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Redefining corporate leadership through Web 2.0 technologies: An initial study

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ABSTRACT

The emerging popularity of Web 2.0 technologies for organizing people and influencing them through reciprocal collaboration and communication has fostered a new leadership paradigm within organizations, that of the technology-driven leader. With recent political campaigns having embraced Web 2.0 technologies with considerable impact, businesses have started exploring its potential in redefining corporate leadership, bypassing established structural hierarchies to directly reach out to employees and engage them in creative dialogue and innovative thinking and to calibrate messaging in line with organizational objectives. Drawing upon the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), this initial study examines the facilitating conditions for fostering organizational leadership through adoption of Web 2.0 technologies. The personality traits that can lead to efficient technology-driven leadership as well as the comparative efficacy of Web 2.0 technologies in fostering leadership perceptions among employees will also be examined.

Keywords

Web 2.0 technologies, corporate leadership, technology-driven leader

INTRODUCTION

Leadership has manifold dimensions – from a social influence perspective it can be viewed as a process that capitalizes on the efforts of followers, towards the realization of a goal or goals (Chemers, 1997). The emergence of Web 2.0 and social media has impacted the manner in which leaders recruit and organize followers as well as influence and co-ordinate their activities towards the attainment of goals. This paradigm shift has impacted leadership in almost all societal constituencies, particularly politics and business (Deiser and Newton, 2013; Wortham, 2012).

Web 2.0 refers to the basket of World Wide Web technologies that empower users to communicate, collaborate, organize, and share information online, often in real-time. This has become feasible due to the transition from static to dynamic HTML web pages, Asynchronous JavaScript and XML, and increased bandwidth due to improved networking infrastructure (Li and Bernoff, 2008). Among others, Web 2.0 technologies encompass instant messaging, web-conferencing, weblogs or blogs (e.g. Word Press, Blogger) micro blogs (e.g. Twitter), wikis, social bookmarking (e.g. Delicious), digital media sharing (e.g. YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest), social networking applications (e.g. Facebook, Google+), music streaming applications (e.g. Spotify) and hybrid applications.

WEB 2.0 TECHNOLOGIES AND LEADERSHIP

The impact of Web 2.0 applications in the political sphere has been profound (Wortham, 2012). In the 2012 United States presidential elections, the presidential candidates of the two leading political parties had a conspicuous presence on Web 2.0 with a combined 57 million plus followers (and millions of site visitors) through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, Spotify, and Tumblr. This arguably impacted the election outcome: the winning candidate had 42 million plus followers more than the losing candidate leading to a 24 percentage point advantage in the youth demographic (Pew Research Center, 2012). The US Congress has also embraced Web 2.0 technologies as a leadership strategy with members utilizing it for reaching out directly to constituents, disseminating information on legislative acts, and for demonstrating accountability and transparency (Greenberg, 2012).

Businesses have started recognizing the relevance of Web 2.0 in redefining corporate leadership. However this has put an additional burden on corporate leaders to redefine their leadership strategies and understand the intricacies of Web 2.0 technologies so as to facilitate its creative use in reciprocal dialogue with employees. While traditional business leadership relied on well-defined structural hierarchies and associated power dynamics, Web 2.0 facilitates linear processes and

horizontal collaborations that cut across traditional power structures, requiring leaders to re-think and re-calibrate their leadership strategies (Cheuk and Dervin, 2011; Deiser and Newton, 2013; McGonagill and Doerffer, 2011). The new technology-driven leader corporate leader needs to be capable of creating compelling digital narratives that enables them to communicate with employees at a personal level. While traditional messaging within organizations tends to be top-down and controlled, Web 2.0 facilitates the retooling and contextualizing of the message through input from employees giving it new meaning and direction. It is important that the technology-driven leader be aware of these messaging dynamics as it spreads through the organizational network and be capable of intervening and reshaping evolving ideas to align with organizational objectives. As a recipient of knowledge, the technology-driven leader needs to be able to prioritize messages to respond to and share with appropriate channels. Care must be taken to ensure that messaging does not get out of hand and result in ill-will between organizational stakeholders; hence it is important that the technology-driven leader be able to develop a network of strategic Web 2.0 nodal leaders through whom messaging activities can be orchestrated, and a measure of control retained. As these technologies and the manner in which they are implemented and messaging contextualized are constantly evolving, the technology-driven leader has to be in constant learning mode, open to adapting and improvising as required (Deiser and Newton, 2013; Wilson, 2004).

Using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis and Davis, 2003) this study attempts to understand the facilitating conditions for fostering technology-based organizational leadership and to identify personality traits that can promote efficient leadership along the dimensions of creating, distributing, and managing Web 2.0 content, establishing and strategically leveraging and promoting Web 2.0 infrastructure, as well as analyzing Web 2.0 trends and recalibrating leadership strategies as required. In addition, the efficacy of different Web 2.0 technologies in fostering leadership perceptions among employees will also be examined.

EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

Data will be collected from senior managers of three major diversified corporations in the Midwest. These corporations have been proactive in implementing Web 2.0 applications to collaborate, communicate, and lead their respective organizations. It is expected that preliminary results available for presentation at the 2015 Midwest Association for Information Systems Conference.

CONCLUSION

The concept of technology-driven leadership is emerging as a potent leadership paradigm within organizations and this study intends to put forth an initial framework for assessing the technology-driven leader and leadership efficacy of various Web 2.0 technologies.

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