Chapter 8

Using Social Media in the Workplace:
How "Lenovo Central" Brings Employees Together

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the internal communication practices of Lenovo, a $34 billion Fortune Global 500 technology company, and the world's second-largest PC vendor. In particular, this study examines how this company uses social media as a method of internal communications in fostering employee engagement. Internal communications is generally led by marketing or PR professionals with expertise in human resources, public relations, marketing, social media, and/or employee engagement. One new way that companies are extending internal communication is by developing the use of their company intranets. Intranets can support an organization by sharing accurate company information on a timely basis. This chapter describes how Lenovo has developed and uses its Lenovo Central intranet to engage employees in its mission and vision.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the internal communication practices of a Lenovo, a $34 billion multinational technology company. This case study examines the development, intent and use of *Lenovo Central,* its company intranet. The case study also analyzes how it uses and publishes internal communication with employees in ways that enhance employee engagement. This chapter will introduce the role of internal communication, how social media

can support such communication, and Lenovo's success with *Lenovo Central.* The chapter also discusses the managerial implications for other firms interested in implementing an intranet in order to improve internal communication and foster employee engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Internal Communication

The practice of internal communication can enhance an organizational culture by promoting employee engagement through open communication (Cahill, 1995; Deloitte, 2013; Harrison, 2013). Employees typically prefer to receive more communication from their superiors as it promotes their willingness to be involved in solving problems in the organization. Research has consistently argued for and empirically found that greater sharing of information by the organization serves to enhance employee empowerment, including a greater sense of impact on the organization and a greater sense of meaning (Mishra, & Spreitzer, 1998; Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999; Siegall & Gardner, 2000; Mills & Ungson 2003). Similar arguments and findings exist for the positive effect of communication within an organization on employee engagement (Kress, 2006; Saks 2006). Welch & Jackson (2007) identified internal communication as crucial for achieving employee engagement. A 2007/2008 Watson Wyatt study found that "Firms that communicate effectively are four times as likely to report high levels of employee engagement as firms that communicate less effectively."

Most recently, a Deloitte culture survey (2013) found that 50% of employees feel that "regular and candid communication" leads to a "culture of meaningful purpose." In addition, internal marketing "enables the firm to serve the needs of the customer (DeBussy, Ewing & Pitt, 2003: p. 150)." As reported in the Deloitte survey on culture and beliefs (2013), only 57% of employees who are happy at work said that their bosses talked about culture with them. Saks (2006) emphasized the need for clear and consistent communications with employees in order to achieve employee engagement, and suggested that employees who are more engaged will have a more positive relationship with their employer. Yet, managers seem to have less time to communicate, due to their demanding jobs (Robson & Tourish, 2005).

Effective internal communication can improve the trust between employees and management within an organization (DeBussy, Ewing & Pitt, 2003; Gavin & Mayer, 2005; Zeffane, Tipu, & Ryan, 2011). In one study (Robson & Tourish, 2005), employees identified a need for more internal communications, including face-to-face meetings, more openness, greater listening, improved email communication, more appreciation, an improved newsletter, and communications training in order to empower and engage employees. Often, however, top managers feel that communication with external constituents is more important than communication with internal ones (Therkelsen & Fiebich, 2003). In a more recent study of retail employees (Mishra & Boynton, 2009) found that those managers that take time for face-to-face meetings, listen, and provide feedback for employees on a regular basis, build strong trusting relationships with those employees and feelings of loyalty to both the local retail establishment and the larger corporate entity, as well.

Research has shown that there is strong link between trust and open communication within an organization (Mishra, 1996; Mishra, Schwartz & Mishra, 2011). Chia (2005) argued that "trust and commitment are byproducts of processes and policies which are designed to make the relationship satisfactory for both parties, such as open, appropriate, clear and timely communication" (p. 7). Trust between leaders and their employees, in terms of openness and concern, can be conveyed through empathic communication (Mishra & Mishra, 1994; 2013). Mishra (1996) found that "the extent to which the trusted person engages

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