
MANAGERIAL CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF USING NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

Gabriel-Andrei BREZOIU

The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

gabriel.brezoiu@gmail.com

Abstract

Nowadays changes such as technological progress, internet use on a large scale and management practices in the context of a knowledge based society are important factors to influence our way of life, our way of doing business. Understanding new media challenges is no longer an accessory for many business sectors. Integrating these tools in our processes is not just an extra benefit, but sometimes it could be a must. Important changes could be seen in the field of communication and public relations, in marketing for understanding our customer behavior, in human resources management and at a strategic level. However, this phenomenon brings both opportunities and threats which may be considered before deciding to upgrade your services to the new media trend.

Keywords: Education, Business, Online, ELearning, Services.

1. INTRODUCTION

Obviously, XXIth century is the time when we have plenty of information which is circulating very fast and we often doubt its quality. All these advantages and disadvantages are coming together with Internet's large scale development and in the same time a raising popularity of social networks.

As for a person, there is a change of behavior by virtually integrating some components of personality and socializing. Psychologists sometimes believe that there are persons which substitute their real life for the virtual one.

In the first part of this paper, we will focus on education – a domain with many influences coming from new technologies development – and we will emphasize the features of eLearning.

For an organization, this trend is also to be considered. Starting with individual behavior change is it easy to understand that there are changes in organizational management for marketing reasons. We will mainly approach marketing, communication, human resources management and strategically management and in order to continue the first part approach we will refer to eLearning providers. Nevertheless, those should be seen as an all while new media technologies (we will mainly approach social networks), the features of a knowledge based society and a fast technological progress should be considered together and adapted to each business environment and to each organization itself.

2. EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

2.1. *Nowadays trends*

In the context of knowledge based economy (Nicolescu and Nicolescu, 2008, pp. 380-381) where knowledge become capital, many enterprises understand how important there are qualifications and lifelong learning of their staff. This is why we consider that nowadays the status is changing: from focusing on production to "processing information, getting knowledge and manufacturing knowledge based goods" by providing a higher investment on human resources training.

Besides that, internet's large scale development in all the fields is deeply changing our way of communication, of socializing and of behaving. Basically, it is no longer a simple communication exchange network for military purposes, but an essential part of all our activities.

Those trends are also contributing to eLearning services development for both organizations requiring this for human resources training or providing this kind of services.

2.2. *The concept of eLearning*

Generally, eLearning (Tavangarian et al., 2004) refers to all kind of education made by using electronic means. IT&C systems are the support for eLearning education in both online and offline ways. Usually, this kind of process takes places in the class room by using various electronic tools or outside the class room by using internet.

eLearning content is delivered through Internet, Intranet, Extranet, audio / video tapes, by TV satellite, by CD ROM etc. The process could be self managed or assisted by a tutor while content could take various forms such as text, images, audio, video and motion.

There are three kinds of roles in an eLearning process (Gaijert, 2008): the **author** (the one that creates the content), the **tutor** (the one which assist students through the platform) and the **student** (the beneficiary of eLearning process).

2.3. *eLearning in the European Union*

European Commission (European Commission - Information Society, 2007) considers that eLearning means using multimedia and internet for a greater quality of educational services by facilitating resources and services access and by encouraging exchange and cooperation. It emphasizes a better socializing within educational processes by supporting interaction between students, by one side, and between students and tutors, by the other side. To this extent, European Commission has:

- Financed eLearning projects;
- Stimulated universities to offer e-resources (virtual campus);
- Supported Internet connection: all education and culture institutions (universities, libraries, museums, archives etc) should offer internet access for educational and research purposes;
- Allocated structural funds for labor force digital literacy increase within EU.

Moreover, computer based training is seen as an efficient way to encourage learning to learn and creativity competencies. For example, using eLearning in the formal educational system seemed to bring greater academic results and to be an important tool to support regional development in EU and reducing educational gaps between its inhabitants (Zamfir and Plumb, 2011). For example, regional development success depends on a trilateral partnership between universities, public authorities and business environment. This is how we could get well trained graduates according to market needs.

2.4. Factors of eLearning services development

Implementing eLearning services has various benefits such as:

- **Technological benefits:** using online technologies instead of CDs or DVDs. Content became independent of platform. Content could be developed as web technologies continue to progress in a faster way than the classical computer based training software. As content is permanently updated, any error could be immediately corrected and new features could be added. Among its disadvantages we could mention that the content it is not available offline or it could be a large connection time in the case of low performance equipment which may affect life studying. There could be also incompatibilities between browser and the platform.
- **Economic benefits:** eliminating installation and support costs for software as each student is enabled to install the needed resources through Internet or Intranet. A possible disadvantage could be a higher cost for high speed Internet connection.
- **Psychological benefits:** online education through chat and instant messenger could bring a positive impact to learning experience and results. By explaining to other students, students themselves get a deeper understanding of the contents. Passing to group learning could bring social motivation among students. Users can choose learning content and their own timing.

Moreover, sometimes eLearning is not just reducing costs but also a way for a more efficient learning. For example, many courses in Japanese universities are held with hundreds of students. In this case it is very difficult for teachers to understand the needs and the difficulties of each student learning.

2.5. Social networks and their role in education

Internet and its users progressed a lot in the past years (Gaijert, 2008). Internet users approach employment, education and play in a new way. They quickly take information from multiple sources simultaneously, work on speed and expect instant response and feedback. They prefer to have access to media on demand and they expected to be in a continuous dialogue with their friends. They like also to create their own media, not just consume media of others. It is possible that such behavioral changes lead to a new approach to delivery of educational materials?

The following Web 2.0 tools can be used in educational context:

- **Wiki** – users can manage web page content (for example, in the case of Wikipedia). In an ideal situation, the community behind the wikis page should give their best to deliver high-quality editorial content. On the other hand, the main disadvantage comes from the same direction - the content is not always checked, and sometimes it is bad faith;
- **Educational weblogs** – based on the concept of personal diaries or blogs, some blogs have come to deliver quality content in the educational field. The main advantage is the close relationship between the blog author and his readers and his ability to be understood. Moreover, some teachers have started to create their blogs to keep in touch with their students.
- **Podcasts**: consist of audio transmission via specialized devices. They began by transmitting news, advertising and newly are used for educational purposes (e.g. for learning foreign languages or other subjects). Podcasts and audio books have similar characteristics enabling learning even while driving or while you cook.
- **Virtual worlds**: development of virtual worlds like Second Life or Google Lively could become a very important communication. The problem that may arise is that users consider the means to be gaming and not give due importance of education.

3. ELEARNING DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS

3.1. Marketing approach

Using web 2.0 (Lehmann and Chamberlin, 2009) tools (blogging, webcasting, photo sharing, video stream, tagging) by teachers made the education services industry in general (particularly eLearning) to develop in this direction. Users of social networks have become more open to eLearning services just through the frequent use of social networks, which in their minds, are associated with: free time, non-formal nature and speed - aspects very different of classic education services.

The proliferation of social networking market creates and develops eLearning services. Users are used to learn from colleagues and friends, they discover learning through play or associate to learning the idea of alternative entertainment.

Going forward the marketing approach, what better way would be to target your eLearning product than the social networks? Without claiming an exhaustive profile of a user of social networking and eLearning services, one shares at least the following:

- They have the proper infrastructure for internet access (PC, internet connection);
- They have a valid e-mail address;
- They use to access the internet periodically;
- They use to browse the Internet;
- They are used to online communication, quick feedback, like etc;
- They are used to share resources (materials, ideas, photos);
- They are used to alternate public communication (as for "Facebook wall") – group communication (as for a communication group on Facebook) – private communication (private messaging, chat, etc.).

Statistics showed that social networks develop very fast. For example, Facebook (Facebook, 2012) has more than 900 million users in March 2012, 50% logging in daily. An average user has 130 Facebook "friends". This brings in some way to the increasing development of educational services based on Web 2.0 technologies. Moreover, the advantages do not stop there. In addition to marketing reasons which are very striking, we can take into account methods of promotion of these services through social networks and strategic reasons related to management.

3.2. Communication and PR approach

When elaborating a Communication and PR policy for an eLearning providers there are two main directions to be taken into account: human part of students and the use of social networks.

Shannon Paul, blogger and consultant in New Media PR believes that *"the reasons why an organization would refuse to be present in social media are the same why individuals refuse to have an honest relationship of love - namely, fear of intimacy"*.

Often, in online courses, students feel isolated and not feeling connected very strong. We need to communicate more, to convey the values of the organization and to encourage them and give feedback. This is the key to success in keeping students for longer and to attract new ones through the power of

direct persuasion (a grateful student will bring another one). Often skills to create a warm atmosphere in the online environment are not known by tutors and the biggest obstacles are faced by those accustomed to face-to-face approach.

Also in this direction, it is important that the dialogue to be customized and more focused on the learning needs of each individual, while feedback has to be diplomatic, friendly and constructive. Computer and e-course barriers should be removed, matters which can be achieved again through social networks.

On the other hand, if we decided that our future customers are users of social networks, it is easy to understand that communication campaign should focus on this channel. From classic promotional campaigns till various news (new courses, courses testimonials, other opportunities that are offered, etc.) and even offline events (thematic parties, photos, "Happy Birthday" announcements etc.) - all are elements that help shaping the organization's brand for an eLearning service.

3.3. HR management approach

A first HR approach would be creating/consolidating organization's employer brand through social networks.

Basically, the employer brand is the intersection of public relations and human resources component of the organization.

Whether we consider the image given by our employees outside the organization (including their accounts on social networks), the events with impact on human resources (those relating to corporate social responsibility) or experiences had by former employees or applicants (there are even forums dedicated to share different opinions on this topic), it is obvious that the stakes are high for the organization. Maybe 20 years ago a work accident, or a drastic policy regarding working schedule would not be as easy to be discovered as today.

A second approach is the role of social networks in the context of promoting employment offers. We speak on the one hand about the use of social media to disseminate information, on the other hand is the internal system of references from current employees of the company (it is especially useful for very specialized positions, as in the IT industry, case in which current employees know and are able to recommend potential candidates for vacancies within the organization).

Thirdly, we speak of "head hunting". This concerns in particular the recruitment of specialists and top managers from competing organizations. The main challenge in this case is given by coming into

contact with subjects. To this extent, the professional network LinkedIn is widely used. Statistics appreciate that about one third of the 30 million LinkedIn users are people in leadership positions. Moreover, over one quarter of them earns over \$ 100,000 / year.

3.4. Strategic management approach

Eventually eLearning services can also be seen from a business perspective. In this context, retention of students and encouraging them to talk about their experience there is only one aspect of communication, but in financial terms, it means an increased turnover and a greater profit by registering a larger number of students.

For an organization believing in the values of Knowledge Management, many solutions offered by Web 2.0 technologies could help strong circulation of information and knowledge among employees.

In any organization, many costs can be reduced by using web 2.0 technologies (meetings, conferences, reports, training, case studies, workshops, etc.). Regarding advertising, broadcasting costs are much lower for social networks; the impact is stronger and allows prompt feedback.

In terms of strategy, at organizational level, social interaction through virtual means can be useful in creating and developing a sense of organizational affiliation. Moreover, the tools and statistics provided by these new technologies we are able to adapt human resource management policy on long-term: we can see what jobs are required, which is the preferred method of application, the characteristics of labor supply and so on.

4. CASE STUDY: CITIZENACT

Corporate social responsibility program that integrates social networking, e-learning component and business philosophy is CITIZENACT.

4.1. Program presentation

CITIZENACT (Groupe Societe Generale, n.d.) is an annual program of corporate social responsibility held by the French financial group "Groupe Societe Generale" (GSG), one of the strongest organizations in the field at international level. The program addresses students worldwide studying at a technical or economic profile, they are addressing the challenge of working in teams, to analyze the reality of their communities and to propose a project of corporate social responsibility (CSR) that could be implemented by the organizing institution.

The project should be in one or more of the following topics: environment protection, risk management, responsible business practices or responsible human resources practices.

The challenge is organized in various stages:

- **Stage I:** contestants make up teams, analyzing the reality of the community they belong, document in the CSR field and come with a concrete proposal for the project;
- **Stage II:** teams selected from Stage I, get a coach - a GSG employee to coordinate the project development, he assists them to understand the context of the bank and provides technical and methodological information. Also competing teams are supposed to build a thematic weblog of their project, integrated with multiple social networks through which to draw attention to the community they belong and to generate comments and reactions ("like", "share") while these social networking elements are measured with a synthetic indicator in the so-called "buzz meter". At the end of this phase, teams come with a developed version of the project focusing on blog readers' feedback.
- **Stage III:** teams that have been selected at the previous stage are invited present their project to the jury, during which the judges can address various questions.

All GSG employees were able to ask questions during plenary presentations or during a fair organized for them and they could ask the favorite team through an Intranet survey.

4.2. Marketing approach

For all projects it was recommended to include a local marketing research to get a better understanding of the addressing audience. Beyond this, some projects in "responsible business practices" clearly aimed to find those products that could be improved to better meet customer needs.

Through these elements, the organizer could get at no extra cost, commercial and marketing information of all participating countries, be they the countries where it has a market share or other where it is rather a niche bank or why not, maybe it is states where they have not yet entered the market.

4.3. Communication and PR approach

It is estimated that, in general, CSR programs aim to transmit corporate values inside and outside the organization.

Firstly, media coverage was very strong. Speaking of channels, we find the classical (ATL: print, radio, TV) and the innovative ones (BTL: social networks, innovative ways of presentation). In terms of geography, the promotion was made at headquarters in Paris and in all countries where there is a GSG branch.

Moreover, by creating thematic blogs by competitors, visibility was extremely high (especially by the fact that they were encouraged to have an intense promotion in order to influence a high score from "buzz meter").

Also, given the specificity of the contest, the interaction between the organizers and competitors and between competitors was provided mainly through social network pages of the program, most of the information being conveyed there in real time.

4.4. HR management approach

In Figure 1 are summarized the main elements that define the impact of the program in human resource management: the current employees and students as potential employees. The significance of this area is underlined by the fact that the implementation was provided by the GSG recruitment department.



FIGURE 1 – CITIZENACT IMPACT IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Also in this section we could mention the relevance of eLearning services. In stages I-II, the employees (especially coaches) and students were encouraged to go through eLearning modules to become familiar with the values and working mode of GSG.

4.5. Strategic management approach

In a medium to long term perspective, it should be noted that proposed projects are ultimately backed up by research and practical innovation with multiple meanings: it aims to develop new products, knowing the consumer behavior, risk management and development of new business practices more suited to market.

In terms of payback period, is difficult to quantify the economic effects of a program with social purpose. However, with the alternative version of a classic sponsorship is quite clear that the benefits are numerous in this case.

5. CONCLUSIONS

It is said that the biggest and most important changes take place during crisis. We believe that nowadays, society is facing two major crises: an economic-financial one and another in the field of values.

Management of an organization in time of crisis has aimed to reduce business costs to preserve profitability. In all levels mentioned above, the eLearning services and use social networks substantially reduce the costs of marketing, promotion and logistics.

Regarding the values in today's generation mentality, education is no longer a core value. The media promotes the idea that ideal youngster should be oriented to entertainment, to socialize, to humor. In this sense, the link between socialization and education, peer education, makes the learning process to get closer to the customer and to focus on his needs.

Therefore, an educational services provider should take into account these challenges in order to meet the needs of its customers and to be able to maintain profitability in the nowadays market economy.

REFERENCES

- European Commission - Information Society, (2007), *eEurope 2005 – eLearning*, retrieved October 31, 2011, from <<http://ec.europa.eu>>.
- Facebook (2012), *Facebook Statistics*, retrieved June 01, 2012, from <<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>>.
- Gaijert, P. (2008), Web-Based Training and E-Learning, In S. Streng, D. Baur, G. Broll, A. De Luca, R. Wimmer, & A. Butz, *Trends in E-Learning*, Munich: University of Munich, Department of Computer Science, Media Informatics Group.
- Groupe Societe Generale, (n.d.), *CITIZENACT*, retrieved April 04, 2012, from <<http://www.citizenact.com>>.
- Lehmann, K. and Chamberlin, L. (2009), *Making the Move to eLearning - Putting Your Course Online*, Plymouth, United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Nicolescu, O. and Nicolescu, C. (2008), *Intrepreneuriatul și managementul întreprinderilor mici și mijlocii*, Bucharest: Editura Economică.
- Tavangarian, D., Leybold, M., Nölting, K., Röser, M. and Voigt, D. (2004), Is e-learning the Solution for Individual Learning?, *Electronic Journal of e-learning*, 2(2).
- Zamfir, A. and Plumb, I. (2011), Using a Computer-based Model for Developing Business Students' Skills: Case Study on the Regional Application of the Model, in Proceedings of the 12th WSEAS International Conference on Mathematics & Computers in Business and Economics, *Mathematics & Computers in Biology, Business & Acoustics*, Lupulescu, N. B., Yordanova, S. and Mladenov, V., eds., Athens: WSEAS Press, 49-54.