

A Case Study: Is Harry Too Social To Be Promoted? Case

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Shockley-Zalabak (2015) frames the case study, *Is Harry Too Social to Be Promoted?* Case through the lens of the tenuous interactions between management in organizations and the employees. The subject of value and ethical communication behaviors and the correlation to social media in the workplace is an issue for examination. Shockley-Zalabak (2015) submits that values are the subjective assessments we make about the relative worth of a quality or object and ethics are the standards by which behaviors are evaluated as to their morality, their rightness or wrongness. Individual and organizational value systems and the standards of a given profession all influence the ethics of organizational communication. Andrews (1999) argues that there are three aspects to ethical behavior in organizations: the development of the individual as an ethical person, the effect of the organization as an ethical or unethical environment, and the actions or procedures developed by the organization to encourage ethical behavior and discourage unethical behavior.

Entering the purview at Metron Company is Harry and Martin Findley, Harry's supervisor (Shockley-Zalabak, 2015). The scenario goes that Martin's assistant mentioned to him that office workers were discussing pictures and posts from Harry's Facebook page about last weekend's party at Harry's apartment. The posts pictured Harry having a wonderful time with two bottles of alcohol in each hand while wearing the company shirt with its highly readable logo. Martin's concern is that he is scheduled to interview Harry for a promotion to senior investment advisor for Merton Corporation. Merton's clients are high-net worth individuals who rely on the company for long-term investment advice. Harry has been with Merton for five years and Martin believes him to be one of the most promising candidates for this promotion. Martin also knows Merton clients would not think highly of the Facebook posts. While Merton has a

strong code of ethics and behavior expectations for all employees, nothing in their code relates to personal social media usage. Martin calls the human resources director for guidance.

The question of how much should Martin Findley consider the Facebook posts in his consideration of Harry for a promotion and if he should even ask Harry about them is at issue. The answer is that Findley has to take full consideration of the Facebook post because Harry's wearing of the company shirt with its logo is considered as posting personal information or about personal activities that lead one's company, a recruiting company or others to believe that the individual is acting unprofessionally or otherwise inappropriately and is characterized as Personal Reputation Damage (Sanchez- Abril, Levin, & Del Riego, 2012). Harry's actions can hurt the employer where the employee's personal reputation is tarnished and so affects the individual's business reputation.

Martin should question Harry about the Facebook posts. Martin's responsibility to the organization falls under the Duty of Care concept (Sanchez- Abril et al., 2012) which posits that social media blurs the boundaries between personal and work life. However, when personal opinions expressed through social media (either on a personal profile or an online forum) refer to a company, it raises an ethical challenge. Sanchez- Abril et al. (2012) further admit that it is unclear what control, if any, the company has over comments communicated in this way and what action it can or should take however, the blurring of personal and work life boundaries can make it difficult for companies to uphold their duty of care to employees. The challenge for companies then become identifying acceptable levels of monitoring employees' personal use of social media, without being seen to limit their freedom of expression (2012).

With regard to links between his personal and professional life, Harry should think about

his reputational vulnerability on social media. Sanchez-Abril et al. (2012) opine that some people are not willing to sacrifice Internet participation to segregate their multiple life performances. Lacking the technological or legal ability to shield performances, employees rely on others, including employers, to refrain from judging them across contexts. Their stated expectations of privacy, therefore, appear to be somewhat paradoxical: employee respondents generally want privacy from unintended employer eyes, and yet they share a significant amount of personal information online, knowing it could become available to employers and others.

The Merton ethics and behavior code should be changed to add guidelines for social media ethical policies and procedures. One of the four major recommendations of the Ethics Resource Center (2013) was that employers should establish a social networking policy, and reinforce it with training to reduce ethics risks for employees and management alike. The rules, it said, must reflect today's realities so that workers are more likely to abide by them. Shockley-Zalabak (2015) suggests that most organizations struggle to maintain humane and democratic commitments while growing, enjoying financial success, and perhaps even becoming more centralized and bureaucratized. Ethical communication is an important prerequisite for communication effectiveness, and has as a central focus, behaviors which encourage choice making, foster conditions for growth and development, and value the innate worth of human beings.

Martin should be advised to be open with Harry concerning Martin's thoughts of suggesting Harry for promotion, however, Harry should not be promoted at this time. Andrews (1989) contends that there are three aspects to ethical behavior in organizations: the development of the individual as an ethical person, the effect of the organization as an ethical or unethical environment, and the actions or procedures developed by the organization to encourage ethical

behavior and discourage unethical behavior. Establishing moral principles means determining the core values which should guide the organization. O'Brien (1995) suggests four for consideration: localness, merit, openness, and leanness. By localness, he means adopting a philosophy of pushing power down to the lowest level possible, and encouraging initiative and autonomy. By merit, he means directing actions toward the overall goals of the organization, and what is best for all. By openness, he means being forthright and honest in all dealings. And by leanness, he means efficient use of resources and economies when possible.

Harry is given a suggestion to acknowledge that unconditional commitment and acceptance of risk are not excluded in principle by online sociality, that anyone using the Net who was led to risk his or her real identity in the real world would have to act against the grain of what attracted him or her to the Net in the first place (Dreyfus 2004). Harry should be apprised of the three qualities individuals must possess to make ethical decisions; The first is the ability to recognize ethical issues and to reason through the ethical consequences of decisions. The ability to see second and third order effects, one of the elements of strategic thinking, is very important. The second is the ability to look at alternative points of view, deciding what is right in a particular set of circumstances. This is similar to the ability to reframe. And the third is the ability to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty; making a decision on the best information available (Dreyfus (2004).

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