Chapter 7

Personal Knowledge Management and Social Media: What Students Need to Learn for Business Life

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ABSTRACT

Today’s students are tomorrow’s knowledge workers. They will be paid to find innovative solutions to organizations’ most pressing problems. In times of decreasing training budgets and a dynamic job market, employees have to take over responsibility for their own personal development. Social Media and Social Software both on the WWW and organizations intranets offer a myriad of possibilities to employees and managers to be successful knowledge workers in increasingly virtual organizations and to ensure continuous learning. However, social media also puts new challenges on employees. Particularly young people, who – as the Generation Y’ers – are expected to possess extensive social media skills, need to know how they can use social media in a business context to ensure their personal development and be successful in their jobs. In this chapter, the Personal Knowledge Management model is used to discuss influential factors of successful knowledge work and personal development and to outline what students need to learn to be prepared for Enterprise 2.0.

INTRODUCTION

Post-industrialism puts many challenges on knowledge workers. The fast generation and dissemination of new knowledge, the emergence of new technologies, and the trend towards networked teams instead of hierarchical structures in organizations facilitate constantly changing working environments (David & Foray, 2002).

Knowledge workers have to find timely solutions to often unexpected challenges. Managers do not give orders or supervise the completion of
tasks. They manage people instead of processes (Romhardt, 1998) and are there to support their teams. Employees manage their own workload by themselves: “It is the knowledge worker’s decision what he or she should be held accountable for in terms of quality and quantity regarding time and regarding cost” (Drucker, 1999). Although knowledge is considered a forth resource in the postindustrial economy (Bullinger, 1998), training budgets and education timeframes become tighter and we can see the trend going against traditional classroom training during which participants sit in a room for days, listening to an instructor who tells them what to learn and how. Instead, there is a clear trend towards collaborative, ad-hoc, and on-the-job learning approaches. There is also a shift from employer-initiated training towards employees themselves ensuring self-managed and lifelong learning in collaboration with others. Pre-requisite for the success of these new approaches is the awareness of how important knowledge sharing is both on the employer and the employee side (Klamma et al., 2007). However, individuals have to know how they can enhance their skills, solve problems, and make timely decisions in highly networked, increasingly virtual work environments. Social Media provide an extensive tool set for these purposes and companies expect employees to know how to make best use of them.

Many organizations have already adopted Social Media tools both for internal and external usage. To the external world, Social Media serve as channels for engaging with customers and partner companies or for promoting products and services to prospects. Youtube videos and Facebook activities are used for brand-building purposes and for presenting a more social side of the enterprise. Inside organizations, Social Media are used in many more ways than for communications and marketing purposes only. Particularly multinational companies and institutions use Social Media to support collaboration among their employees who are spread across the globe. Employees are expected to work together and to coordinate their activities using discussion forums, virtual ‘rooms’ or micro-blogging tools which they can find on the corporate intranet. Instead of writing meeting minutes and documentations and distributing them through e-mail or storing them on a server, employees can share relevant information through team blogs or even record short videos with webcams integrated in their laptops which they can upload and use for knowledge sharing and asynchronous communication with their colleagues. Although companies still struggle with the implementation of such changed working behaviors and some firms still have to jump on the Social Media bandwagon, they all expect their employees to go with the shift towards the so-called “Enterprise 2.0” (McAfee, 2006).

Today’s college and university students will become knowledge workers in the near future. They will be employed and paid to support accelerated innovation cycles and ensure their organizations’ success in fast-paced environments. Project-based work and virtual teams put an emphasis on self-efficacy and self-managed work effort. Employees need to collaborate with their peers across time zones and regions, dealing with diverse cultures and language barriers. These challenges they will have to approach with the support of social, web-based technology. The ability to use Social Media effectively for fostering their personal careers is becoming increasingly important. When first-time employees enter a corporate environment after graduating from college or university, they find themselves in a new situation where they quickly have to take on responsibility for their personal careers. The majority of students may have gained working experience already during their studies, and may therefore already know that and how Social Media are used in companies. They are also aware of the fact that, although employed, they might never really leave the job market again: “A changed employment has resulted in a new generation of first-time employees who realize that they need to be more self-sufficient than their predecessors as that they cannot rely on the same
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