

The Social C-Suite

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If the C-suite increases its social media use internally and externally, it could be used as a tool to impact organizational competence.

To be engaged means employees feel like a part of the organization. They will want to go the extra mile, are willing to stay and will recommend their place of employment and its products and services to others.

Among the 47,361 employees surveyed in 120 countries, Gallup, a research-based performance-management consulting company, estimates the percentage of employees who are engaged at 11 percent. In Canada employee engagement creeps up to 20 percent, and in the United States it's slightly better at 28 percent. BlessingWhite, a Gallup competitor, reports 33 percent of North Americans and 30 percent of European employees are engaged in their work.

The state of employee engagement is a troubling organizational predicament, and many leaders wonder whether internal social media and social learning could help to drive it: Should the C-suite become more involved? How does its use by the C-suite affect adoption of social learning in the organization? Is it the chief learning officer's responsibility?

In a 2012 study conducted and sponsored by Domo and CEO.com, researchers found 70 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs had no social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest or Google Plus. Some 26 percent of them had a LinkedIn profile, whereas only 4 percent were on Twitter.

Consulting firm BRANDfog conducted a 2012 survey and discovered when members of the C-suite began engaging in external social media such as Twitter and Facebook, some 82 percent of consumers would be more trusting of a company.

IBM conducted research with more than 1,700 CEOs across 64 countries in its 2012 Global CEO Study and found 75 percent of CEOs listed collaboration as the No. 1 attribute they seek in their employee base.

To borrow from Winston Churchill, it seems organizations are nearing the "end of the beginning" of social in the enterprise, both internally and externally. It's happening slowly, but there isn't widespread use by the C-suite. The C-suite should adapt its leadership style to incorporate social as a way to both give knowledge to the organization and to endorse collaborative-based practices that enrich employee competence.

There are a few reasons why the C-suite isn't using social media more inside organizations. Time management is a big one. A CEO, CIO, CFO, CHRO or other chief officer is likely quite busy and may think he or she doesn't have time to "do social." The Executive Time Use Project found C-suite members spend 55 hours per week at work.

Fear is another reason — specifically fear of failure and of being open. India-based HR social consultant Gautam Ghosh said, "The C-suite needs to stop thinking of the boundaries as opaque walls — both internally and externally. Think of them as porous, translucent membranes. Be ready to fail. Remember, it's a world of flows." In other words, the C-suite should get over fears of failure, openness and tentativeness and partake in the flow of information.

Another issue that may be causing this dearth of C-suite social participation is the misperception that it is a time waster. McKinsey Global Institute, however, finds the opposite to be true. After analyzing more than 4,200 companies, in 2012 McKinsey found if social technologies were used more effectively in the workplace, these companies would garner \$900 billion to \$1.3 trillion in total value. The report suggested social technologies in the organization demonstrated "improved communications and collaboration within and across enterprises." That's not wasted time. Communicating and collaborating are knowledge sharing methods that can increase organization competence.

Ryan Holmes, CEO of social media management system HootSuite, said social media is an important asset inside and outside the organization. In a 2012 Fast Company article titled "The \$1.3 Trillion Price of Not Tweeting at Work," Holmes said, "Social technologies have the potential to free up expertise trapped

ON THE WEB

Serendipity Interactive founder Tammara Combs says CLOs can counter executives' concerns about social learning: CLOMedia.com/materials/view/223.



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— Ryan Holmes, CEO of HootSuite

in departmental silos. High-skill workers can now be tapped company-wide.”

“I believe that social media is the new watercooler, in the sense that more and more people are talking, sharing stories and generally bonding through social channels like Facebook and Twitter,” Holmes said in a recent interview. “... In this way, social media is like an ongoing team-building exercise. When C-suite members join that conversation, they become more in touch with their employees, and only then can they use those channels to drive internal engagement.”

To start or to better engage in social media use, the C-suite can take three actions: get social, utilize the CARE principle and be real.

Get Social

As a first step, the C-suite must ensure the organization is equipped to utilize social technologies. Ask employees if there are any tools such as blogging, micro-blogging, video sharing or photo sharing being used. If not, draft a cross-functional team, including the learning team, to bring these tools into the organization. Afterward, the C-suite must begin using these tools to connect, collaborate and communicate with its employee base. The C-suite can start with a few micro-blog posts via Twitter and graduate to full-blown blog posts and video sharing snippets to share knowledge, recognize someone or point out useful external sources of information and learning.

The next step is to think about using external-facing social tools, but the C-suite should focus first on its internal engagement, knowledge sharing and silo busting. One of the primary benefits of being social for the C-suite and the organization lies in openness. “Traditional organizational structures are removed,” said Alan Lepofsky, vice president and principal analyst at Constellation Research Inc. “Executives can have conversations with people they otherwise would rarely have the opportunity to interact with.”

Lepofsky said bi-directional conversation is an important cultural trait in an organization, and the C-suite should use social software to communicate important company information — such as sharing

the corporate vision and strategy — or to solicit process improvements and innovative ideas. “Just like in personal relationships, communication is the key to success, and an organization that communicates well is one where you’ll find happier and more motivated employees,” he said.

Utilize CARE

Flat Army: Creating a Connected and Engaged Organization by Dan Pontefract, the author of this article, introduces the Participative Leader Framework. Within this model is the CARE principle that argues a leader must demonstrate the holistic behaviors of being continuous, authentic, reciprocal and educating (CARE) throughout the organization at all times. This can be adapted to the use of social tools inside the organization by the C-suite as well.

Once tools such as micro-blogging, wikis, video sharing, virtual worlds and blogging are up and running inside the organization, the C-suite not only needs to use them, these leaders have a responsibility to continuously post and connect to others via authentic contributions. To help, the CLO could institute a way to measure levels of reciprocity in the organization and determine who is contributing versus merely consuming.

Rawn Shah, social business strategist at IBM, said responsiveness and supportiveness are also key attributes. Both align well with the CARE principle. “The C-suite needs to be ready to respond to employee questions regardless of rank in a timely manner whenever possible. It shows they are willing to pay attention to detail and the needs of employees.”

The C-suite should choose to support individual employees’ messages shared in public or widely seen internal social spaces when they help to promote the activities and messages of their area of business. Shah said this would demonstrate an unsolicited level of support and endorsement.

Be Real

If the C-suite is on the social train and can employ CARE, responsiveness and supportiveness attributes, there is also the need to be real. Kevin Akeroyd, senior

vice president of field operations at Badgeville, a global gamification company, said social media and the C-suite are important for one another, so long as those occupying the chief seats keep it real. "Social isn't going to be enough unless the C-suite invests the time in engagement and motivation mechanics to help drive overall happiness at the company."

Akeroyd said reputation and status will only go as far as the C-suite's ability to be clear about what it's doing and its level of openness and transparency. The last thing the C-suite should do is have ghost bloggers or micro-bloggers inside the organization. It should be their voices participating, and it should be straight talk. The C-suite cannot get away with being robots or having their internal communications team act or speak on their behalf.

According to a study by MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte released in May, "55 percent of shoppers share their purchases on Facebook," while "98 percent of shoppers say that online customer reviews have a major influence on their decision to purchase a product or service." It went on to report that "68 percent of shoppers rate and review products on a regular basis."

Consider, what if the C-suite increased its participation in internal social tools such as blogs, micro-blogging, commenting and videos to mimic what consumers and shoppers are doing? What if these leaders openly encouraged their employees to behave in this manner transparently and freely inside the organization? Spikes in employee engagement, collaboration, knowledge sharing and organizational competence likely would result. Every chief learning officer needs to take this on as a challenge because they could become the social change agent for the entire C-suite.

The more participative the C-suite is in social media and with employees, the more engaged the organization will become. Once the organization is engaged, levels of trust, competence, intellect and productivity will swell. That can only be a good thing when it comes to customer satisfaction and profitability. **CLO**

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