

## Status update: Mixed messages for social media

*Plenty of wariness despite potential upside: Studies*

BY SARAH DOBSON

**SOCIAL MEDIA IS** increasingly infiltrating the workplace and employers and employees alike are jumping on board. But there are mixed messages when it comes to the use and effectiveness of social media, according to recent studies.

“From the employer’s perspective, the saturation of social media in the workplace is occurring faster than any rules designed to manage it,” said Kristin Supancich, vice-president and general manager of Kelly Services’ Canadian operations in Toronto.

“While many employees are quick to see the benefits, managers are grappling with a host of complex issues relating to privacy, monitoring and control of sensitive business information.

“So, how are companies going to change their own internal way of doing things to embrace that? It’s certainly uncharted waters.”

More than one-half (54 per cent) of 8,000 Canadian respondents to the *Kelly Global Workforce Index* feel mixing personal and professional connections through social media can cause problems in the workplace.

“We now have this more holistic view of our lives intersecting with work life and personal life,” said Supancich.

“Those lines will continue to be blurred over time and I think that’s one of the biggest things companies will have to grapple with, especially when you’re looking at roles like sales positions and customer-facing positions, with the blurred line of where do I leave my workday... This generation that’s coming up sees that completely linked.”

Almost one-half (43 per cent) of respondents to Kelly Services’ *When Two Worlds Collide — The Rise of Social Media in the Workplace* also said the use of social media at work negatively impacts productivity.

It’s about finding a balance, “that happy medium of using social media to move the business forward as well as for personal and

professional use, but making sure it doesn’t infringe on productivity or within the space of the privacy concerns that we have,” said Supancich.

But employees and employers can’t have it both ways, according to Randall Craig, Toronto-based president of consulting firm 108 IdeaSpace and social media expert.

If an employer wants to see high productivity, it shouldn’t cut off access to social media if employees need to connect with customers, prospects and other stakeholders. Plus, personal devices allow employees to access sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube or Twitter, circumnavigating any firewalls there are in place, he said.

“If you’re not managing, guess what? There’s going to be productivity issues whether that has to do with social media or not.”

Among the generations, 16 per cent of generation Y (aged 19 to 30) believe it is acceptable to use social media for personal use while at work, compared to 14 per cent of gen X (aged 31 to 48) and 11 per cent of baby boomers (aged 49 to 66), found Kelly Services.

And 79 per cent of Canadian execs agree social media is making it harder for older employees to compete in the workforce, according to a recent survey from Queen’s School of Business at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ont.

There are different perceptions depending on the tools, said Kate Rowbotham, professor of human resource management at Queen’s.

“LinkedIn is seen as the professional social media site, it seems safe, it seems controlled, it seems clear about what it’s being used for. On the flip side, Facebook is generally seen as personal... but for something like Twitter, where it really covers both sides — that’s where there’s that wariness, or blogs or other things like that.”

Executives have decidedly mixed feelings about social media, according to the Queen’s

survey of 400 business leaders. While 39 per cent said it is something they need to use — whether they want to or not — and 35 per cent said they use it heavily because it’s a good opportunity for the business, 24 per cent think it doesn’t add any value.

“It speaks to those really mixed messages or at least those mixed findings about some recognition that social media is here to stay. It can be used to do some really great things but there is still some wariness around it,” said Rowbotham.

One-third (34 per cent) of the executives also disagreed with the notion that what employees do on their own time is their own business, found the survey. Almost one-quarter (22 per cent) felt social media use by employees outside regular work hours should be monitored.

“The dangers are quite clear and there have been some really good examples in the media of people who, in their off hours, have done some really inappropriate things in social media,” said Rowbotham.

But more than one-half of workers don’t believe employers have the right to view personal social media pages (56 per cent) nor do they approve of employers viewing their personal pages as a hiring tool (55 per cent), according to the Kelly Services survey.

Employees want all the benefits but none of the responsibility, said Craig.

“If somebody wants to use social media to get their next job, they can’t say, ‘Now that I’m employed, you can’t look at it to make sure I’m onside,’” he said. “You can’t have your cake and eat it too.”

On the other hand, it’s reasonable for employees to ask, “Where does my privacy start?” because it’s too easy for companies to abuse the public nature of employees’ lives, said Craig.

### **Skepticism around building culture through social media**

When it comes to building culture, em-

ployees and employers are again at odds, according to the Deloitte study *Core Values and Beliefs*. Forty-one per cent of executives believe social networking helps to build and maintain workplace culture, while only 21 per cent of employees feel the same, found the survey of 1,005 Americans.

“Executives are possibly using social media as a crutch in building workplace culture and appearing accessible to employees,” said

Punit Renjen, chairman of the board at Deloitte in the United States.

“While business leaders should recognize how people communicate today, particularly millennials, they must keep in mind the limits of these technologies. The norms for cultivating culture have not changed and require managers to build trust through face-to-face meetings, live phone calls and personal messages.”

Employees want to have authentic engagement and if social media is something that’s been done just because people see it as a must, then it won’t be seen as authentic, said Craig.

“If there isn’t intention and thought as to how to build that kind of network and collaboration, you’re not going to be able to build the kind of culture at an organization that you really want.”