

Social Media Position in Workplace Communication - Knowledge Management and Leadership Styles

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ABSTRACT

Effective as well as efficient communication in workplace environment is a critical factor for sustainable existence and growth of firms. There are many empirical pieces of evidence that expected performance is highly dependent on the right value creation and such process needs proper knowledge sharing throughout the firm. It is the top management task to build the right communication infrastructure within (and outside) the firm to capture, diffuse and apply knowledge essential for creating the value. Since communication can be reckoned as one of the crucial competences of managers, formation of proper functioning communication infrastructure should be based on good knowledge of the individual communication tools characteristics and other relevant and influencing elements. Besides of this knowledge there is also concrete top management leadership style that has tight connection with the style and form of communication and the preference of more or less open communication tools and channels. The use of social media among the other workplace communication tools and channels brings many benefits especially for enabling and promoting social interactions.

This paper investigates expected relations among three groups of variables, specifically various communication tools (media) used by managers toward the employees, various leadership styles and chosen knowledge management measures applying empirical quantitative survey to ascertain the general proposition put forth in the research. This proposition assumes: 1. positive association between the openness of leadership styles and the rate of social media utilization in workplace communication; 2. positive association between openness of leadership styles and quality of knowledge management and finally 3. positive association between quality of knowledge management and the rate of social media utilization in workplace communication.

INTRODUCTION

Managers have traditionally spent most of their time communicating. Communication is contained in majority of ten managerial functions described by Mintzberg (1973). Workplace communication is a part of organizational communication focused on the internal environment of organizations. It is especially this type of communication that according to Drenth, Thierry and de Wolff (1998, eds.) stands for the key element of organizational climate and it is "the central binding force that permits coordination among people and thus allows for organized behaviour" (Meyers and Myers, 1982).

Communication in general is a process which constitutes of several elements: source, goal, audience, context, message, media and feedback. The media (or communication tools as the synonymous) can have various form, nevertheless their basic function is in conveying the message from the source to the audience (El Ouiridi M., El Ouiridi, A., Segers and Henderickx, 2014). In workplace communication the most typical communication tools – media are face-to face communication, mail, phone as the traditional representatives, email and social media as the modern ones (for the list of examples of social media types see for instance El Ouiridi M., El Ouiridi, A., Segers and Henderickx, 2014).

Emergence of internet has brought a birth of social media. Social media incorporate several features, „such as presence, sharing, conversations, groups, identity, relationships, and reputation“ (Krischkowsky, Fuchsberger and Tscheligi, 2014, p. 158). Media (or communication tools) can be classified in terms of whether they allow instant or delayed information transfer with immediate or postponed feedback and do not or do enable the change of message content after its transfer, in terms of different levels of persuasion and ability to create and support relations (Leonardi, Neeley and Gerber, 2012; Leonardi, Huysman and Steinfield, 2013). Likewise Turner, Qvarfordt, Biehl, Golovchinsky and Back (2010) suggest evaluating five categories of individual communication tools characteristics: function, immediacy, productiveness-efficiency, side effect and social aspect of communication tool for workplace communication as the basis for decision making of appropriateness to use the specific tool for the specific purpose.

The above mentioned features of communication tools play significant role in knowledge management particularly in their role in four basic knowledge management processes. In one primarily, i. e. knowledge transfer (sharing), but also in the other three, namely: 1) knowledge generation (knowledge creation and knowledge acquisition); 2), knowledge codification (storing); and 3) knowledge application (Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Crawford and Strohkirch, 2006). Not all communication tools have the same qualities and capacity for the purpose of knowledge management. As Alberghini, Cricelli and Grimaldi (2014) argue, it is especially the social media that are more valuable in comparison to other tools. The question is why – despite their prevailed positive characteristics – their current penetration in management and knowledge management is not high. A list of drivers, benefits but also some negative features and barriers of workplace social media in the context of knowledge management is offered for instance by Munro (2014). Some of the barriers can be related to management and managers. Leadership style, innovativeness of management in the sense of applying innovation into the processes and products and type of industry belongs to some (Hurley and Hult, 1998; Politis, 2001).

Leadership style is the concept related to the particular category of typical patterns of leader's behaviour, i. e. what leaders do and how they behave when managing and leading (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano and Dennison, 2003) and how they communicate and which media they use to communicate in the workplace (e.g. Hambley, O'Neill and Kline, 2007). Theory offers variety of more or less similar categorization of leadership styles with the description of various characteristics. For instance Kavanaugh and Ninemeier (2001) describe three factors - both leaders' and subordinates' characteristics (personality, knowledge, values, and experiences) and the organisation environment (organisational climate, values, type of work and composition of work group) - that determine the style. From the multiple studies of leadership four basic styles emerged, namely autocratic, laissez faire, Human Relations and democratic leader based on the level of emphasis on people versus performance (Warrick, 1981).

SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

Survey was chosen as the research method to collect needed data. Managers and in the part of the sample also owners providing management function from 450 Czech firms were inquired personally with the use of structured questionnaire. The purpose of questionnaire was to find out patterns of behaviour and attitudes of managers within several managerial areas. Workplace communication, knowledge management and leadership style were just three streams of interest. These three constructs were operationalized in the form of multiple variables. Six statements related to knowledge management issues, six statements concerning various leadership styles and seven statements about the extent of communication tools use have the character of a seven-point scale as well as one question that investigates the innovativeness of management. This question was utilized as one of three control variables for the analysis presented in this paper. Another two control variables were the size of a firm given by the number of employees, recoded into four-point scale and industry as the nominal variable also recoded into several types of industries. Seven-point scale for knowledge management issues as for instance development and education of employees, promotion of knowledge sharing and continuous learning enabled to measure quality of knowledge management. For the expected association Spearman Rank correlation was applied.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

smaller firms → substantially more face-to face communication and phone
bigger firms → more often email and standard mail

social media → bigger firms, industries as for instance ICT, consulting, research, in those with participating and cooperative leadership styles, with higher level of knowledge management and with higher level of management innovativeness

Standard mail, email and phone → (highly) associated with directive and formal/bureaucratic leadership style
Face-to face communication and meetings → seems to be not dependent on any specific leadership style

CONSTRAINTS AND FUTURE WORKS

More work should be done in further elaborated analyses with the employment of statistics showing relations, differences and causalities. Literature review shows that there is a gap in knowledge regarding the relations among utilization of social media, leadership styles and knowledge management despite relative good understanding of the substance of all three individual issues.

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