



One department within the enterprise that stands to benefit greatly from enterprise social networking is human resources (HR). HR departments constantly deal with a number of challenges, changes, and employees. As companies identify areas where social solutions can be put to use, HR should be one of the first and most obvious departments.

In today's fast-paced market, preserving employee expertise is a big challenge. Today's workforce size is constantly changing, and employees often move companies in order to further their career path. Often people leave just when they've become productive. Companies can better transfer and maintain knowledge by using an enterprise social network (ESN) to capture, house information, and expertise. Using the blogs, wikis, and videos in an ESN makes capturing knowledge a very simple and natural activity.

Capturing and preserving employee knowledge is not the only area where rapid turnover rates present challenges for companies; they also need to quickly onboard new hires and bring them up to speed so they can become productive. To retain employees, companies need to continue to motivate and educate them. The longer a qualified employee stays with a company, the more the company will benefit and profit from them. Keeping the most talented workers on board for the long term is becoming one of the most important tasks of HR departments.

HR has to address staffing and personnel issues on a regular basis. Social business tools can help the HR department meet the requirements of the modern working world. Social businesses put employees at the center of the company, which coincidentally, is where HR departments put employees. There are many ways in which a company can derive great benefit from an ESN. Here are five simple areas where HR can leverage enterprise social networking services:

Benefits communication and management — This is a classic forum for learning more about benefits, providing a self-serve benefits model, and enabling simple sign up and management of benefits. This is the easiest to understand, plan, and deploy. An ESN may be used to communicate and manage benefits directly or even integrate into existing systems and mechanisms. Companies can set up self-serve benefits portals, enable access to other systems to sign up and manage benefits, and create blogs and wikis to disseminate information. Companies can also gather immediate feedback from employees through polls, activity streams, and other feedback mechanisms. This is also an area where companies can offer a high degree of personalization. At sign in, employees may be greeted with the performance of their 401K portfolio, their remaining vacation days/sick days, as well as information about their specific benefits.

Recruiting, onboarding, and training — In times when qualified, skilled workers are in short supply, it is extremely important for companies to recruit the right talent. In order to do so, companies need a variety of tools that can create attractive, dialogue-oriented career pages.

Once a company has found the right talent, they need to train new employees quickly and efficiently so they can become productive as soon as possible. Social software, e-Learning, knowledge sharing, and capturing business experiences with coworkers play a fundamental role. Benefits training and access to benefits forms and process is another. This is especially important in companies where employment is seasonal or where there may naturally be high turnover.

Once a company has employees on board, they consistently need to train them so that they can maintain a relevant skill set. In today's business world, change and ongoing learning are the norm, and that means an HR team needs to be adding knowledge and sharing experiences with other employees so that they may stay up-to-date. The focus is shifting to bringing talent into the company, observing them, and continually supporting them in order to achieve maximum productivity and keep them on board.

Networking and finding experts — Now that the company has trained their staff, individuals will need to find and connect with experts. The ability to quickly find experts and information is perhaps one of the greatest benefits of an ESN. The serendipitous nature of an ESN enables people to find information that otherwise may have been overlooked or never connected. It is most helpful when users are able to easily identify and contact experts within the company. Forming communities with employees that are in the same field or who have the same interests so they can share information about a specific area of expertise increases efficiency (not to mention fun and motivation).

Leadership, communication, and community — Leadership has shifted to a much more transparent style that demands clear communication and involvement from the top. Many CEOs and executives communicate goals and results through their blog. Company leaders invite employees to comment and discuss ideas, initiatives, and general company business. Group leaders and managers can start communities in the network where employees work together to focus benefiting its customers.

Leaders can use social tools to motivate employees. Motivated employees are productive employees. This fact gets overlooked far too often, although many managers and people in HR now realize how necessary it is. Gamification can help to engage employees, motivate them, and retain employees instead of having them quickly disappear.

Leaders and companies are constantly managing change in markets, policies, and direction. ESNs support gradual change at the enterprise and individual level.

Innovation and knowledge management — Preserving in-house expertise and sharing information has been around for decades. Social software, and most importantly, new ways of thinking are finally helping to significantly improve its chances of success. Today, employees are much more inclined to share information freely.

Company feedback mechanisms and digital suggestion boxes have been around for a long time. Social software tools offer completely new ways of offering suggestions and working on them as a group in order to generate innovations.

These are just rough sketches of a few of the areas where HR professionals can put an enterprise social networking service to use. The wants and needs of today's employees include a desire to share their experiences and co-determine processes. Employees want to achieve a healthy work-life balance. In the age of social business, HR can play a more central role as employee advocates while also promoting and leveraging new cultural techniques and work methods.

At BroadVision, it is the HR department that manages and drives the company's ESN.

