

Human Resource:
How to Leverage SoCoMo
(Social-Collaboration-Mobile)
to Enable the Future Workforce

Siow Meng Soh
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Summary

Issue

Australian businesses have been hearing and discussing the need to embrace digital technologies to enhance competitiveness both locally and internationally. There is no shortage of examples of how traditional businesses can be disrupted by new, and leaner players who are adept at leveraging technologies to develop new business models. Many companies are now taking steps to transform their business or making key changes to become more competitive. However, many such changes require people who are able to lead and implement the changes and also to get buy-in across the organisation. It is therefore crucial for HR to be actively involved at the beginning for effective communications and manpower planning to ensure a smooth transition.

Underpinning the transformative changes are the tools that organisations can deploy internally to ensure that the workforce becomes more collaborative and productive. Some organisations are able to leverage SoCoMo (social, collaborative, mobile) technologies to enhance communications and collaboration internally, resulting in a more engaged workforce and ultimately more happy customers. Better employee engagement and the ability for them to become more flexible in the way they work can also improve their overall satisfaction with work and reduce staff churn. However, moving to a more flexible and collaborative work environment requires a change in work culture and there is a need to involve all staff and strong support from the company leaders.

Key Takeaways

Organisations going through major business changes have a better chance of success by involving HR early for effective communications and manpower planning.

Managing a multi-generational workforce will add complexity as HR needs to consider different training requirements, career development and workplace expectations.

HR can look at improving staff interaction through the use of social media platforms to break down barriers between departments and hierarchies.

Workers are demanding flexible working arrangement and collaboration tools play a crucial role in enabling such an arrangement.

Mobile applications can help to improve field force productivity as well as enhance many HR processes.

Real-time analytics is an emerging area but it has the potential of helping HR to move from a transactional function to a strategic role within the business.

Perspective

Current Perspective

Human resources (HR) management team's fundamental role is to strategically manage people as business resources. Having the right people is crucial in ensuring the future success of an organisation and in a survey of 200 Australian HR leaders conducted by GlobalData, 82% of the respondents indicated building up leadership at all levels to be their top priority. Businesses going through major changes need to bring HR to the table during decision-making, not after. Whether it is entering a new market, adopting new business models, changing business processes to be more responsive to market changes, or restructuring the organisation to become leaner, there will be significant impact on manpower requirement and staff morale.

With the rapid pace of change, it is extremely challenging for HR to develop a workforce that is able to manage and deliver the changes needed for the business to stay competitive. The pressure is on HR team to recruit the right talent, communicate the need for business changes, review employee benefits to improve retention and provide employee training and development. In managing human resources, the HR team has to take into account that an organisation in Australia is likely to have a multi-generational workforce and each generation will have different work preferences and expectations. Some organisations are not set up for the millennial generation workforce resulting in high turnover within the group of younger employees. High turnover can be costly and besides recruitment and onboarding/training costs, there is also productivity lost to be factored in. Increasingly, employees are expecting greater flexibility and empowerment. There is also a growing need to use contract or part-time workers to fulfill some short-term work requirements and/or skill shortages.

Whilst technology alone cannot solve all the HR challenges, there are tools today that can help HR to better manage their processes and meet their objectives. HR departments already use business applications for their daily operations including legacy HR systems, learning management systems, applicant tracking and enterprise resource planning. Majority of HR's IT budget will continue to be focused on these legacy systems over the next 12 months. However, some companies understand the ability to react to a rapidly changing business environment is largely dependent on the way employees interact and engage, collaborate and communicate – not only with each other, but also with business partners and customers. These companies have started to invest in social media platforms, collaboration tools and mobility – collectively GlobalData refers to these applications as 'SoCoMo' (social, collaborative, mobile) apps. These apps come with collaborative functionality such as persistent chat, project-oriented rooms, file sharing, and real-time voice and video capabilities. Some organisations have also started to explore real-time analytics to gain employee insights to improve decision on developing talent, succession planning and employee retention.

Social Media Platform

Based on our survey, the top use case for social is the creation of internal employee communities of interest. These are social networking groups set up to bring together like-minded employees to share their opinion which is a great way to build bond and trust within their organisations. Social media can also be an effective tool for talent acquisition particularly for attracting the tech-savvy workers. People are now more connected via social media networks and companies need to build up their profile and be visible in popular social media channel. Internal social media platform can also be used to engage employees which will help with their talent retention

efforts. Greater transparency by giving staff more insight into the vision and strategy of the organisation has the positive effect of making staff feel more engaged and empowered. The more they understand the bigger picture, the more motivated they are to execute the strategies and the more likely they are to deliver the vision. Increasingly, people are getting used to providing their views and comments over social media and these platforms are useful for leaders to receive feedback from various levels and removing hierarchies for an open staff communication channel.

Collaborative Applications

Collaborative applications are the key enabler of flexible working, a major driver of workspace transformation. Whilst these are not part of traditional HR IT systems, the availability of collaborative applications enables HR to introduce flexible working arrangement to improve productivity and employee satisfaction. The demand for flexible working including part-time arrangement continues to grow as people look at reducing commute time, improving work-life-balance and managing childcare needs. This is also becoming possible with better Internet access across Australia enabled by NBN and improved 4G mobile services.

Collaborative applications can also help HR to be more effective in on-boarding staff. For example effective use of file/content sharing tools enable staff to access HR-related files (forms, company handbook, staff policies, etc.) without sending copies to staff via email. The use of Wikis and blogs enable sharing of ideas amongst employees. Video conferencing enable training and check-in meetings between HR and new staff who are located in different offices or staff under a remote working arrangement. The younger generation are also likely to use social networking tools (either Facebook or an enterprise platform) to connect with their colleagues.

Mobile Applications

The integration of e-mail, unified communications with mobile devices and mobile apps can vastly improve productivity of field force workers (including telecommuters, mobile and remote workers). For example a giving field force workers mobile collaboration tools allow these workers to access a wider pool of expertise within the organisation to address customer issues on the spot, which improves productivity as well as customer

satisfaction. Besides enabling flexible working, some HR departments are using mobile apps for recruitment. With greater use of the online/social channel for recruitment, it is a natural extension to conduct recruitment via mobile apps. In addition, HR can itself become more productive by extending HR applications to mobile devices, for example, leave application, travel booking, time tracking and expenses claims.

Real-Time Analytics

The use of real-time analytics within HR is an emerging area and it can greatly enhance HR operations with the insights that can be derived from the data collected within an organisation. Real-time analytics can help to predict issues and help HR make better decisions. For example, HR personnel responsible for staff retention can look for trends and common features of employees that are related

to high retention rates. Other areas include identifying career advancement for staff and identifying staff that are potential leavers. Equipped with insights about the organisations as well as the understanding of business requirements, HR leaders can play a more strategic role in advising the CEO how to drive business with the right workforce with the right skillsets.

Recommended Actions

The implementation of SoCoMo technologies is typically driven by the IT department. HR and IT need to work closely together to ensure that the tools will meet staff requirements which is crucial to ensure high adoption. The involvement of Facilities Management becomes crucial when the organisation is undertaking a workplace transformation, allowing employees to have greater freedom in moving around the office space and mingling with people across different departments.

A key driver in deploying a comprehensive collaboration solution is to enable flexible working to improve productivity and employee satisfaction. There needs to be measurement put in place to track the improvement in these two aspects. HR needs to consider metrics such as response time to customers, attrition rate, absenteeism rate and employee NPS (or an equivalent system to gauge employee's willingness to refer their peers to join the firm). There will be managers who are apprehensive to let staff work remotely. There needs to be staff policies around flexible working and staff KPIs clearly defined to ensure a successful outcome.

Businesses are embracing a more collaborative environment to improve competitiveness. However, this requires not just the technology but a change in work culture to encourage employees to work across different functions and share expertise. The implementation of activity-based working can remove barriers between departments, and using social media platform can encourage staff interaction and bonding. However, the change needs to start from the top and the collaborative nature will trickle down across the organisation. There is also the generation gap that HR needs to be mindful of.

HR needs to play a strategic role in helping the business achieve its goals by ensuring a highly engaged and high performing workforce. This means that HR needs a greater understanding of staff behavior, their satisfaction with the organisation, the expertise vs business needs, and so on. The use of real-time analytics can help to draw insights to improve decision-making around hiring, talent management, staff retention and succession planning. There are now use cases and examples developed and organisations can approach IT service providers to understand the possibilities.

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www.globaldata.com



Basingstoke

4th Floor, Northern Cross
Basing View, Basingstoke,
Hampshire, RG21 4EB,
UK
+44 (0) 1256 394224

Beijing

Room 2301 Building 4
Wanda Plaza, No 93 Jianguo Road
Chaoyang District
Beijing 100026, PR China
+86 10 6581 1794
+86 10 5820 4077

Boston

179 South St, Suite 200,
Boston, MA 02111
USA
+1 617 747 4100

Buenos Aires

Basavibaso 1328, 2nd Floor
Off 206, Buenos Aires, 1006
Argentina
+54 11 4311 5874

Dubai

Dubai Media City
Building 7, Floor 3, Office 308
PO Box 502635
Dubai
United Arab Emirates
+971 (0) 4391 3049

Hong Kong

1008 Shalin Galleria
18-24 Shan Mei Street
Fo Tan, New Territories
Hong Kong S.A.R
+852 2690 5200
+852 2690 5230

Hull

GlobalData PLC
Shirethorn House
37-43 Prospect Street
Hull
HU2 8PX

Hyderabad

2nd Floor, NSL Centrum,
Plot No-S1, Phase 1 & 2
KPHB Colony, Near: BSNL Office
Hyderabad-500072
Andhra Pradesh
+91-40-30706700

London

John Carpenter House
7 Carmelite Street
London
EC4Y 0BS
+44 (0) 207 936 6400

Madrid

C/Jesusa Lara, 29 - Atico J,
28250 Torrelodones Madrid,
Spain
+34 91 859 4886

Melbourne

Suite 1608
Exchange Tower
Business Centre
530 Little Collins Street
Melbourne
3000, Victoria, Australia
+61 (0)3 9909 7757
+61 (0)3 9909 7759

New York

441 Lexington Avenue,
New York, NY 10017
USA
+1 646 395 5460

San Francisco

Progressive Digital Media Inc
425 California Street
Suite 1300
San Francisco
CA
94104

Seoul

Global Intelligence & Media Korea Limited
11th Floor, West Wing,
POSCO Center Building,
892, Daechi-4Dong,
Gangnam-Gu, Seoul 135-777
Republic Of Korea (South)
+82 2 559 0635
+82 2 559 0637

Shanghai

Room 408, Jing'an China
Tower No: 1701,
West Beijing Road
Jing'an District, 200040,
Shanghai, PR China
+86 (0)21 5157 2275(6)

Singapore

1 Finlayson Green
#09-10
049246
Singapore
+65 6383 4688
+65 6383 5433USA

Sydney

Level 2
63 York Street
Sydney
NSW 2000
Australia
+61 (0)2 8076 8800

Tokyo

Global Intelligence & Media Japan Tokoyo
Level 3,
Sanno Park Tower,
2-11-1 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku,
Tokyo, 100-6162
Japan
+81 3 6205 3511
+81-3-6205-3521

Toronto

229 Yonge Street
Suite 400
Toronto
Ontario
M55B 1N9
Canada

Washington

21335 Signal Hill Plaza,
Suite 200, Sterling,
VA, 20164
+1 703 404 9200
877 787 8947 (Toll Free)