

Developing your career: harnessing the power of the internet for “digital career management”

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Emerald in *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal* in January 2017. It is available online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/DLO-07-2016-0066>. It was published as

Hooley, T. (2017). Developing your career: harnessing the power of the internet for “digital career management”. *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal*, 31(1), 9 – 11. DOI: 10.1108/DLO-07-2016-0066.

Article

The overwhelming majority of adults in developed countries are now using the internet almost every day. In a study in Britain, the Office for National Statistics (2016) found that 87.9 per cent of adults were recent internet users and that the percentage of the population which was using the internet regularly has been trending steadily upwards. I also know that employers are using the internet extensively for recruitment, screening of applicants, surveillance of employees and as evidence in dismissals (Landers and Schmidt, 2016; McDonald and Thompson, 2016). The internet is everywhere, and this includes the workplace.

It is possible for us to argue about the ethics of workplace internet use and to feel that there should be stronger safeguards on individual’s rights to control their own data. However, at the moment the internet is largely unregulated and employers are free to use it as part of their recruitment and management practices. Individuals therefore need to think carefully about how they present themselves online as part of their career building.

It is important not to view the internet negatively. While it is easy to focus on the things that we should not do, we should remember that the internet also offers us a wide range of opportunities. In a previous article (Hooley, 2012), I argued that, for career builders, the internet is:

- *a career resource library* through which individuals can find information that informs and relates to their informational needs;
- *an opportunity marketplace* where individuals can transact with opportunity providers such as employers and learning providers;
- *a space for the exchange of social capital* within which conversations can be undertaken, contacts identified and networks maintained; and
- *a democratic media channel* through which individuals and groups can communicate their interests and concerns to the wider world, raise their profiles and manage their reputations.

Learning to make use of these different opportunities is the central task for those wishing to develop their careers in the internet age. Of course, it is easy to get carried away by the impact of the internet. In many ways, the things you need to do to have a successful career have not changed at all. You still need to make good decisions based on the best information available. You still need to be alert to the appearance of appropriate opportunities. You still need to be able to build your reputation and your professional network. And you still need to be able to present your most winning qualities to prospective recruiters. The internet has neither changed any of those things nor has entirely replaced the need to engage in more traditional offline job-hunting activities. However, it has opened up opportunities to do those things in potentially more efficient ways and on a larger scale.

The internet therefore shifts the context for career building, resituating some skills while requiring the development of new skills. To help individuals to identify and develop their capacity to build their career online, I developed a framework of seven key digital career management skills (Hooley, 2012). The seven Cs of digital career management are as follows:

1. *Change* is inevitable and you need to be adventurous and willing to respond to the changes that you experience in technology and your career. The internet is changing the way that careers work. You need to embrace this change if you want to be successful in your career.
2. *Collect* information because information is power. Information about jobs and opportunities is out there on the internet, but you need to be good at looking for it.
3. *Critique* everything you find online and off. Remember the internet is full of information, but you cannot rely on all of it to be accurate and up to date. You need to develop the skills to critically evaluate the information you find.
4. *Connect* to others and build networks. You can use the internet to build a powerful professional network that will support your career building.
5. *Communicate* appropriately with others. The internet is all about communication, but the most effective way to communicate will depend on who you are talking to, what you want to achieve and the nature of the tools you are using.
6. *Creating* compelling content is key to you building an effective online brand for yourself. The internet allows us to publish content about ourselves and our interests and to make that available to the world. You can make this work for your career.
7. *Curate* what is out there about you. Most of us have created some kind of digital footprint. You should know what information about you exists online and think about the kind of impression you are making and remember, no information makes an impression too.

Learning and development (L&D) professionals within organizations may find it useful to draw on this framework when thinking about interventions to assist employees to proactively manage their careers. It offers a series of learning outcomes which can help individuals to think through the changing context of what the internet offers and develop responses to this (Hooley *et al.*, 2016).

In conclusion, the importance of addressing digital career management is twofold. First, there is a strong rationale for addressing this context for individual career and professional development. Second, there is an important organizational context, whereby organizations need to think about how they use the internet within HR and L&D. Raising these issues at both the individual and the organizational level is a critical contribution that L&D professionals can make.

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