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The social media conundrum: Employers walking tightrope to create productive workplaces

MARTIN KOVACS / Monday, June 18, 2018



Social media can boost productivity in the workplace, but employees who use social platforms are also more likely to leave an organisation, with recent research shedding light on the potential social media conundrum faced by employers.

Writing at the *Harvard Business Review*, California State University assistant professor of management Lorenzo Bizzi points to the [potential collaborative benefits of workplace social media use](#), labelling concerns that it can harm productivity as “misguided”.

“Social media doesn’t reduce productivity nearly as much as it kills employee retention,” Bizzi observes.

How are employees using social media?

Bizzi undertook research with 277 employees of a healthcare organisation, canvassing opinions on why and how they used platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. He found that employees interacting with co-workers “tend to be more motivated and come up with innovative ideas”, with the opposite holding true for interaction with individuals outside of an organisation.

“These findings suggest that the effects of social media depend on who employees interact with; employees who interact with their colleagues share meaningful work experiences, but those making connections outside the organisation are distracted and unproductive,” Bizzi writes.

However, the second part of Bizzi’s research revealed that employees using social media were also more likely to leave an organisation, perhaps “because they were more likely to engage with potential new employers than their less social peers”.



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According to Bizzi's study, 76% of employees who used social media for work took an interest in other organisations they found on social media, compared to 60% of those who used social media only for leisure.

The research additionally showed that employees who used social media for work were more likely to use social media to find out about other organisations, use it to make new work connections and to search for a new job.

How to approach the social media conundrum?

Bizzi suggests that managers can approach this conundrum by seeking to neutralise social media-created retention risks, leveraging training to make employees focus on positive behaviours, such as collaboration, which may increase satisfaction and attachment and counter turnover risks.

Bizzi writes that managers can also "turn the threat into an opportunity", while social media could also potentially be used as a recruitment tool.

"Managers can create social media groups in which employees will be more likely to collaborate and less likely to share withdrawal intentions or discussions about external job opportunities," he advises.

"Managers can use social media to directly reduce turnover intentions, by recognising employees' accomplishments and giving visibility to employees' success stories."

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