

New Media and Leadership: Social Media and Open Organizational Communication

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Abstract: *This paper aims to identify and analyze the extent to which new media have penetrated the Romanian organizations' internal communication and have influenced the leadership. We intend also to consider how social media becomes a tool for organizational communication and contributes to the creation of a new kind of leadership associated with open communication. We start from the premise that new media and social media can contribute to the leader's mission to create around him a vision and makes others to share this vision. In terms of open communication, the external image of organization reflects, in part, leadership practices within the organization. It is about the exercise of the shared collective leadership (Don Tapscott, 1996) that should strengthen the organization position.*

Key words: Leadership, new media, social media, open communication, shared information

JEL Classification: O15

Leadership and management: definitions and theories

The term 'leadership' is used referring to inter- or intra-group communication. Strictly speaking, its meaning is to influence communication. Fundamentally, leadership

and influence are synonymous (Tellier, 1999, p.126). In this perspective, we start from the principle that in any group - regardless of structure or number - individuals interact in pursuit of a common goal, whether it is inside or outside group, referring to public

or private interests, shaped or diffused. The leadership designated as "the ability of a leader, driving a framework to determine a group of people to work with it in achieving a goal based on their strong involvement" (Nicolescu, Verboncu, 1999, p.516). The same authors designate leadership as the interface between the leader and his followers' staff as "interpersonal influence that a manager exerts on subordinates in the establishment and in particular the achievement of the objectives" (Nicolescu, Verboncu, 1999, p.514).

From here results the idea that "leadership is based on team spirit, which is the result of integrating four processes: build trust between those involved; establishing a clear mission and goals that join individuals; conduct participatory decision-making processes; strong individual and group motivation to help achieve common goals" (Cornescu, Mihailescu, Stanciu, 2003, p.221).

A definition that takes into account explicitly the communication process belongs to the authors R. Tannenbaum, J. Weschler, F. Massarik (Leadership and Organization, 1961), cited by Mielu Zlate: "Leadership is interpersonal influence exercised in a defined and directed situation, through the communication process, to achieve a defined goal or goals" (apud Zlate, 2004, p.23).

In terms of effectiveness, leadership involves a person's ability to create a vision, to establish guidelines for actions, to unite the individuals for achieving the vision, to realize the vision with team members, to track the project in its processuality, to achieve results through organization, control and problem solving and teamwork seen as a sum of complementary forces which identity is given by the following and achieving a shared vision.

From the multitude of definitions, as a common element appears the processual character of leadership and the fact that it involves a group over which the manager exercises a formal influence or an informal leader exerts an informal influence, in both cases this influence is transmitted through a form of communication, in order to influence the achievement of group goals or achieving goals.

Tellier believes that leadership occurs whenever we are dealing with a process of communication between two or more people - transmitter and receiver - between which there is a circulation of meanings. The significations movement between these two poles affects the counterparts in some way by these significations, for long or short term. Some influences are deliberately pursued by the transmitter in the short term and the receiver cannot be aware of this influence. We talk here about advertising, political and media influences (Tellier, 1999, pp.127-128).

Also in this category we placed the messages sent through social media influence. Leadership reflects the human dimension of the manager, the side that allows it to influence, to determine which group leads to work together to achieve the objectives of the organization.

The studies from the 60s, among which those of Kurt Lewin from the National Training Laboratories recommends participatory perspective control. During this period the term leadership is used in place of the commander. Thus, the manager must lead not only as a commander, but he has to influence subordinates and to consent to be influenced by them so as to create a consensus that can be translated into actions.

The 70s showed that in the modern

economy wins one who has the best human resources in fighting competition. At that time the situational and evolutionary theories of leadership had appeared. They took account of the context and relationship between superior - subordinate. In this context, the leadership is a key factor in striving for excellence and self-improvement. Manager cannot meet these challenges. He must be a leader with a clear vision that you can communicate to others. This must be an effective communication through which to impose the ideas at the same time. "In this perspective, leaders are people who do what it takes to implement the vision, exerting influence on others. On the other hand, managers are people who do things right" (Hellriegel, Slocum, Woodman, 2001, p. 296).

Organizations began to move towards a new type of leader, charismatic, transformational, open to change and to interpersonal communication. To update this vision, the leader must have a sense of organization, respect, use and take care of his subordinate staff. It will promote a set of transparent values and be able to convey to others. One of the most important qualities is his ability to perform change management, which is increasingly important in terms of the complexity of the modern world where everyone is striving to remain competitive. The management through the leadership has to face competition to keep costs as low as possible, to increase product quality, to improve customer service, and to impose faster the products into the market. Company image is transmitted over public relations services to diversify their communication techniques inside and outside the organization.

Leadership as a process of influence, but also managerial process, is determined

by a number of factors, from personal qualities to the organization's situation and position in the external environment. The first category of factors related to personal characteristics that make leadership to manifest itself both in the formal and informal leaders. We are talking about the innate qualities such as intelligence, flexibility of thinking, personal attraction, the understanding, openness to others, etc. Those who possess these qualities are considered charismatic person, who attract others to achieve common goals, to inspire confidence and dynamism. Many experts feel that the exercise of leadership depends largely on the ability of leaders to use different types of power to influence the behavior of subordinates (Zorlețan et alii, 1995; Stăncioiu&Militaru, 1998; Cornescu et alii, 2003). In the last two decades, new technologies have provided and continue to provide tools for the exercise more complex and diversified power and influence. From the site which became mandatory card of any organization that wants to be on the market to use of social networking that evolution was rapid and with major consequences on the evolution of leadership.

The modern notion of leadership cannot ignore the functioning of formal and informal groups and interaction inter- and intra-group. Once a group begins to communicate – one by one, transmitters and receivers – the influences occur gradually changing meanings and behaviors that will affect the whole group and activity. Once a group begins to communicate, it lives an experience which means sharing of influence, so the leadership.

C. Rusu, R. Mathis and P. Nica discuss about a "neo-manager" who "promotes professional competition, providing resources, ideas and motivations. He asks questions

that determine employees to seek solutions and take responsibility in decision making" (1997, p.432-433). The main quality of this new type of leader will be the orientation towards excellence. The hierarchy is less stratified and the leadership is focused on communication and feedback. Charlene Li, in *Open Leadership: How Social Technology Can Transform How You Lead* (2010), talks about "openness, transparency and authenticity" as the fundamental precepts of leadership. In this work, Charlene Li provides resources for leaders willing to use social media while maintaining control over the management of the organization. As the author said, the opening relies more on rigor and effort than on the control. Using social media, leaders transform their organizations so that they become more efficient and more powerful, while being profitable in an open market economy. It ensures communication and social media connectivity and leads to a shared communication (culture of sharing). The Romanian organizations do not generally apply these principles and practice based on management control.

Social Media and Open Organizational Communication in Romania

In this article we aimed to research the extent to which managers of Romanian companies use communication opportunities offered by new media and social media and what consequences appear on leadership style practices. The exploratory research is still in progress. In the first stage of the research, we applied a questionnaire in which we identified the leaders of Romanian organizations who use the new media and social

media as tools for management and internal communication. Of the total of 54 questionnaires, 8 respondents were from state institutions (schools, public television, hospitals, media agencies, research institutes, etc.). The remaining 46 respondents are from the private business organizations, such as private television, commercial banks, etc. The respondents were questioned online or face to face.

From the questionnaire responses, coupled with our observations and the results of previous studies made by my students from the Master of Corporate Communications, we can draw some important conclusions:

- The use of new media as a means of communication within the organization and as a means of transmitting leadership increases the group's sphere of influence which widens and becomes heterogeneous and do not comply with hierarchical levels and statutes.

- Also the use of new media increases transparency of management decisions.

- The new media increases top managers' leadership. Top manager gains through social media greater visibility which can be 'tangible': what he thinks, how he expresses himself, that attitude he shows, that opinion he has, etc.

- In contrast at the level of middle management, there is no such a problem: his message is addressed to a small group, which interacts and communicates directly.

- Social media, through free access of persons in the group, flattens hierarchical structures and creates a personalized relationship between management and employees.

- Under these conditions, the type recommended is that transformational leadership.

- Leadership that uses the new media is

a collective leadership. However, it should not replace control as management function.

- Leadership becomes fragile by opening in new media and exposure to critical opinions.

- Feedback from bottom to top can be critical and opinions are interrelated and influence each other and can cause currents of opinion for or against the management style practiced in the firm.

- It favored the emergence of informal leaders who influence individual messages and lead to the structuring of group views; also the use of social networking and the attraction of a large number of 'friends' can lead to the discovery of the structure leading to the person concerned.

- The inhibitions disappear in front of the hierarchy by the fact that it can mask identities and thereby become more honest opinions and more virulent

- These decrease inhibitions may occur due to lower average age of managers, but also - in many private companies - the employees.

- In Romania, managers do not take into account the views expressed by employees in social media.

- An interesting observation was the result of the Apa Nova organization. Its employees are also beneficiaries of the company. Expressing their opinions in social media influences company general opinion of the beneficiaries of the company. These employees send out a high degree of credibility (they are meant witness) of corporate image; to give a positive image of the organization, managers must increase the level of accountability and motivation of their employees.

- The leader's blog is less visible. The possible explanation is that the Romanian

companies have managers and leadership and are not concerned with the transmission of the vision and mission of the organization they lead.

- The image transmitted through social media organization should to be related with existing organizational culture type. A negative image transmitted from the organization can harm fragile company. This may however have a boomerang effect on employees: if their organization is in decline, their own situation may be endangered, employees are the ones who bear direct consequences.

- The image spread outside organization involves the opinions of the employees related with the company internal communication. The public relations departments send a positive global image of the organization, while social media is transmitted through personalized messages, individual testimonies of leaders and employees who are found in proximity relationship with the hierarchy.

- A positive feedback received from group/person on a social network increases self-esteem and confidence of the employees.

- An example of a negative reaction to the message group was a formal New Year greeting sent by a multinational CEO: only 20% of employees surveyed (50) have opened that email and only 5% read the message until the end. The explanations: the message was formal without being adapted to the group (survey conducted at the Master of Corporate Communications).

This study also included 13 questionnaires with open questions, addressed to managers of Apa Nova, Raiffeisen Bank and Siveco Romania. All respondents believe that the democratic leadership allows them to give and receive feedback and apply

supportive communication style. In one form or another, they agree that the use of new types of communication help to organize, control and streamline communication and information and increase reliability and customer satisfaction.

However, according to respondents, these new interactive media should not replace face to face communication that favors direct relationship with employees and customers. This is also one of the conclusions of Dominique Wolton, who found that the most important decisions pertaining to power is always done by word of mouth (D. Wolton, p 42). New media open up new opportunities to assert the "personality" of a leadership organization and open an important role is

shared communication with both employees and clients.

Conclusions

To conclude, leadership can not ignore the new media, this is an opportunity but also a tool of self and even a risk factor for organizations that do not properly manage their image and internal communication. Social networks cannot be controlled and subdued. Through their pressure, leadership must evolve to authentic values, decisional transparency and direct and personalized communication. In our opinion, the charismatic and visionary leader will be one that will be able to align the group in achieving its objectives and bring added value to the organization in an open and competitive economy.

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