

Chapter 3 – Additional Student Case Study

Social media – benefits and barriers

The University of Grimford is a (hypothetical) research intensive institution which is desperate to improve its performance in respect of the impact of its research and its engagement with the public and policy-makers. As a result of this, all academic staff have been asked to create a twitter account and to use this to publicise their research and also as a form of communication with students.

While some staff are very 'social media' friendly, others struggle with digital technology and there have been a number of examples of staff using email in an abrupt and sometimes abusive manner. You are an HR practitioner at the University and have been asked to provide advice and guidance in respect of the introduction of this new approach.

1. What are the main employment relations problems that the greater use of social media and twitter may cause?
2. What would be the main elements of a policy regarding the use of social media?
3. What are potential advantages for employment relations of the greater use of social media

Reading

Broughton, A., Higgins, T., Hicks, B. and Cox, A. (2010) 'Workplaces and Social Networking - The Implications for Employment Relations', *Acas Research Papers*, 11/11, London: Acas.

Silverman, M., Bakhshalian, E. and Hillman, L. (2013) *Social Media and Employee Voice: The Current Landscape*. London: CIPD Publications.

Key issues

For many HR practitioners social media is an increasingly important source of workplace conflict. Students should be encouraged to look at the advantages of academics using twitter, but also some of the possible drawbacks i.e. blurring personal and work issues; negative publicity for the institution; and the potential for conflict with colleagues. This could lead into a discussion on how this issue could be managed including policy and training, perhaps drawing from Acas advice. Finally, students could consider whether social media could have possible advantages in terms of enhanced employee voice.