Current Issues in Organizational Behavior: Teaching Social Media and BYOD Policies

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ABSTRACT

The impact of social media and technology growth in businesses today is apparent; just read the daily business news to find reports that produce unflattering images of companies and their employees' behavior (from ranting disgruntled employees to stolen personal devices loaded with company intelligence). As social media and new technology continue to have a greater impact on daily business operations, companies grapple with the development of social media policies – and now bring your own device (BYOD) policies. Instilling in Millennial generation students the value of these policies as new employees and potential managers is critical to the success of these policies and the operations of companies that develop the policies. Including these topics in organizational behavior courses using an active learning approach provides an opportunity for students to better understand the necessity of these policies and potential responses to these policies by employee populations (including their fellow Millennial cohort).

INTRODUCTION

Today's students are tomorrow's entry-level employees and managers. For Millennial generation students – the cohort born since 1982 (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 4), technology has been a common, normal expectation of their lives. As digital natives (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008), they have been living their lives out loud through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Flickr, and Tumbler – sharing every detail of their lives with the world. Joining the workforce and business environments in many cases proves to be a challenge (Cisco Systems, 2012, Gale, 2013a) to their understanding for the needs of confidentiality, privacy and security in the workplace.

In light of these facts, raising awareness of social media policies and BYOD (bring your own device to work) policies as a management, organizational behavior issue is important. This paper provides a brief overview of these policies, resources for presenting these policies in an organizational behavior context, and a sample class activity to engage students in active learning regarding the development and implications of these policies.

Social media and BYOD policies

With the introduction of Facebook in 2004 and Twitter in 2006, the world of instant and public communication between individuals and businesses alike changed forever. As Intel's Paul Otellini quipped in his 2006 speech to the Consumer Electronics Show, you can't go back once

we have reached a new normal in technology capabilities. "Social media provides the way people share ideas, content, thoughts, and relationships online. Social media differ from so-called 'mainstream media' in that anyone can create, comment on, and add to social media content. Social media can take the form of text, audio, video, images, and communities" (Scott, 2010, p. 38). Social media today include a growing collection of applications and social networks; the most popular (based on Alexa Global Traffic Rank) social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, MySpace, and Google+. Add to this list popular sites for sharing multimedia, including Instagram, Tumblr, YouTube, and Flickr. Social media content includes both narratives (i.e., blogs and comments) and multimedia (images, videos, and audio recordings). Social media interactions blur the lines between personal communication and professional communication.

Businesses today are reaping the benefits of social media to connect externally with consumers and investors and internally with employees. Companies use social media for brand-building, networking, customer service, sharing work-related project information, monitoring competition, sales prospecting, and research. Perceived benefits of social media use include: enhanced existing customer relationships; building company brand; recruiting employees; increased customer service opportunities; and enhanced employee morale (Russell & Baer, 2009). Some social media applications like Yammer are designed specifically for internal organizational communications.

Harkening back to the days of Fredrick Taylor and Max Weber, organizational leaders have attempted to control and harness every facet of their operations. Policies and procedures fill company handbooks and attempt to provide employees with directions for every facet of organizational behavior. Unfortunately for many companies, social media was initially perceived as a communication fad for personal communication (SilkRoad Technology, 2012). As a result many companies did not consider developing social media policies until after an unfortunate breach of corporate protocol, such as employee insubordination gone viral or corporate secrets leaked through casual communication. The first social media policies appeared on the corporate landscape around 2008 with tech companies leading the way. By 2010 a Manpower study found that 75 percent of employers reported their organizations did not have a formal policy regarding the use of social networking sites at work. Today the Social Media Governance Policy Database (Boudreaux, 2013) includes nearly 250 samples of social media policies from organizations as diverse as nonprofit organizations, consumer product companies, educational institutions, and hi-tech companies. (Boudreaux also provides an archive of research studies and templates for corporate social media.)

A social media policy is an attempt on the part of an organization to "protect their property, confidential information and reputational interests, and avoid potential liability that might arise from employees' use of the Internet and social media" (Brice, Fifer & Naron, 2012, p. 13). Cursory review of National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) operations management memos and board decisions coupled with national news coverage indicates that social media policies continue to raise issues for large and small companies alike. For those organizations that are only now beginning to craft social media policies the following discussion provides a review of best practices and official guidelines for consideration.

The collected wisdom and observations of researchers and business consultants (Brice, Fifer & Naron, 2012; Gale, 2012a; Halpern and Gardner, 2012; Harrison, 2010; Hepburn, 2009; Murphy, 2012; Russell & Baer, 2009; Workforce Management, 2012) summarizes social media

policy design concerns into the following guidelines that address both organizational behavior protocol and legal concerns.

The development process that a company employs to create a social media policy should be a proactive process and not a reactive response to an incident. The process should reflect the corporate culture and include, whenever possible, employees – as members of the drafting committee or by collecting their input through surveys and focus groups – to encourage compliance with the new policy and to reduce push-back from employees. Policies that focus on the benefits of social media and that provide affirmative guidance regarding its business applications and the responsibilities of employees using it on behalf of the company are viewed as more appealing than those policies that simply provide a list of scolding statements of punishments. These policies should reinforce and align with existing corporate policies regarding codes of conduct and ethical behavior and jurisdictional regulation such as copyright and trademark. When the new policy is introduced, employees across the organization should receive training on the new policy. As with any communication in the workplace, social media interactions should bring value to the organization.

> To avoid overly punitive or too generic social media policies, human resources should work jointly with other departments to craft guidelines that protect the brand and reflect the corporate culture, while promoting the right tone of conversation. Social media policies that define what employees can talk about and how employers will monitor them help organizations protect their intellectual property while giving workers a framework for online communication (Workforce Management, 2012, p. 18).

In defining a template for social media policy, Brice, Fifer and Naron said "Social media policies should avoid ambiguity and whenever possible employ specific examples of forbidden or preferred conduct; sweeping statements and pronouncements, even on seemingly innocuous subjects, may inadvertently or accidently punish or deter protected activity." (2012, p. 14). At a minimum social media policies should include: "clear specifications on acceptable use of social media for business purposes; … guidance on acceptable use of company social media profiles for personal reasons; … clear rules on whether and how employees can use company intellectual property in personal usage of social media; … prohibition of disclosure of confidential information; … and ramifications for policy violations" (Murphy, 2012, p. 2). Halpern and Gardner (2012, para 10) add, "employers remain entitled to enforce important workplace policies even in the context of social media. Employers have the right to prohibit sexual harassment, workplace violence and threats of violence, sabotage and/or abusive and malicious activity."

In closing, Russell and Baer (2009) contend that social media policies should be prescriptive regarding the types of social media activities that are acceptable and unacceptable, appropriate and inappropriate, as well as who can represent the company on social media. Social media polices should require "employees to be open, honest, respectful and transparent in their usage of social media – especially in the business context. … When engaging in online social networking, it is important to differentiate an employee's personal identity from his or her business identity. … The policy should discuss how to identify potential conflicts of interest, what types of conflicts are prohibited and who to talk to when in doubt. … Employees should make it clear that their views about work-related matters do not represent the views of their employer or any other person. The policy should require a disclaimer" (p. 7). Other concerns to consider include whether the company has the right to monitor employee social media usage.

In the end, the focus of social media policies should be on job performance and on one company policy universally applied to all members of the organization. Finding from the Cisco Systems (2012) survey remind employers to consider all generational cohorts in the workplace when crafting a social media policy that is embraced by all employees.

Hand-in-hand with social media usage companies are now concerned with employees' use of personal devices in the workplace (Shepherd, 2012). More than building a sufficient wired and wireless network with an organization, BYOD (bring your own device) is a trend affecting clients within organizations (i.e., students of a school district or university (Raths, 2012)) as well as employees. "Smart organizations tap into employee passion for the latest gadgets and use them as an attractive channel for their own internal messaging" (Twentyman, 2013, p. 28). BYOD at first glance looks like a means for companies to economize on technology purchasing. A closer looks raises issues of security, capacity, and application or usage.

Similar to social media in the workplace, the BYOD trend now requires employers to develop policies for policing the use of these personal devices. According to data reported by Workforce.com (Shepherd, 2012), the benefits of BYOD to companies includes greater internal collaboration, improved customer service, employee access to services and information, greater employee productivity, and increased employee satisfaction. Additionally, employees are using their personal devices to accomplish the following business tasks: email, manage their calendar, phone calls, texting, social media, other enterprise applications, customer relationship management, and enterprise resource planning. "Instead of banning risky apps, many companies create password-encrypted environments on users' mobile devices. These isolated virtual workspaces … allow users to manage corporate data and run business apps including their corporate email and meeting software, without having them intermingle with personal data" (Gale, 2013b).

BYOD policies are concerned with allowing employees to access company applications and data with personal devices (Gale, 2012b, p. 16). BYOD policies work in tandem with social media policies to determine how personal devices may be used in business contexts. When implementing BYOD programs, Good Technology suggests four main areas of consideration: "general technical considerations, financial reimbursement, technical support, and liability" (Good Technology, 2011, p. 3).

By enacting social media policies companies intend to curb operational disruptions and control their reputation, both critical elements of business success. BYOD policies are intended to better manage company costs by allowing employees to use their own device. Social media along with mobile technology present great challenges and opportunities for business efficiency and employee productivity (Twentyman, 2013). Writing policies that effectively manage these communication and productivity operations and that resonate with employees enough to maintain positive organizational behavior is a challenge – a challenge addressed in the lesson plan that follows.

An activity for teaching social media and BYOD policies

The developmental framework for this activity is built upon Boyer's[1] (1987 & 1990) scholarships of application, discovery, and integration and Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956; Forehand, 2005; Harrow, 1972), which includes three learning domains: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Cognitive learning domain addresses comprehension and application of basic knowledge. Affective learning domain addresses attitudes, values and emotions. The psychomotor domain typically

refers to the physical application of skills required to be successful in a chosen discipline; psychomotor domain is driven by performance and application of strategies and tactics.

Setting the stage (cognitive domain). As with any new unit of study, this lesson begins with a review of current research regarding social media policies and BYOD policies (see discussion above) through class lectures and discussions. Additionally, students investigate current cases of successful and failed attempts at social media policing in organizations. Two templates are also brought to the attention of the students as examples of social media and BYOD policies (See Appendix A and B, respectively). These templates developed by the Society for Human Resource Management are meant to give students a framework in which to apply their new knowledge.

Processing new paradigms (affective domain). After developing a foundation of knowledge and history, through class discussion students begin to challenge their own beliefs about corporations' responsibilities to security and employees' rights to using social media and personal devices in the workplace. These conversations are some of the most interesting during this part of the lesson. Millennials are notorious for their defiance to social media protocols, as noted by Cisco Systems (2012): "While two out of five [Millennials] said their company's policy forbids them to use company-issued devices for non-work activities, nearly three out of four (71 percent) said they don't always obey those policies. Two-thirds (66 percent) feel that 'employers should not track employees' online activities -- it's none of their business.'" College student stereotypically defend their rights to social media at all cost until they are confronted with the financial, productivity, and security costs associated with such capricious behavior. After some debating, students begin to see the value of these policies and the necessity for adhering to the policies.

Let the challenge commence (psychomotor domain). In this third phase of the lesson, students are challenged to develop social media policies and BYOD policies for companies. The class determines project teams of three to four students (depending on the size of the class). The teams choose companies from the Great Place to Work Institute lists (2012). The Great Place to Work Institute (the research muscle behind *Fortune* magazine's annual great place to work list) provides company profiles and related data for small, medium and large companies in their research population. The lists on the Institute's website provide more companies for students to investigate than the 100 listed in the annual *Fortune* magazine articles. This population of companies is vetted through the Institute's research as companies that exhibit high employee trust and engagement.

At this point in the process, students are encouraged to consider small and medium workplaces, since these size organizations represent more than 90% of businesses today (SBA, 2013). Additionally, larger enterprises create more complicated work environments to manage with these policies (social media and BYOD). The Great Place to Work Institute defines workplaces as small (up to 250 employees), medium (250 to 999 employees), and large (1000 or more employees). Students are also asked *not* to investigate the current state of their chosen company's social media policy and BYOD policy. Through this random selection process, most student teams choose SMBs, but a few groups like to think big and choose a large company as a challenge.

Reflecting on their knowledge of social media and BYOD policy guidelines and requirements (NLRB) and their understanding of organizational behavior (especially of members of their own cohort), the student teams draft policy statements for their chosen companies. Students submit their final policy statements to the instructor via a secure class site for review

that only the instructor can access. As the instructor, I review the contents of the policies for clarity and evaluate how well they met the guidelines. My grading comments are kept confidential until after the classroom debate of the policies.

After reviewing (grading) the assignments, the policies are moved to a second secure site that only members of the class can access. Once there, members of other teams are required to review the policies of their classmates and comment on the policies. These comments become the starting point for an in-class debate regarding the rigor of the policies and whether the policies would pass muster with NLRB. Students also argue their expectations for employee breaches and anticipated corporate security issues.

Outcomes. I've conducted this lesson plan and assignment once as described here after years of discussing the impact of new technology on organizational behavior for the last few years. Initial reactions to this year's activity showed that students were engaged and found the assignment to be a welcome challenge in comparison to traditional analysis papers and case study assignments. They enjoyed the opportunity to receive feedback (comments) from students outside their immediate assignment team. They also were eager to debate and discuss their policies and the rationales behind their development in the in-class debate session. Some commented that it made receiving my graded commentary a little easier to accept, i.e., confirmation from their peers was an important factor to digesting post positive and negative commentary from the instructor (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008).

Initially, the main learning outcomes of this assignment were to engage students in the development of these policies and to encourage students to develop an appreciation for the impact of new technology on workplace behavior and organizational success. In reflection on the policies students produced, this assignment also engaged students in a summative application of concepts reflected in the course as a whole. Through their investigation of the companies – their cultures, industry sectors, and settings, students applied concepts including management styles, organizational definitions (classical to systems), co-worker relations, supervisory relations, and ethical frames.

In the future I plan to invite a local expert (either a lawyer or law faculty member) to participate in the in-class debate/discussion session to provide a more critical eye to the final evaluation of the policy statements.

CONCLUSION

As social media and new technology continue to have a greater impact on daily business operations, companies grapple with the development of social media policies – and now bring your own device (BYOD) policies. Instilling in Millennial generation students the value of these policies as new employees and potential managers is critical to the success of these policies and the operations of companies that develop the policies. Including these topics in organizational behavior courses using an active learning approach provides an opportunity for students to better understand the necessity of these policies and potential responses to these policies by employee populations (including their fellow Millennial cohort).

ENDNOTES

[1] Scholarship of application includes using knowledge to solve problems and address issues. Scholarship of discovery refers to the identification of new knowledge (theories and principles).

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Society for Human Resource Management Template for Social Media Policy
Available online at:
http://www.shrm.org/templatestools/samples/policies/pages/socialmediapolicy.aspx

Appendix B: Society for Human Resource Management Template BYOD Available online at:
http://www.shrm.org/TemplatesTools/Samples/Policies/Pages/BringYourOwnDevicePolicy.aspx

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