When blogging is a challenge:
An organizational and psychological analysis
of a failed empowerment project

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Riassunto

È stato ampiamente provato che i blog possono essere utilizzati per potenziare competenze legate alla comunicazione efficace, pensiero strategico e cooperazione. Tali competenze sono particolarmente importanti in ambito aziendale: per questo motivo i social media sono spesso utilizzati per ottimizzare la performance dei dipendenti, potenziare il trasferimento di conoscenze e promuovere il pensiero creativo. Nonostante ciò, è evidente in letteratura una carenza di studi scientifici che offrano chiare linee guida per l'uso di tali strumenti in ambito aziendale. Questo studio, basato sull'analisi di un fallimento di questo approccio in ambito aziendale, si propone di fornire nuove evidenze che favoriscano la comprensione dei processi promossi dall'uso di un blog in ambito aziendale - focalizzandosi sugli aspetti sia individuali che socio-relazionali e sulle possibili problematiche legate a questa strategia di formazione. I nostri dati (ricavati principalmente dall'analisi della conversazione degli impiegati coinvolti nel progetto) suggeriscono che la consapevolezza metacognitiva dei soggetti coinvolti è l'elemento cruciale per il successo di un progetto di empowerment basato sull'uso dei blog. I dati ricavati dall'analisi della conversazione suggeriscono la fon-

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damentale importanza di gestire in maniera efficace gli aspetti di comunicazione diretta che favoriscano l'attribuzione e co-costruzione di senso da parte del gruppo coinvolto.

Parole chiave: blog; metacognizione; training; risorse umane; organizzazione; analisi della conversazione

Abstract

Literature supports the effectiveness of blogs to improve communication, strategic thinking, and collaboration. These competencies are particularly relevant for organizations, and for this reason, social media are frequently used as opportunities to better manage employees' behaviors, enhance the transfer of knowledge, and foster creativity. Despite these considerations, few research-based findings guide these new tools' practical application in the organizational environment's training processes. This study aims to understand the organizational, individual, and socio-relational processes and issues that occur during a blog-based training program and how they interact and influence its effectiveness. We present a case study based on the use of discourse analysis, focused on the failure of a blog-based training project. Our findings suggest the employees' metacognitive awareness is a significant issue in the design and implementation of a blog-based training program. Insights derived from conversation analysis suggest that to manage a blog-based training program effectively, it is crucial to deal with face-to-face interaction and the group sense-making process 'outside' the blog.

Keywords: blog; metacognition; training; human resources; organization; discursive psychology

Introduction

Evidence in the literature proves that there are several reasons why blogs can be considered valuable tools in self-directed learning, defined as a widespread learning that occurs as part of adults' everyday life, that is systematic but does not depend on an instructor or a classroom (Tough, 1967; Tough, 1971). These reasons include the fact that the use of blogs and social networks can improve individuals' awareness of their learning experience (Churchill, 2009; Norman, Nordin, Din, & Ally, 2016), promote strategic thinking and cooperation (Antonietti, Caravita, Colombo, & Simonelli, 2015; Shuen, 2018), and foster self-awareness while improving communication (Fernandez, 2016; Lee, 2009). These positive outcomes appears to derive from the fact that the use of blogs and social networks supports interpersonal relationships and a personal commitment to online contributions (Johnson, Gueutal, & Falbe, 2009). Because of this social potentialities, blogs and social networks evolved from pure entertainment media to create distinctive multimedia-based learning platforms that have been proved to expand the typology of competences enhanced through technology-mediated learning (Minocha, 2009). These changes have been guided by the proven efficacy of different uses of multimedia tools to promote self-regulated learning. To be more specific, a positive correlation has been found between metacognition and the use of multimedia tools (Antonietti, Colombo, & Di Nuzzo, 2015; Cuevas, Fiore, Bowers, & Salas, 2004; Cuevas, Fiore, & Oser, 2002; Kramarski & Mevarech, 2003; Kramarski & Ritkof, 2002; Lindner, Eitel, Barenthien, & Köller, 2018). Metacognition can be defined as the sum of a person's opinions about how their mind works, but also as an opportunity to use what is known about the mental functioning to control and enhance thinking processes. This is important for three reasons: it allows individuals to overcome the limitations of traditional ways of transmitting knowledge, promotes deeper and more generalized acquisition of specific competencies, and is helpful in situations where learning is difficult, such as demanding work settings (Akturk & Sahin, 2011; Trouillet, Doron, & Combes, 2016). Hence, it is not surprising to find various other studies reporting the effectiveness of trainings that uses metacognition combined with multimedia to enhance self-awareness, motivation (Colliot & Jamet, 2018; Kramarski & Mevarech, 2003; Kramarski & Ritkof, 2002; Mazumder, 2012), cooperation (Antonietti, Caravita, et al., 2015; Colombo, Antonietti, Sala, & Caravita, 2013; Garza, 2002), and cognitive processes (Fiorella & Vogel-Walcutt, 2011; Kramarski & Zeichner, 2001; Scheiter, Schubert, & Schüler, 2018; Stalbovs, Scheiter, & Gerjets, 2015).

These results offer a solid theoretical foundation to justify the use of a blog-based training as a tool to foster employees' psychological empowerment. In this context, we define empowerment as "the state or set of conditions that allow for employees or teams to believe that they have control over their work" (Maynard, Gilson, & Mathieu, 2012). To be successful within a psychological empowerment program, individuals need to believe that they can perform their work on their own, something that can be fostered and achieved through metacognitive competencies. Moreover, because of the focus on personal accountability, this specific form of empowerment can also be defined in terms of motivational processes (Maynard et al., 2012), which is known to be based on the sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) – which are variables that we can hence assume will play a role within a blog-based empowerment program. Self-determination, close relative to self-esteem and very much influenced by metacognition, is also considered a key factor in a well-established framework of psychological empowerment, which posits that it is a four-dimensional construct, whose components are: meaning (i.e. fit between one's work goals and beliefs or values), competence (i.e. beliefs of having the right capabilities to skillfully perform their work activities), self-determination (i.e. sense of autonomy or control over immediate work behaviors and processes), impact (i.e. the extent to which individuals view their behavior as having an influence on operating outcomes) (Spreitzer, 1995). Evidence in the Human Resource Management (HRM) literature proved that training specifically has a positive effect on the last two components of psychological empowerment, namely self-determination and impact (Logan & Ganster, 2007).

So far, we assessed how blogs could be used to foster several variables linked to psychological empowerment, because of their specific structure that fosters social connection (and hence cooperation among learners), metacognition, motivation and self-determination. Another important characteristic of the blogs that adds to these aspects, helping to clarify the reasons for their efficacy in self-regulated learning, is that they are technology-based – and this links them to the technology-mediated learning theory. As a technology-mediated learning tool, blogs can be seen as a successful combination initially of the positive aspects of Web 2.0 and later of social networks, that allows to share diary writings or specialized contents with a potentially very large audience. Blogging enhances two aspects that are relevant to maximize self-regulated learning (SRL): dialogue and structure. The dialogue is promoted by the comments that are fundamental part of a blog, and a well-defined structure is always present due to this tool's clear content organization. Through this specific structure, which resembles a diary (a blog's entries are written in chronological order and usually displayed to the readers in reverse chronological order), it promotes the use of narrative thinking, which allows organizing, interpreting and using experience as a structured succession of events, oriented toward a goal (Bruner, 2003; Hadzigeorgiou, 2016). The act of narrating is useful not only to trigger the internalization of concepts and the construction of a social, reflective, and coping conception of the self (Bruner & Kalmar, 1998; Hutto, 2016), but it can also foster the creation of cooperative online communities, which is one of the possibility offered through technology-mediated learning (Garza, 2002; Pinkard, Erete, Martin, & McKinney de Royston, 2017).Within a blog, all users can comment on any posted information at any time. For this reason, a blog can be useful within the theoretical conceptual framework of self-directed learning. In fact, blogs allow a continuous direct interaction, among others, with the instructor, which is proved to be a very effective way to support the learners' readiness for and comfort with being self-directed as well as develop the learners' autonomy, especially in the first stages of a learning project (Merriam, 2001). Such an effect is even more important because a learner autonomy cannot be taken for granted. In fact, although a person demonstrated to be self-directed in one situation, this will not be automatically true in another domain (Candy, 1991; Liu & Cheng, 2012; Wenzel, 2000).

For all these reasons, blogs and social networks proved to be valuable tools for companies who are looking to effective ways of promoting self-regulated learning among their employees. Therefore, literature of the management domain is paying more and more attention to the blogs and social networks, considering them as an opportunity to enhance transfer of knowledge and foster creativity (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2012; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Shuen, 2018). Social media promote the interactions of the organizations with the outside (i.e. customers, prospect employees, communities of practice). This activates a process of sharing and co-creation of knowledge (Imperatori & Ruta, 2013; Lockwood & Dennis, 2008). For this reason, this specific media technology can be conceived as an empowerment tool, useful to enhance employees' competences within the organizational context (Emerson & Berge, 2018; Schneckenberg, 2009). To be more specific, being blogs and social networks tools that enable technology-mediated learning, as discussed above, they can benefit Human Resource professionals, who can use them to design effective web-based Human Resource Management practices, taking advantage of the fact that they are cheaper than face-to-face learning initiatives. Furthermore, evidence from e-HRM literature prove that employees appreciate them because they see them as a signal that their company is willing to invest on its workforce (Bissola & Imperatori, 2013a). From this perspective, the HR practices based on social media appear to sustain the employee-organization relationship enhancing employees' positive work attitudes (Bissola & Imperatori, 2013a; Poba-Nzaou, Lemieux, Beaupré, & Uwizeyemungu, 2016; Ruël, Bondarouk, & Looise, 2004).

Despite the growing attention to the social media intended as HRM practices (London & Hall, 2011; Marler, 2009; Roth, Bobko, Van Iddekinge, & Thatcher, 2016), there is not a lot of research-based evidence to guide the effective application of new blogs in the training processes within the organizational environment. In the HRM domain, research reports evidence that there are almost endless web-based options that may influence both the effectiveness and efficiency of HRM systems (Bissola

& Imperatori, 2013b; Haines & Lafleur, 2008; Strohmeier, 2007). Yet, this evidence is mainly related to employer branding, recruitment systems, and knowledge management practices, only recently to the training and development tools (Breunig, 2016; Qi & Chau, 2018).

On the other side, the psychological literature examines social media and their adoption in self-regulated learning mainly for student education (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012) not considering them as specific HRM tools to enhance employees' competences within the companies. This is coherent with the results reported by research focused on adult learning processes (andragogy), which establish the value of the management teaching methods characterized by a learner-centered approach (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Merriam, 2001).

Despite these gaps in the literature, blogs' characteristics, discussed above, make them particularly relevant from an organizational perspective; organizations can definitely benefit from their cooperative structure, that it is proved to enhance the development of relevant attitudes and competences. For example, evidence supports the idea that collective approaches and social confrontations activate creative processes among employees, leading to boost organizational creativity, which is the premise for innovation within the company (Bai, Lin, & Li, 2016; Bissola, Imperatori, & Biffi, 2017; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003). Feedback and collective processes (e.g. feedback-seeking, help-giving and help-seeking behaviours) are practices mainly employed in a context of high levels of creativity and innovation and blogs can train these processes thanks to their intrinsic structure (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Porath & Bateman, 2006; Wooten & Ulrich, 2017).

Besides creative competences, the evidence reported in the literature and described above, lead to hypothesize the success of a blog-based empowerment program, designed and applied according to the guidelines derived from research. Yet, a similar program, designed for employees of an HR department, failed. This paper aims at exploring this exemplary case, trying to investigate in depth what are the organizational, individual and socio-relational processes that occured during a blog-based managerial training program and how their interaction resulted in a failure in achieving the training's aim.

The training project was implemented taking into account the main guidelines emerging from the literature on technology-mediated learning, which assumes participants beliefs, knowledge, practices and the environment all have a relevant role and mutually influence one another (Bower, 2019). On their side, instructors were very competent and attentive in designing tasks that enable to develop the targeted competences (i.e. empowerment) (Biggs, 2011). Nevertheless, the learning outcomes failed to be achieved because learners did not complete the training path. Taking into account the literature on social media education as a relevant part of technology-mediated learning process, self-directed learning, e-HRM systems, and Discursive Psychology, this study aims at making a step forward in understanding what are the organizational, individual and socio-relational dynamics and issues that occur during such a blog-based training program and how they interact thus failing to engage the learners. Learning engagement is defined as *a student's voluntary participation in activities designed as part of a learning program* (Natriello, 1984). Learning engagement has been proved to be a relevant variable in technology-mediated learning because it fully mediates the effects of technology-mediated learning on learning effectiveness measured as the extent to which the learner acquires focal knowledge or skills (Hu & Hui, 2012).

This is even more relevant to analyze when taking into account that the training project aimed at developing personal competences, instead of a technical skill strictly related to their actual job. Our assumption was that, since these competences were the focus of the program, this could contribute to support the learners' engagement because they would have considered the program as a personal opportunity to increase their own behavioral competences. For this reason, we also aimed at exploring and understating the role played by participants' individual perspectives in causing the failure of the training program.

Starting from these goals, we designed a triangulated research strategy that enabled us to explain complex causal links in an unforeseen failure of a blog-based training initiative. The analysis is based on a revelatory case, that allows to access a complex phenomenon, which has not yet been addressed from a multilevel perspective (Tetnowski, 2015; Yin, 2017).

Method

The failure in engaging learners of a web-based training program emerged as an opportunity to conduct an in-depth investigation of a revealing case, which is particularly relevant because it refers to an empowerment development path that involved employees of a large company. Case studies have been used in varied investigations, particularly in sociological studies, but increasingly, in education and management (Quinlan, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2019; Yin, 2017). A case study allows a qualitative research design where different types of triangulation are adopted, enhancing the robustness and the validity of the results (Tetnowski, 2015).

Research setting and process

The case study is based on data collected during a collaborative management research project. Collaborative management research (CMR) is "an effort by two or more parties, at least one of whom is a member of an organization or system under study and at least one of whom is an external researcher, to work together in learning about how the behavior of managers, management methods, or organizational arrangements affect outcomes in the system or systems under study, […] with the intent of both proving performance of the system and adding to the broader body of knowledge in the field of management" (Pasmore, Stymne, Shani, Mohrman, & Adler, 2008).

The project has involved Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and the Italian branch of a European global company that provides innovative solutions in automotive and industrial technologies as well as in products and services for professional and private use.

Consistently with the innovation strategy of the company, the HR Department is constantly interested in training programs, aiming at developing employees' competences such as lateral thinking, creativity, proactive collaboration, knowledge sharing, which are coherent useful competences to nurture psychological empowerment in such an organizational environment. Furthermore, the innovative orientation of the company leads the organizational environment to be very sensitive to technological solutions; specifically, attention was allocated to the opportunities offered by social media that were already included in the company marketing strategy and were used as a tool for internal communication. As for the e-HRM architecture, the company more recently became active both globally and locally (i.e. Italy) in the most important social networks (e.g. LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Google+) for employer branding purposes.

The training

The description of the organizational setting allows to understand the prompt interest of the HR department when coming to know that a team of researchers at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore had developed a blog-based training program able to increase creativity, critical thinking and self-esteem at individual level. This training program had been previously tested and validated in the academic context with a wide sample of students having different academic backgrounds. The training is built around a narration, which is divided into seven episodes. The narrative presents three characters. At the beginning of the story, they lack one skill each: creativity, self-esteem, or critical thinking. Through the activities presented in the training, the protagonists succeed in improving the specific skill they were lacking. Each episode is divided into three subsections – each subsection focuses on one character and their missing skill. Participants are asked to help the characters with the different tasks that they face in each episode. The activities suggested have been designed to modify standardized activities commonly used to enhance the target skills. A specific section intended to prompt metacognitive reflection and awareness concludes each episode.

The implementation

The head of the HR department and the HR training and development manager, after a presentation of the training, research design, and agenda, enthusiastically decided to implement it in their company.

The research team was composed by 4 researchers and 3 members of the company, from the HR department. Considering the innovative nature of the training tool, the team decided to start the project with a pilot test, involving twenty HR employees. They were expected to recognize the value of the project for the company, and to be particularly involved in the process itself also due to their professional focus towards people development.

The team planned the training program to be organized around 4 phases. Firstly, the HR department, the manager in charge of HR development and the research team presented the project, using official communications via e-mail.

The second step was a meeting of all the employees of the HR department with the collaborative research team, who illustrated the research program and introduced the blog and its features. Then a session of assessment took place; all the 20 employees of the HR department were tested to assess their individual levels of three target skills (i.e. creativity, critical thinking and self-esteem).

The third phase was the training itself, to be performed through the blog: this phase should have last sixteen days.

In the fourth phase, the team would have assessed again the individual level of the three skills, in order to verify the efficacy of the training program with a pre-post design.

End of the training process

However, after the training started, motivational and technical problems emerged – so that the blog was closed after four weeks. None of the participants completed the training program. To be more specific, some people started to complain they couldn't log-in into the platform were the blog was hosted (the specific reason of this problems was not identified, because the researchers were not able to replicate the problem) and others progressively stopped posting.

Participants expressed no interest in the post-test assessment. So a second assessment of the target skills did not happen. A meeting to discuss the negative outcome of the project was organized by the management together with the researchers.

This happened despite the fact that all involved actors recognized the relevance of the target competences, that the schedule had been carefully planned and shared before starting the training phase, and despite the established effectiveness of the blog, the strong top management sponsorship, the declared interest and curiosity of the target audience and the continuous recalls, assistance, stimuli and solicitations received from the project team.

During the process, qualitative data useful to reflect on the reasons of this failure have been collected: these data allow to identify the key aspects that could negatively influence the efficacy of a blog-based empowerment program in an authentic organizational setting.

Data collection and analysis

Data were gathered through diaries coded by 3 members of the collaborative research team and through 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews with all the training program participants. In the diaries, each team member daily coded the different events related to the training project that occurred before and during the program.

The interviews lasted from 60 to 150 minutes; they were conducted using the same structure, which has been derived from the specific research aims. An open-end format was adopted in order to collect both factual data and personal impressions (i.e. effectiveness of the blogs presentation and of the instruction for its usage; perceptions about the effectives of the blog-based training both within the HR department and/or other departments; suggestions to improve the training experience; perceived value of the trained competences to enhance employee performance).

We performed a preliminary content analysis on the observers' diaries and interviews to understand, from different perspectives, the pros and cons of the training program. To be able to rely on more solid data, and to develop a model to explain our result, we also analyzed the transcripts of the 20 interviews using Discursive Psychology (DP). We decided to use Discourse Psychology (DP), because of the methodological link that this approach establishes between "psychology" and "discourse": psychology is intended as something that is displayed, and can hence be studied, in talk and dialogical interactions (Potter, 2005), such as the interviews that we collected. Within DP, psychology is considered from the perspective of the participants of the dialogical interaction (Potter & Wetherell, 2001), and understanding our participants' perspective was one of the main goal of this research. This is possible because language is intended both as constructed and constructive: people when talking "act", using language as a fundamental tool to construct the social world. Language is also intended as informative: this means that people's conduct during a conversation has to be treated not as a simple behavior, but as an action (i.e. an intelligent activity) (Holtgraves, 2013). From this perspective, language involves a series of procedures that are shared among people, which help individuals, in everyday life, to co-ordinate with others. This perspective opens the possibility of examining utterances as objects which speakers use with awareness in order to pursue specific goals while interacting with other people (Clarke, 2017; Wooffitt, 2001).

A common method used with DP to analyze the transcripts is Conversation Analysis (CA). CA derives from Sack's work, with the cooperation of Schegloff and Jefferson (McCarthy, Matthiessen, & Slade, 2013; Schegloff, 1991) – aimed at exploring language and its organization in everyday use. Their main aim was to define a new sociological method to analyze natural occurring interactions (that is to say data driven and not theory led), starting from the assumption that language use can be seen as an informative site to explore social actions (Paulus, Warren, & Lester, 2016; Wooffitt, 2001).

Natural, extended sequences of talk are needed, in order be able to detect complex linguistic structure and rhetoric constructions. For this reason, the analysis of situated interaction, organized as semi structured interviews, recorded in natural settings is preferred (Arminen, 2017; Potter, 2005).

All the interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed according to the convention suggested by Jefferson (2004) by two independent judges. Inter-rater reliability was calculated and resulted to be 0.87.

Transcripts were divided into sections, which have been classified and analyzed according to the topics of interest by the three judges, who discussed the interpretation/reading.

Results

Content analysis

As a first research step, in order to highlight the positive and the negative perceptions of the empowerment training, we performed a qualitative content analysis of the diaries and of the interviews.

This analysis enabled us to identify the main strengths and weaknesses of the training program, as the participants reported. Table 1 and 2 synthesize the pros emerged from content analysis of the diaries and the interviews.

Tab. 1 - *Positive aspects perceived by collaborative research team (from the diaries)*

	Frequency of citation
Innovative learning tool (Blog)	32%
Opportunity to activate a social learning environment	13%
Sponsorship from the HR Director	10%
Positive feedbacks after the program presentation	8%
Relevance of competences (both at individual and company levels)	21%
Opportunity to perform a competences assessment (pre and post test)	16%
	100%

Tab. 2 - *Positive aspects directly cited by the users (from the interviews)*

	Frequency of citation
Program presentation	13%
Skills (general)	33%
Creativity	8%
Critical thinking	8%
Narration	17%
Blog	21%
	100%

Despite the positive aspects, participants reported many negative issues related to the implementation of the training program. These topics can be classified into three main areas: related to the specific tool (e.g. innovative tool, technical aspects, and narration), to the individual approach (e.g. interest about the training topic/competences, resistance to use social media for professional aims), and to the more general organizational process (sponsorship, internal communication, and feedbacks). The negative issues are synthesized in Tables 3 and 4, where the two different perspectives from users and research team are presented.

Tab. 3 - *Negative aspects – Collaborative research team perspective (diaries)*

	Frequency of citation
Technical difficulties (difficulties to use the tool)	32%
Difficulties to balance work and training time (lack of dedicated time within the working hours)	17%
Ineffective support and communication (as for technical aspects)	12%
No feedbacks	12%
Narration distant from working context and too complicated	21%
Resistance to use social media within the professional context	6%
	100%

Tab. 4 - *Negative aspects – Users' perspective (interviews)*

	Frequency of citation
Program presentation	11%
Practical/technical issues	26%
No coordination/feedback	14%
No encouragement from inside	14%
Narration	12%
Time	33%
	100%

Considering the whole evidence reported, it is noteworthy to observe that the different actors involved in the project reported sometimes diverse issues and, moreover, the same aspects were often reported (sometimes even from the same person) both as positive and negative, namely the narration and the presentation/explanation given by the research team as an introduction to the training.

These preliminary considerations suggested us to go deeper with our data and to adopt a discourse psychology perspective to better analyze our evidence.

Conversation analysis

Starting from the evident contradictions that emerged from participants' reports, we focused on explaining these as a variable closely linked to the project's failure. We hypothesized that the negative outcome of this experience might have had consequences at different levels, namely the causal attributions (external or internal) that participants ascribed to the failure, and the sense of self in relation to the project.

External attribution. As could be expected, most participants used external attribution to explain why the project did not work. The negative results were considered not to be under the individuals' control (Merkl-Davies & Brennan, 2017; Murray & Thomson, 2009).

Tab. 5- *Excerpt VR_1*

1	**I.:** ! Ciao V.(.2) data la tua (.)	1	**I.:** ! Hi V.(.2)considering your (.)
2	conoscenza in ambito HR, se ci	2	knowledge of the HR field, if you
3	puoi dare qualche opinione >	3	can tell us any opinion >
4	qualche miglioramento che può	4	some improvement that can
5	essere apportato allo strumento	5	be brought to the target
6	proposto (.)quindi al blog…?=	6	tool (.)i.e. to the blog…?=
7	**VR:** =certamente l'idea del blog	7	**VR:** =certainly the blog idea
8	è un'idea molto .hh (.)po-	8	is a very .hh (.)positive idea
		9	(.4) so it is also to

sitiva	
9 (.4) quindi è anche da	
10 implementare volendo Hhhh… solo	10 implement if are willing to Hhhh… but
11 che °come già detto dalle mie	11 °as my colleagues already
12 colleghe° (.) abbiamo avuto delle	12 Said°(.) we had some
13 (.) difficoltà iniziali nel	13 (.) early difficulties to
14 registrarci (.3).hhh quindi	14 register (.3).hhh so
15 (.2)anche eventualmente	15 (.2) also possibly
16 effettuare una (.) spiegazione	16 to give an (.) explanation
17 passo passo seppure può sembrare	17 step by step even if it can seem
18 banale o comunque (.3) si	18 to be irrelevant or whatever (.3) it
19 traduce comunque in un guadagno	19 brings anyway a gain
20 di tempo nella registrazione	20 of time in registration
21 (.)per entrare subito nel vivo	21 (.)to get immediately to the heart
22 .hhh del blog e (.)delle storie.	22 .hhh of the blog and (.)of narrations.
[…]	[…]
23 Avevo voglia di capire meglio	23 I wanted to understand better
24 (.5) poi però mi sono	24 (.5) but then I
25 (.)scontrata con la (.)dura	25 (.)ran into the (.)hard
26 realtà (.5) il tempo.	26 reality (.5) time.

In this first Excerpt, the Interviewer (I.) is actually asking VR not to find a cause for the failure, but to provide suggestions to improve the blog. VR immediately answers, almost without waiting for I's turn to be over, and stresses the positive relevance of the blog. Yet, she uses this positive opening as an intro to the new topic she is willing to discuss: the external attribution of the failure. The fact that she is actively constructing this new scenario can be derived from the pauses and inspiration/expiration that anticipates the new topic. The change is introduced by taking personal distances from the statement (lines 11-12 `°come già detto dalle mie colleghe°`). Then the attribution to something purely external (lacking of explanation is introduced) – suggesting that this is the only reason for the failing. This is stressed a little farther in the interview, (see lines 23-26), where VR constructs a dichotomy. On the one side she was willing to understand (so she put all her cognitive effort to succeed), then "something" happened, this is the other side that prevented her to complete the experience: time, which is described as something real and harsh – something that you cannot defy without concrete help.

Other participants just piled up external causes, creating a long list – almost as a shield against any possible internal attribution (See additional Excerpts upload as additional materials). Some external attributions were formulated as blames to others, when compared to the "good behaviour" of the speaker.

Moreover, from some of the participants' remarks it was possible to hypothesise also the presence of internal attribution, which was, in some cases, mixed with the external one.

Tab. 6 - *Excerpt SP_1*

1	**SP:** […] >comunque bisogna che ci	1	**SP:** […] >however you need
2	s i a u n tempo d a stanziare:::	2	to allocate some time:::
3	(.5) non va bene (.) quando vuoi	3	(.5) it doesn't work (.) when you want
4	(.3) perché dopo < non ce la	4	(.3) because then < you
5	fai °e lo vivi male:::° (.4)sei	5	can't °and you take it wrong:::° (.4)you are
6	continuamente alla ricorsa (.2)	6	constantly running up (.2)
		7	and then (.) look .hhh you see
		8	things by yourself (.6) and

7 e poi (.) guarda .hhh le cose le 8 vedi anche da te (.6) e se poi 9 gli altri non lo fanno tu 10 dici::: (.6) ma perché io (.) e 11 perché la sera (.4) e allo-ra va 12 a finire che lasci perdere::::	then 9 if others don’t do it you 10 say::: (.6) why me (.) and 11 why at evening (.4) and then it 12 turns out that you let it go::::

In Excerpt SP_1, we see how the interviewee keeps alternating in his explanation about the project’s failure, between external (un tempo da stanziare; e se poi gli altri non lo fanno) and internal (non le ce la fai °e lo vivi male:::°) attributions. He was also, apparently, waiting for a feedback from the interviewer helping him to focus on either one, or providing a change of topic (see the numerous long pauses - for example line 8 and 10, and the direct reference to the I. at line 7 (guarda). Since neither came, he finally summarises the different arguments, admitting his failure (e allora va a finire che lasci perdere::::).

Internal attribution. We were also able to find examples of internal attribution to the work team (e.g. the HR group) or to the single individual. Internal attribution refers to when an internal cause is attributed to an individual’s behavior, such as personality or temperament. In this case, the person tends to be considered in control of or responsible for his/her behavior (Murray & Thomson, 2009; Paley, 2016).

Tab. 7 - *Excerpt RZ_2*

1 **I.:** … (.3) >E come target a 2 livello di funzione 3 organizzativa? Secondo le::i c’è 4 un target più indicato o= 5 **RZ:**= ↑beh sicuramente non le	1 **I.:** … (.3) >And about the organizational department to consider for the pilot? According to yo::u is there 2 a more adequate tar-get or=

6 risorse umane visto i risultati	3 **RZ:**= ↑well for sure not
	4 Human Resources considering the results
7 ((risata)) (.) °scherzo° (.3)<	5 ((laugh)) (.) ° I'm joking° (.3)<
8 però temo che questi piccoli	6 but I'm afraid that these little
9 problemi di effettiva (.3) così	7 problems of real (.3) so
10 (.4) siano un po' (.)comuni a	8 (.4) are quite (.)common in
11 tutte le aree (.3) non penso ci	9 all areas (.3) I don't think
12 sia una funzione più o meno (.)	10 there is a more or less (.)
13 adatta, si tratta di comunicarlo	11 suitable department, it comes to communicate it
14 bene e di rinforzare i	12 well and to reinforce the
15 messaggi::: (.4)anzi noi come	13 messages::: (.4)rather we as
16 HR dovevamo essere i più	14 HR had to be the most
17 pronti:::	15 ready :::

Reading Excerpt RZ_2, we can see how RZ starts talking before the I. has completed her turn of talk, attributing the fault of bad results to the HR group. This quite strong statement is softened by the laugh and the recoding of the attribution on a different communicational level, framing it as a joke (line 7). Then he waits to see if the I. acknowledges his previous utterance as a joke. The I. does not take a conversational turn, stressing the fact that the "joke" has to be clarified: it is based on a true fact (the bad results named by RZ on line 6) so there is a communicational contradiction between the statement (true) and RZ's meta-communication ("it is not true, I am joking"). Hence, the interviewee goes back to the internal attribution to the HR saying that even if it may be a common problem, they should had been better than the others due to their specific expertise (lines 13-17).

Tab. 8 - *NegaExcerpt RZ_3*

1	**RZ:** = Io devo(.) confessare che	1	**RZ:** = I have to(.) confess that
2	non ce l'ho fatta a parte-cipare	2	I couldn't participate
3	(.4)in realtà ho anche	3	(.4)indeed I also
4	aspettato un po' per capi-re:::	4	waited a bit to understand:::
5	.hhh diciamo:: (.2)quali erano i	5	.hhh so to speak:: (.2)which were the
6	segnali dai miei (.2)da tutti:::	6	signals from my (.2)from everybody:::

In Excerpt RZ_3 the interviewee "confesses" (line 1) that he couldn't make it. The fact that he uses the term "confess" makes us see how he conceptualises this internal attribution as something private that has not to be shared. A similar attributional style could be found in other interviews where the sense of guilt is clearly stated.

The construction of the self – Avoiding causal attribution. The self-concept can be defined as the collective set of beliefs individuals have about themselves (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2014). Many participants used their professional role as a shield to avoid any actual causal attribution.

For example SP, when directly asked if the blog could be a good tool to be used for HR training (See *Excerpt SP_2),* or in which context it would be most effective (See *Excerpt SP_3*), or even if the target skills were good choices (See *Excerpt SP_4*)*,* he avoids the question referring to his specific professional-self.

Tab. 9 - *Excerpt SP_2*

1	**SP:**Lo vedo difficile (.4)	1	**SP:** It looks hard (.4)
2	Hhhhh. va beh::: io sono di	2	Hhhhh. well::: I have a
3	Estrazione tecnica (.) mi occupo	3	technical background (.) I deal with
4	di cose tecniche, non sono	4	technical things, I'm not
5	dell'HR (.) o uno psicolo-go	5	an HR employee (.) or a psy-chologist(.)
		6	I deal with administration

6 mi occupo di amministrazione 7 però…	7 but…

Tab. 10 - *Excerpt SP_3*

1 **SP**:.hhh non ho (.2) non ho	1 **SP**:.hhh I have (.2) I have no
2 proprio idea::: .hhh forse (.)	2 idea at all::: .hhh maybe (.)
3 non a dei tecniconi come me	3 not at hard technicians like me

Tab. 11 - *Excerpt SP_4*

1 **SP**:no:::mmmm:::: (.4) mi	1 **SP**:no:::mmmm:::: (.4) they
2 sembrano abbastanza:: ehm (.4)	2 seem to me quite:: ehm (.4)
3 °adeguate° però non lo so:::	3 °adequate° but I don't know:::
4 (.2) non ho molta esperienza in	4 (.2) I don't have a lot of experience
5 merito a::(.) a questa modalità	5 about::(.) this modality
6 ehm che forse per me è molto	6 ehm that maybe for me is very
7 innovativa(.) o mi occupo	7 innovative(.) or I deal with
8 proprio di altro	8 really other things

Discussion

The collaborative research project discussed in this paper concerned the learners' engagement of a blog-based training program in developing behavioural competences in a business organization. The project was highly innovative and it was implemented in a company, on the basis of theoretical argumentations that allow hypothesizing its suitability and appropriateness considering both the personal and the organizational development needs .The research team assumed that the ideal setting to involve would have been the unit in charge of creating strategic value through the human and social capital (i.e. the HR department). Despite the attention to the ideal setting and despite the research evidence that support the effectiveness of blogs as learning tools in education, the blog-based program failed. Such an outcome is unexpected and challenging also from the perspective of the e-HRM literature that has been devoting a growing attention to the potential of social media for the HR domain (Azeem & Yasmin, 2016; Bondarouk & Olivas-Lujan, 2013; de Zubielqui, Fryges, & Jones, 2017; Zhao & Kemp, 2013).

To better explore the reasons of this unexpected result, we collected data during and after the failure of the project to explore individual, organizational, and socio-relational issues that the literature claims can compromise the learning engagement in a blog-based training program in business organizations (Bower, 2019).

At a general level, results confirm the significance of better analyzing the blog-based learning process at different levels. First, results highlight and confirm some typical features often related to an effective training program, such as the perceived relevance of the content (i.e. skills), the declared supervisor support (i.e. sponsorship), the communication of the project (i.e. the presentation and the kick-off meeting) (London & Hall, 2011). Second, they suggest the relevance to manage both organizational social context and technical issues and prerequisites – such as technical aspects and schedule and organizational culture and supervisor support. Third, our data stress the relevant role of the individual actors involved in the program: conversation analysis allowed us to highlight in a constant way how a common traits within the interviews was participants' use of attributional styles to justify the failure of the program as well as building a strong professional self that could be used to mediate the failure, without using any internal attribution. Investing on these psychological aspects (both at an individual and group level) could help to succeed in engaging employees in such a learning path. Obviously, these variables are influenced by the specific context where the training took place. External attribution could be expected as a consequence of the training being promoted by the management team (something that could be hardly avoided in any HR sponsored program) and the specific subculture of the organization could also have played a role – something that future studies should explore more in depth.

Being more specific, our findings highlight three key areas that are useful to interpret the failure of a social media training program in engaging participants into the learning process (and, more in general, to suggest how to prevent it): the characteristics of the blog; the individual characteristics of the users, and the organizational context and processes that aim to support and frame the attendance of the training program. For each area, we were able to pinpoint the relevant topics that should guide the design and the implementation processes of training programs based on blogs within business organizations.

As for the characteristics of the blog, our evidence suggests that, quite obviously, it is relevant to prevent technical potential problems and to design the blog as a very user-friendly and easy-going instrument to prevent irritation and frustration. Moreover, results suggest that the technical aspects are not only relevant 'per se', but they could be used both at individual level, and at organizational one, as an alibi for not attending the learning activities, as better explained in the next two sections.

The findings also highlight that a "continuous" feedback on the participants' progresses during the learning process through the blog would contribute to foster their motivation in going on with the blog activities, similarly to what is widely proved for the 'off-line' working activities (Clark & Mayer, 2016; Luthans, 2002). Nevertheless, previous literature proved that frequent feedbacks are particularly relevant for immature learners that are not already entirely prepared for being self-directed (Grow, 1994). In addition, the participants' complains about the narratives of the blog, that are perceived too far from the work context, seem to confirm their low readiness as self-directed learners. These considerations confirm the relevance of the readiness of the learners as one of the key issues for designing and managing a blog-based self-learning process. Having a good sense of the learners' level of readiness is crucial for the instructors that need to activate the learning path, but also for the blog designers that need to align the characteristics of the tool to the learners' characteristics.

At an individual level, evidence emerged through CA suggests that it is important to work on participants' causal attribution during the process, and also to take into account their concepts of selves, as they are constructed and change during the program. Moreover, our data suggest that personal and professional life presents some distinctions, as for the preferred management tools. Results suggest the participants' metacognitive awareness is a major issue in the design and implementation of a blog-based training program, also consistently with the literature about the andragogy (Tsai, Lin, Hong, & Tai, 2018; Watts, Ibrahim, & Toland, 2016). In a learning program based on social media, this seems to be also strongly related to participants' causal attributions that, as we saw, created controversial socio-emotional situations for all participants (Maymon, Hall, & Goetz, 2018). Sections devoted to metacognitive awareness, and especially on causal attributions, should be included in any Web 2.0 empowerment path. It may be worthwhile to mention that the blog did had "metacognitive corners", but unfortunately most participants quitted the project before dealing with the first one. Therefore, starting the learning process with an activity on beliefs and expectations of the participants and giving them continuous feedbacks on these aspects may be extremely useful.

The adoption of the DA also allowed highlighting the role that the partecipants' self perception had played in predicting the program's outcome. As emerged from our analysis, many problems derived from self-discrepancies, i.e. any gaps between the actual self and the ideal self within the empowerment project. Discrepancy between these self-guides is characterized by dejection-related emotions, such as disappointment and dissatisfaction: in our specific case individuals tended to attribute these feelings to the tool itself – because they were not able to realize where they actually originated from. This could also be seen in the light that it would have been hardly acceptable to ascribe the blame to the management or HR team, and this might have played a role in promoting the trends of external-attribution mediated by a distant professional self that emerged in the interviews. To be more specific, participants tended to deal with these discrepancies by using external causal attributions, which helped them being close to their ideal self-image (Nguyen, Johnson, Collins, & Parker, 2017).

Finally, with reference to the organizational level, our analysis identified that some process characteristics such as kick-off activities, time schedule and project continuous communications have to be carefully designed and managed. More interestingly, findings also pinpoint the relevance of managing the wider organizational setting 'out-of-the-blog' where the social sense making process originated from what happened around the blog (Ngai, Moon, Lam, Chin, & Tao, 2015).

Other relevant considerations emerging from our evidence at the organizational level pertains the growing literature on e-HRM implementation. Previous research suggests that this understanding is critical to an organization's ability to plan for and ultimately deliver new HR tools. If stakeholders are unable to make sense of technology and agree on common (congruent) technological frames, as a minimum there will be issues of resistance and potentially significant barriers to progressing beyond administration towards transformational HR (Foster, 2009). E-HRM literature suggests that blogs and training tools based on social media could have a relational role supporting the development of interaction processes (peer feedback among employees within the blog) and the emergence of the community identity (Bissola & Imperatori, 2014; Ruël et al., 2004; Wood, Berger, & Roberts, 2017). Our results contribute to this literature by offering evidence that the e-HRM outcomes depend on the ability of the organization to support their implementation and the related sense-making among all the involved stakeholders, such as employees, supervisors, HR professionals, instructors and even external actors such as blog providers and the scientific community (Bissola & Imperatori, 2014; Ruël et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2017).

How is it possible to deal with these issues from a managerial standpoint? A good starting point is a positive cooperation between whoever manages the empowerment and the HR management in presenting the project, stressing the right aspects, and giving the participants the right job resources to deal with the specific job demands they will have to address. This will help involved people in building realistic expectations, to prepare themselves for the project with more awareness and to engage them into the processes (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). Listing and clarifying the existing resources, both external (the empowerment tool, the research team, the management and so on) and internal (participants' skills, both cognitive and socio relational) could help the individuals to become ready, engaged and not feel exhausted, accordingly with the job Resource-Demand model.

Besides, our findings suggest the importance of working constantly at a metacognitive level at both success and failures, talking about difficulties within the empowerment could help building more realistic attributional causes. With an adequate organizational support and providing alternative readings to difficulties/failures could also prevent emerging strong discrepancies between ideal and actual selves; relevant role in this direction could be played by the supervisors' ability to frame the blog experiences. As mentioned in the introduction, this would promote better cognitive and emotive outcomes.

From our study, metacognition also appeared to be deeply interconnected with the organizational and professional cultures that surround the self-directed learning processes. They can contribute to frame the relevance and significance of the learning activities and to support learners' motivation and expectations or, in the opposite direction, to give/construct reasons to quit. Within the organizational context, managers are role models that could confirm (or disconfirm) the organizational value of the learning activities, the proper learning attitude and perceptions around the blog. This implies that in a new self-directed learning process the management sponsorship is relevant and the manager actual behaviors are even more critical because they symbolically interpret the organizational culture. In our case, the HR director supported the project that is said is very consistent with the innovative culture of the company, but in practice, the manager himself found motives to postpone his learning activities. Beside the management model, also the professional culture seems to play a relevant role into the sense-making process. The HR participants seem to put more effort in the every-day-activities and facing the line managers requests and consider the blog training experience subordinated to their operative goals. This justifies their quitting from the learning program and preserving their professional status, even if they were HR people that were supposed to be aware and interested about the learning and development activities. These final consideration confirms that the reconfiguration of the HR professional role would be the prerequisite for the mindset shift that is needed for HR to transform the digital revolution in a chance to overcome its traditional lack of power and attempt to face the lack of legitimacy that afflicts the function's professional status (Bissola & Imperatori, 2020; Guest & King, 2004).

Conclusion

As a general conclusion, with regard to the social media domain, it is important to highlight an imperative general advice for HR practitioners and managers who intend to design and implement a blog-based development process: to effectively manage a virtual training program it is crucial to manage the face-to-face interaction and the collective sensemaking process 'outside' the blog.

We wish that our research will serve as a prelude to the growing body of theory and research seeking to explain the emergence, the existence, and, especially, the need of organizational and managerial practices to improve the success and the sustainability of the integration between social media and HRM practices.

Finally, although different theoretical and managerial implications are outlined, the exploratory nature of the study imposes a cautious approach. Future research should be carried out involving a wider sample to provide evidence of validity of the discussed results. A broader variety also with reference to the organizational contexts will be useful to identify which organizational dimensions could impact more and influence on the adoption of social media to develop effective and highly appreciated people management solutions.

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