

Chapter 15

Learning in Post-Bureaucratic Organizations: The Role and Contribution of Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the chapter is to analyze the evolution of training and learning in post-bureaucratic organizations through the lens of the learning 2.0 phenomenon, discussing some of the critical aspects and challenges of learning effectively for both individuals and organizations. First, the chapter introduces the main characteristics of post-bureaucratic models and illustrates the evolution of Human Resource Management and the strategic role it plays in the success of post-modern organizations. The concept of Strategic Human Resources Development will also be introduced, with attention given to the importance of training and learning for human capital development and improvement. The author then details some significant trends and evolutions in how learning is accomplished in post-bureaucratic organizations. Second, the chapter outlines the role and contribution of social media in workplace learning and the related benefits, risks and limitations. After reviewing the findings of recent studies, the author delineates some ways for post-bureaucratic organizations to effectively leverage social technologies in order to support learning and growth at both the individual and organizational level. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of the main avenues for future research.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, both the academic and practical sides of management have paid increasing attention to learning and knowledge management as strategic issues—not only for Human Resources Management (HRM), but for organizations' general competitiveness and success.

Recent developments in the global economic and social climate have imbued learning and knowledge with strategic importance, which has consequently impacted organizations. Specifically, there has been a transition from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic models: Static, vertical and monolithic structures have

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given way to increasingly dynamic, flat and flexible structures characterized by unstable and changing boundaries (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005). These structural changes have naturally affected how work is organized and employees are managed.

Many studies underline that, in contrast to the previous focus on hierarchy, formal coordination and control, post-bureaucratic organizations tend to focus on values and behaviours (Thompson & Alvesson, 2005; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Van Maanen & Barley, 1982), which has resulted in a soft management model replacing the traditional bureaucratic approach. Organizational learning, from this new perspective, is a means of facilitating the development of these soft elements. At the same time, learning has also become necessary for organizations to acquire a competitive position (Deeds, 2003).

With the advent of the so-called Knowledge-based Economy, knowledge has been recognized as a primary intangible asset and productive resource capable of generating value, innovation and productivity (Drucker, 1993; Toffler, 1991). Because of this, human capital (Edvinsson & Malone, 1997; Sveiby, 1997) has assumed a central role in organizational success and competitive advantage:

- Individuals, with their skills, expertise and attitudes, represent organizations' real value; and
- "Those organizations that learn and apply learning more efficiently have the opportunity to reap greater rewards in productivity, speed and profitability" (Wellman, 2009, p.5).

Therefore, one of the main challenges for current organizations is to act as a learning organization (Senge, 1990). This entails developing routines, tools, and procedures to deal with problems and situations in an uncertain and increasingly complex environment, as well as constantly facilitate the growth and renewal of skills and competences at both the individual and collective level. To promote effective organizational learning, companies need to create a coherent culture of learning, spreading the belief that employees need to not only learn, but importantly adopt a learning to learn orientation (Bateson, 1972).

Thanks to the rapid technological changes that characterize the Digital Era (Castells, 1996) organizations have increasingly adopted web 2.0 tools (Bughin & Chiu, 2010; Treem & Leonardi, 2013). Digital tools like blogs, wikis and social networks have greatly impacted people's lives, allowing widespread individuals to share their personal and professional experiences, thereby crafting shared identities, meanings and knowledge. Applied to post-bureaucratic organizations, social media seems to foster social and collaborative learning processes among professionals and workers (Seely Brown, 2008; London & Hall, 2011), which has given rise to the 'learning 2.0' phenomenon within organizations (Redecker et al., 2009). However, there are various challenges involved with effectively cultivating a learning 2.0 culture (Chui, Miller, & Roberts, 2009).

Based on these premises, the chapter focuses on learning processes in post-bureaucratic organizations. Specifically, the chapter analyzes the evolution of training practices and tools in post-bureaucratic organizations through the lens of the learning 2.0 phenomenon, discussing some of the critical aspects and challenges of learning effectively for both individuals and organizations.

First, the chapter illustrates the evolution of Human Resource Management and the strategic role it plays in the success of postmodern organizations. The concept of Strategic Human Resources Development will also be introduced, with attention given to the importance of training and learning for human capital development and improvement. The author then details some significant trends and evolutions in how learning is accomplished in post-bureaucratic organizations.

Second, the chapter outlines the role and contribution of social media in workplace learning and the related benefits, risks and limitations. After reviewing the findings of recent studies, the author delin-

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