Human Resources and Organizations

How social network sites (SNS) have changed the employer–employee relationship and what are the next challenges for human resource (HR)?

Como os Sites de Redes Sociais estão mudando a relação empregado–empregador e quais são os próximos desafios para os Recursos Humanos?

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Abstract

Business people are increasingly using social network sites (SNS) through corporate platforms or open websites such as Twitter, LinkedIn or Facebook. Because it is a recent phenomenon, the potentialities, benefits and risks of such tools have not yet been properly addressed inside organizations. SNS have been used by different members of society, including people of all ages and social classes. Human resource (HR) refers to the practices and policies adopted by companies to carry out the personnel aspects of the work, but some organizations are reluctant to permit SNS access within workplace boundaries. Currently, it is imperative to recognize SNS as an extension of people's social activities and, instead of restricting their use, companies should appreciate the benefits arisen from them. The objective of this essay is to discuss how HR activities are traditionally performed, the changes caused by the emergence of SNS and the new challenges. Thus, it may be useful for HR practitioners as it highlights how key HR activities are being affected by the emergence of SNS. Given the new challenges, HR professionals should use SNS as a complement of their activities, developing policies of use and monitoring the workforce online behavior.

Resumo

A sociedade brasileira usa cada vez mais *sites* de redes sociais por meio de plataformas corporativas ou *websites* abertos como Twitter, LinkedIn e Facebook. Por se tratar de um fenômeno recente, todas as suas potencialidades, todos os seus benefícios e riscos ainda não foram devidamente discutidos nas organizações. Os *sites* de redes sociais são usados por diferentes membros da sociedade, de todas as idades e classes sociais. Os Recursos Humanos (RH) se referem às práticas e às políticas adotadas pelas empresas para administrar os aspectos pessoais do trabalho, e algumas organizações relutam em permitir o acesso aos *sites* de redes sociais durante o horário do trabalho. Atualmente, torna-se imperativo reconhecer os *sites* de redes sociais como uma extensão das atividades humanas e, ao invés de restringir seu uso, valorizar os benefícios gerados por ele. O objetivo deste ensaio é discutir como as atividades do RH são tradicionalmente feitas, as mudanças causadas pelo surgimento dos *sites* de redes sociais e os novos desafios. Dessa forma, deve colaborar com os profissionais de RH, uma vez que destaca como suas atividades são afetadas pelo surgimento das redes sociais. Tendo em vista os novos desafios, os profissionais de RH devem usar as redes sociais como complemento de suas atividades e desenvolver políticas de uso e acompanhamento do comportamento *on-line* dos trabalhadores.

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Introduction

The advance of web-based technology has enabled a greater number of people to be on social network sites (SNS). Increasingly, SNS have been used by different members of society, including people of all ages and social classes. Inside organizations, SNS may help users on connection, collaboration and communication (Jue, Marr & Kassotakis, 2009), but many organizations are reluctant to permit SNS access within workplace boundaries. Although the use of SNS inside organizations has brought several benefits, some companies are still blocking employees' access to external websites by arguing that time spent on SNS is not work related (Andriole, 2010; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). There is a common belief among employers that workers who use the Internet for personal reasons during work hours are 'goofing off'. It is not uncommon for employees to be punished or even fired for personal web usage at work (Coker, 2011).

SNS may increase both the number and strength of ties among people, yield highly useful digital environments that are easy to capture and spread knowledge, and provide high-quality answers to questions (DiMicco et al., 2008; McAfee, 2009; Skeels & Grudin, 2009). Currently, SNS use is so spread that we come to the point where monitoring, instead of banning SNS activities, may bring greater benefits to company performance. Thus, human resource (HR) plays an important role in this paradigm shift, as it should understand, adapt and disseminate new guidelines inside the organization.

Within this context, this essay will discuss how the activities under the responsibility of HR (recruitment and selection; training and development; performance management; safety, health and engagement; and labor relations) have adapted to the emergence of SNS. More than pointing out the changes, this essay discusses the implications, by indicating the problems that can arise and how to overcome them.

The emergence of SNS has changed the employer-employee relationship. Thus, this essay indicates the benefits and risks involved in SNS use within the workplace. It begins with a discussion on SNS functionalities and how some organizations are making use of them. It presents some HR activities and discusses how SNS are affecting them. Implications and new challenges are also highlighted.

Social network sites

Social network sites (SNS) are web-based services that allow users to construct an individual profile to interact with contacts and also enable the visualization of friends' network within the system. These platforms allow users to learn detailed information about contacts, share it with others and build online human-relationships (Beer, 2008; Kwon & Wen, 2010; Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009).

SNS complement the network of relationships present in the offline world by providing both the technical and the social infrastructure for social interaction. For example, the tool provides technical support for communication through applications (wall posts, messages, comments) and information about users'

contact. The identity information serves as a social lubricant, providing clues about the profile owner's social status, physical attractiveness, credibility, cultural tastes and political affiliation, besides other aspects of the self (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2011; Steinfield, Ellison & Lampe, 2008; Tong, Van der Heide & Langwell, 2008).

The passive observation of social news also allows users to track the activities of connections and might lower the barriers to initiating communication, both because potential commonalities are revealed and crucial information about others is provided (Burke, Marlow & Lento, 2010; Steinfield et al., 2008; Vitak, Ellison & Steinfield, 2011). The size of one's apparent friends' network on SNS can easily become much larger than traditional offline networks, as technology facilitates greater connection, and social norms inhibit refusals to friend requests (Tong et al., 2008).

Most SNS are structured around a profile and a display of connections, but they may vary to the extent that they support additional services such as blogging (LiveJournal), audio-visual content sharing (Flicker, Last.FM, Youtube) or status updates and mobile connectivity (Twitter). Also, they can be directed to a specific audience, such as work-related connections (LinkedIn), romantic relationship initiation (the original goal of Friendster.com) or ethnic, religious, sexual orientation or particular content genres (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). Apparently, each SNS may be directed to a particular audience or purpose. However, informal and formal relationships are mixed in the same platform, because people may use it indiscriminately, mixing personal and professional objectives.

Much of the existing research on SNS has focused on the motivations for using it, its role on the creation of social capital and privacy concerns. There is a lack of studies in the organizational context. Inside companies, information technologies with SNS features are changing the way HR departments handle record keeping and information sharing. Today, HR employees use information systems to automate much of their work in managing employee records and giving employees access to information. This means employees have online access to information about HR issues such as job opportunities, training, performance, and compensation; go online to enroll themselves in programs and services; and provide feedback through online surveys (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2007).

Some organizations have developed internal SNS to be exclusively used by employees. They have the objective of promoting internal network connection, enabling information exchange and stimulating cooperation inside the firm. Internal SNS may be considered as an extension of HR's information technologies that support employee record, information sharing and knowledge management through firm-wide (DiMicco et al., 2008).

Social network sites inside organizations

Researches have showed that employees surf the web or send personal e-mails during working time because these activities are considered to be similar to other everyday activities at the workplace, such as calling home or chatting with a coworker