally, openly challenging organisations and leadership. Social media brings long awaited accountability to organisations’ employee value propositions. This is inevitable as the technology on which these conversations are being had, is no longer within the domain of control of the organisation. So, organisations need to choose to embrace this conversation, and the demand for transparency, openness and authenticity, if they are to survive longer term. And just as Seth points out above, there will be two general approaches to this movement; some will see it as a tax, a burden – others will see it as an opportunity.

Those companies that will survive in the long term, I believe, will be the ones that are already embracing social and collaborative approaches internally as well as externally.

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References and sources of information


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Future-fit organisations is one of the three themes in our Sustainable Organisation Performance research programme. The other two themes are stewardship, leadership and governance and building HR capability. Within each of these themes we will research a range of topics and draw on a variety of perspectives to enable us to provide insight-led thought leadership that can be used to drive organisation performance for the long term.