

## **New Zealand HR Employee Communication: Comparing 2000 and 2010 Empirical Results with Forecasts for 2020**

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*Businesses in New Zealand demands high quality and cost effective products and services to remain locally and internationally competitive. This process includes competent managers and human resource (HR) practitioners who communicate effectively with staff. Empirical research was conducted in 2000 and again in 2010 and forecasted for 2020 in order to compare HR practitioners' traditional with contemporary communication modes that include Facebook, Twitter and Blogging with staff. Results were obtained via a mailed questionnaire in 2000, which obtained a response of 10.1%. An electronic questionnaire was used in 2010 and the response was 15.4%. Recommendations are that HR staff could embrace HRIS' modern social media means to enhance organisational communication and promote the competitiveness of organisations and staff satisfaction.*

**Keywords:** HRM, employee engagement, job satisfaction, HRIS, retention, social media

### **1. Introduction**

The contemporary work environment has changed significantly due to the development and application of new technology and use of electronic commerce (Nelson et al. 2012). Electronic human resource management (e-HRM) is also increasingly replacing traditional HRM roles. Nowadays, e-HRM, such as human resource information systems (HRIS), has enabled HR practitioners to transform themselves and transit from transactional and administration roles to being a strategic partner of the organisation (Martin & Reddington 2010; Tkalac Verčič Verčič & Sriramesh 2012). Ulrich et al. (2012, p.191) also confirm the trend and claim that "Almost every company has a page in Facebook and LinkedIn. HR departments use Twitter messages to attract prospected talent. Companies use videos and blogs on social media platforms to communicate about their work culture and present new opportunities to the external world".

The study conducted by Abdullah & Antony (2012) pointed out that employees view internal communication as part of the organisation's HRM responsibilities. HR practitioners have become a middle person to obtain and disperse information regarding the HR strategy between management and employees. Hence selecting the appropriate channels of communication is becoming increasingly important.

In the globalised business world, electronic communication has rapidly become very popular and greatly preferred by employees (Ruck & Welch 2012; White Vanc & Stafford 2010; Welch 2012). Even though email is a greatly preferred method of

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internal communication (Welch 2012), the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM: 2012b) and Deloitte (2011) stated that there is an increasing trend of using social media for staff communication in the workplace.

Social media is defined by SHRM (2011a, Para. 1) as “web-based tools and technologies used to share information and turn communication into interactive dialogue with internal and external audiences through Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter”. HR practitioners play a significant role as facilitator and moderator using these media to “restore some of the personal touch that was lost in previous pushes for improved HR efficiency” (Deloitte 2012, p.20).

The magnitude of social media usage is highlighted by Bell (2012), who writes that 92% of United States of America companies used social media during 2012, in particular to source talent. LinkedIn is identified as a dominant method in the recruiting network. The use of Facebook and Twitter also increased significantly in the last two years and two-thirds of US companies indicated that it is being used for recruitment purposes as well. The general use of social media has increased, because HR managers also see the benefit of improving quality support in order to achieve organisation objectives and become more competitive. This is a noticeable move away from traditional administrative focused HR activities towards a more strategic approach.

## 2. Literature Review

Various theoretical aspects are presented in this section regarding HR’s internal and external communication activities. The literature that has developed over time indicates that there has been a gradual shift from modernity to postmodernity, which has become known as the “new media” (Lister et al. 2009). The usefulness of “new media” has gained its currency because of its useful inclusiveness, and its lack of emphasis on purely technical and formal definitions. New media could range from new textual experiences, e.g. computer games, to new ways of representing the world, e.g. interactive multi-media, new patterns of organisation, e.g. media culture and computer mediated communication (CMC) The focus of CMC could include e-mail, chat rooms, avatar based communication forums, voice image transmissions, the World Wide Web, blogs, social networking sites and mobile telephony. This means that using ultra postmodern means when communicating with employees is currently in existence and available for use.

For the purpose of this article, however, only the narrower aspects of new media that focus on CMC aspects and are available for use by HR in organisations are researched. It focuses, amongst others, on the means of communication with employees that are current elements of the HR toolkit available to HR practitioners.

The awareness and practice of this facet of new media by HR staff clearly shows their understanding of its impact on the organisations they serve and how it can enhance performance and goal achievement. The challenge for contemporary HR staff is to prove their worth by moving from being administrative in their approach to being strategic in their role in order to support top management’s goals in the communication context in the most effective way (Lister et al. 2009 & Ulrich et al. 2012).

## 2.1 HRIS and E-HR

Martin & Reddington (2010, p.1553) developed a model of e-HR that focuses on the “relationship between HR strategy, e-HR goals and architecture, and positive and negative of e-HR outcomes”. Their study also found that line managers believe that e-HR systems are off-loading HR duties like staff administration tasks to the managers, which subsequently increases their workload. Nelson et al. (2012, pp. 230-231) also claim that “new technologies are a double-edged sword that can be used to improve job performance or to create stress”, and that fast changing technologies can create techno-stress among line managers and employees. Nelson et al. (2012, p.231) went on to define techno-stress as “tension that is caused by the new and rapid technology changes that require workers to keep up-to-date with the latest information technologies”.

HR practitioners have to choose the proper message and channels to communicate and to promote the advantages of using e-HR. The main benefit of e-HR is the ability to transform available knowledge and technology into a more strategically oriented function which addresses the key success factors of an organisation in a timely manner for competitive advantage (Wilson 2010).

## 2.2 Internal Communication

Staff should be informed about an organisation’s current and future activities by building a shared understanding of the overall business strategies. Abdullah and Antony (2012) found that employees who are fully informed about the organisation’s goals are more satisfied in the workplace.

The researchers Welch (2012) and Laugesen (2012) found that the majority of the employees prefer to receive information about the organisation electronically rather than through traditional printed formats. These findings are supported by White, Vanc & Stafford (2010) who found that employees prefer electronic information over traditional printed documents. However, Welch’s (2012, p.252) also found that excessive and inappropriate internal communications could be “... a source of irritation to employees”, because top-down communication using electronic media could portray an image of organisational power. HR practitioners have to carefully select, execute and maintain electronic communication in order to produce a positive impact on the workers and, at the same time, encouraging employees to actively engage in social media that could be utilised as bottom-up communication tools. Marques (2010) also pointed out that employers should consider other circumstances such as demographics (age, ethnicity and social status) before selecting and evaluating the communication formats that are suitable for particular organisations.

Welch (2012) points out that the effectiveness of internal communication depends on the message and its format in terms of whether it is acceptable and useful to employees. HR practitioners also have to encourage and promote two-way communications in an organisation (top-down and bottom-up) so that the information relay is fair and effective, and employers can be in a position to utilise innovative ideas from employees to gain and maintain competitive advantage (Nel et al., 2012).

## 2.3 Social Media

According to Deloitte (2012, p.20) "... social media has become a standard business tool" rather than being merely IT, as it can be used to share information among internal stakeholders. It also serves to integrate social media with HR service delivery and could transform the role of HRM in the workplace. Unfortunately, most organisations are reluctant to allow employees to use social media in the workplace (SHRM 2011b; NZ Herald 2012). Only 20% of the respondents from the SHRM (2012b) survey utilise social media as internal communications channels and 40% have social media policies in-place (SHRM 2012a). Employees view the creation and enforcement of a social media policy as the responsibility of HR Practitioners (SHRM 2012b).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Background to the Collection of the Empirical Data

The main research question is: To what extent do Human Resource practitioners use the available means of communication to communicate with staff? The sub-question is determining the extent and use of contemporary social media in communicating with staff.

A very comprehensive questionnaire covering 358 items to identify HRM and management trends was jointly compiled in New Zealand (NZ) and Australia in 1994. It was used in a survey to identify the future competencies and roles of HR in those countries for the year 2000 and was used by the then Institute of Personnel Management, now known as the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand (IPMNZ 1994). That study formed the basis for subsequent research studies.

The questionnaire was edited and slightly modified and used in 2000 by Burchell (2001) in association with the (HRINZ) to determine a future perspective on human resources issues in 2000 and forecasted for 2010 in NZ. The minor modifications involved updating and reducing the questionnaire and refining the questions for clarity.

The questionnaire categories covered HR goals, roles and activities, as well as implications of changes in the business environment, and it finally identified practices for gaining competitive advantage. Respondents were also asked to rank the five most important elements regarding goals, roles and activities in the various categories which were contained in the questionnaire. The final section of the said questionnaire sought to obtain demographic information from respondents.

The questionnaire was distributed to all members of the HRINZ. A total of 1510 questionnaires were mailed from which 150 usable responses were received, which represents 10% of the sample. After the responses were verified, the survey results were written up. At the time the research was executed in 2000, advanced statistical analysis was not applied, and the compilation of the questionnaire was limited to the use of a variety of statistical analysis methods. Therefore, in the follow-up survey in 2010 various improvements to the previous questionnaire were introduced to enable

the application of different methods, as shown in the section outlining the repeat study.

### **3.2 Repeat Study Covering HR Practice in New Zealand in 2010 Forecasted for 2020**

The NZ study of 2000 was again used with minor modifications in 2010. It was clear from the previous studies' responses that the questionnaire was too detailed as it covered 358 questions, which in retrospect, discouraged participation. The fact that it was paper-based also reduced the previous response rate. For the 2010 repeat study, the questionnaire was shortened, but some sections were again expanded to include contemporary aspects such as social media in the HRIS section. The reporting format was also changed to an e-survey using Survey Monkey. A 5-point Likert scale was also used which ranged from 1 = "unimportant" to 5 = "critical to success". The Likert scale was not applied in the 2000 survey.

Due to the growing importance of social media and e-HRM, the 2010 survey was expanded to include some new questions on aspects such as the use of Facebook, Twitter and Blogging. This was in response to the importance of HR communication and e-HR, which was identified in 2000 and forecasted for the 2010 survey. However, at the time the 2000 survey was executed, social media phenomena such as Facebook and Twitter were non-existent so comparisons of these aspects with the 2000 results would have been impossible.

The target population was again limited to HRINZ members, but those who had registered to participate in HR research requests. The HRINZ provided links to the total number of HRINZ members in this category being 635. A total of 119 members responded, but only 98 questionnaires were fully completed and usable, resulting in a 15.4% response rate.

Furthermore, due to the different reporting formats used in the different surveys (from being merely listing and identifying priorities to a Likert Scale and an e-format for respondents) not all results are precisely comparable. However, trends previously identified are indicative of the present importance and context of the 2010 survey and forecasts for 2020 which are reported in this paper. It must be noted that due to the magnitude of the research projects and their longitudinal nature, only the results focusing on HR communication and e-HR are reported on in this article, which represents a very small section of the overall survey.

The similarity in the 2000 and 2010 surveyed profile of the respondents adds value to the results as shown in the various tables.

In the current study in NZ (2010), the most frequent title was HR Manager (46.7%), and the next most common title was HR non-management (16.7%). Those two titles accounted for 60.2% of the reported titles compared to 72.5% in 2000.

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**Table 1: Profile of Respondents by Profession in New Zealand in 2000 and 2010**

| Profession                           | NZ profile 2000 | NZ profile 2010 |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| HR (officer to director)             | 72.5%           | 60.2%           |
| Business (line managers to CEO)      | 10.1%           | 1.4%            |
| Consultants                          | 13.8%           | 24.7%           |
| Academic (all tertiary institutions) | 3.6%            | 9.6%            |
| Other                                | 0%              | 4.1%            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                         | <b>100%</b>     | <b>100%</b>     |

With regard to Table 1, it needs to be noted that a limitation regarding the two surveys of 2000 and 2010 could also be viewed as an advantage. As pointed out earlier in the methodology, the 2010 survey participants obtained from the HRINZ database only included members who were registered and who requested to participate in HR research from HRINZ. This perhaps explains the larger number of consultants in 2010 (up to 24.7% from 13.8%) and the lower number of CEOs (down from 10.1% to 1.4%). The overall positive implication is perhaps a higher quality and more focused response from participants in 2010, which also resulted in a higher overall response than that for the 2000 survey.

**Table 2: Profile of Respondents by Organisation Size in New Zealand in 2000 and 2010**

| Number of employees in organisation | NZ profile 2000 | NZ profile 2010 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Fewer than 10                       | 1.0%            | 12.5%           |
| 10 – 49                             | 3.9%            | 6.9%            |
| 50 – 99                             | 8.6%            | 4.2%            |
| 100 – 499                           | 40.4%           | 26.4%           |
| 500 or more                         | 46.1%           | 50%             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                        | <b>100%</b>     | <b>100%</b>     |

As shown in Table 2, most NZ organisations (83%) have fewer than 10 employees. In this study, the participants are from different sized organisations. The following groupings were compiled for analysis: small organisations with fewer than 10 employees and the various categories that are also compatible. It should be noted that NZ is predominantly a country of small businesses with 93.3% of enterprises employing 19 or fewer people ("SMEs in NZ: Structure and Dynamics" 2006).

It is shown in Table 3 that the results are comparable, and the 2000 results and forecasts for 2010 as well as the 2010 empirical results could be used for trends identification with confidence.

### 3.3 Results of the Survey

The results of the 2010 e-survey and forecasts for 2020 regarding HR communication with staff in relation to e-HR approaches are presented in Table 4.

The results of the e-survey were subject to verification for SPSS analysis purposes. The Likert Scale application (ranging from 1-Unimportant to 5- Critical to success) for the 2010 survey enabled the researchers to apply statistical analyses which were not

**Table 3: Profile of the Respondents by Industry Sector for 2000 and 2010**

| Sector   | NZ profile<br>2000 | NZ profile<br>2010 |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing         | 4.2%               | 4.3%               |
| Mining and quarrying                               | 1.4%               | 1.5%               |
| Manufacturing                                      | 5.5%               | 6.9%               |
| Electricity, gas and water                         | 9.6%               | 8.3%               |
| Wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels | 5.0%               | 6.2%               |
| Transport, storage and communication               | 3.3%               | 4.1%               |
| Business, insurance and financial services         | 13.7%              | 12.5%              |
| Community, social and personal service             | 11.0%              | 11.1%              |
| Education  | 20.7%              | 20.8%              |
| Other  | 25.6%              | 24.3%              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                       | <b>100%</b>        | <b>100%</b>        |

possible for the 2000 survey. Parametric and non-parametric tests were applied using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test as well. Significance levels at the  $p < 0.01$  were recorded. This level of statistical analysis was not possible in 2000 due to the design of the then questionnaire. The current approach was, however, vital for the 2010 comparisons with the 2020 forecasts in order to identify significant differences.

It must be noted that relevant results from the 2000 study and forecasts for the 2010 study are compared with the current results (that is, 2010 and forecasted for 2020).

## 4. Findings and Discussion

To communicate with staff, HR ought to operate a comprehensive HRIS. This would provide the backdrop to the various means of communication with staff across various functional areas. These aspects, as presented in the survey results, are

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**Table 4: HR Communication Approaches with Staff for 2010 and Forecasted for 2020**

| <b>Topic/Scale</b>   | <b>1 Unimportant</b>         | <b>2 Slightly important</b>  | <b>3 Important</b>           | <b>4 Very important</b>      | <b>5 Critical to success</b> |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| The organisation has a human resources information system    | 2010 – 9.7%<br>2020 – 1.4%   | 2010 – 18.1%<br>2020 -5.6%   | 2010 – 29.2%<br>2020 - 18.1% | 2010 – 33.3%<br>2020 - 38.9% | 2010 – 9.7%<br>2020 - 36.1%  |
| Internal organisational communication is by electronic means | 2010 – 4.2%<br>2020 – 2.8%   | 2010 – 20.8%<br>2020 – 11.1% | 2010 – 36.1%<br>2020 – 27.8% | 2010- 30.6%<br>2020 – 33.3%  | 2010 – 8.3%<br>2020 – 25.0%  |
| HR staff are knowledgeable about web based services          | 2010 – 8.3%<br>2020 – 1.4%   | 2010 - 25.0%<br>2020 – 5.6%  | 2010 – 45.8%<br>2020 – 37.5% | 2010 – 16.7%<br>2020 – 36.1% | 2010 – 4.2%<br>2020 – 19.4%  |
| HR use of Facebook to communicate with the staff             | 2010 – 66.7%<br>2020 – 34.7% | 2010 – 22.2%<br>2020 – 25.0% | 2010 – 9.7%<br>2020 – 19.4%  | 2010 – 1.4%<br>2020 – 15.3%  | 2010 – 0.0%<br>2020 – 5.6%   |
| HR use of Twitter to communicate with the staff              | 2010 – 77.8%<br>2020 – 45.8% | 2010 – 12.5%<br>2020 – 25.0% | 2010 – 9.7%<br>2020 – 12.5%  | 2010 – 0.0%<br>2020 – 12.5%  | 2010 – 0.0%<br>2020 – 4.2%   |
| HR use of blogging to communicate with the staff             | 2010 – 54.2%<br>2020 – 22.2% | 2010 – 27.8%<br>2020 – 23.6% | 2010 – 15.3%<br>2020 – 33.3% | 2010 – 2.8%<br>2020 – 13.9%  | 2010 – 0.0%<br>2020 – 6.9%   |
| HR use of LinkedIn to communicate with the staff             | 2010 – 58.3%<br>2020 – 20.8% | 2010 – 20.8%<br>2020 – 36.1% | 2010 - 19.4%<br>2020 – 20.8% | 2010 – 1.4%<br>2020 – 16.7%  | 2010 – 0.0%<br>2020 – 5.6%   |

discussed by topic in this section. Because of new developments such as “new media” and social media which were highlighted in the literature review, it is again referred to in the findings and discussions below.

Test results to determine significance differences between the 2010 and 2020 responses are presented in Table 5.



**Table 5: Paired Comparisons and Significance of Results**

| Pair number | Question   | Mean 2010 | Mean 2020 | Significance     |
|-------------|--|-----------|-----------|------------------|
| 1           | The organisation has a human resources information system    | 3.12      | 4.00      | .000*<br>/.000** |
| 4           | Internal organisational communication is by electronic means | 3.28      | 3.78      | .000*<br>/.000** |
| 13          | HR staff are knowledgeable about web based services          | 2.83      | 3.65      | .000*<br>/.000** |
| 16          | HR use of Facebook to communicate with the staff             | 1.48      | 2.40      | .000*<br>/.000** |
| 17          | HR use of Twitter to communicate with the staff              | 1.35      | 2.12      | .000*<br>/.000** |
| 18          | HR use of blogging to communicate with the staff             | 1.67      | 2.60      | .000*<br>/.000** |
| 19          | HR use of LinkedIn to communicate with the staff             | 1.68      | 2.62      | .000*<br>/.000** |

\*p<0.01 (Note: Scale used was: 1-Unimportant, 5- Critical to success)

\*\* Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

#### **4.1 The Organisation has a HRIS**

In 2010 a high degree of support existed for a HRIS system and 9.7% rated as critical. However, compared to 2020 there is much more support regarding it being critical to success since the response jumped to 36.1%, which was the highest response. This result is also significant at the p<0.01 level as shown in Table 5. It can be deduced that in future much more emphasises will be placed on HRIS.

According to Burchell & Beaver (2005: p.10), the 2000 survey with forecasts for 2010 rated HRIS as the 7<sup>th</sup> most important priority by HR staff in 2010, with a 32.2% response to the following question: What priority should the activity have in the year 2010?

#### **4.2 Internal Organisational Communication by Electronic Means**

The results for 2010 reveal that the importance is high, bearing in mind that 30.6% of respondents rated it as very important and 8.3% as critical to success. For 2020 the response is 33.3% for very important and 25% for critical to success. This trend is supported in the literature by Oiry (2009), who emphasises the growth of E-HRM processes. The result is significant at the p<0.01 level as shown in Table 5. It can be deduced that in future more extensive communication by electronic means will become even more critical for organisations to communicate effectively with staff.

In the 2000 survey it was already on the priority list. According to Burchell & Beaver (2005, p.10) the 2000 survey with forecasts for 2010 rated employer and employee internal communication as the 6<sup>th</sup> most important priority by HR staff for 2010, with a 37.2% rate of respondents in response to the following question: What priority should the activity have in the year 2010? It is even higher than the HRIS priority at that point in time.

A further question in the 2000 survey focused on whether respondents believed that there would be present and future benefits of HRIS to organisations regarding employer and employee communication. The results were that for 2000 only 12.5 % of respondents saw benefits, but it increased spectacularly to 61.9 % for 2010 (Burchell & Beaver, 2005, p.20). It is clear that over time employer and employee communication's importance increased dramatically and this supports the current trend that was originally identified by Burchell (2002).

### **4.3 HR Staff is Knowledgeable about Web Based Services**

In 2010 the level of knowledge of HR staff of web-based services was quite low in that 8.3% regarded it as unimportant and 25% as slightly important (a third of all respondents). This is in strong contrast to the forecast for 2020, where 1.4% rated it as unimportant and 5.6% as slightly important to success. There is consequently a large change in emphasis from 2010 to 2020 regarding HR being knowledgeable about websites.

The result is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level as shown in Table 5. The future value of web-based services has become undeniably important for HR staff as a crucial element of their function. Various web-based services are critical for the future and this is highlighted in the literature survey by various researchers (Nel et al. 2012; Oiry 2009).

Once again the forerunner to current aspects relating to websites and related aspects can be traced back to the 2000 study and the forecasts for the 2010 survey identified by Burchell & Beaver (2005, p.21). It was reported that nearly 85% of organisations had their own website in 2000, and that all the organisations were planning to have their own website by 2010. The HR departments were slower to set up their own websites in 2000 with only 27% already having their own sites, but the respondents anticipated a dramatic increase to 82% having their own website by 2010.

### **4.4 HR Use of Facebook to Communicate With the Staff**

The result for the new 2010 survey question concerning the use of Facebook is quite surprising for 2010 in that 88.9% of the HR respondents (unimportant and slightly important combined) allocated such a low usage to Facebook as a communication means with staff. Furthermore, the forecast for 2020 also has 59.7% of respondents as a low response (unimportant and slightly important combined) regarding communicating with staff.

The result is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level as shown in Table 5. It is deduced that although a low positive response rate was recorded, the significance over a 10 year period is huge and that organisations ought to pay much more attention to Facebook to communicate with staff. As generation Y and X increase in the workplace, this communication means might expand much more than is anticipated, which is emphasised by Deloitte (2011) as well as Nel et al. (2012) in the literature survey. The NZ Herald (2012) report also confirms that Facebook use in organisations is popular.

## **4.5 HR Use of Twitter to Communicate with the Staff**

The use of Twitter has only recently become a high use means of communication and it has increased phenomenally as evidenced by celebrities' followers and their communication via Twitter. The following of megastars in the entertainment world via Twitter communication has peaked in the millions in the last couple of years when newsworthy occurrences have been publicised involving celebrities.

It is surprising, therefore, that the use of Twitter in HR communication with staff is regarded as unimportant or slightly important by 90.3% of the respondents. The forecasted response for 2020 is also a surprising at 70.8% (unimportant or slightly important). However, the response difference between 2010 and 2020 is significant and needs to be investigated in more detail.

The result is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level as shown in Table 5. It can once again be deduced that this communication means should not be under-estimated, as Generation Y and X will play an ever increasing and significant role in organisations in the future.

## **4.6 HR Use of Blogging to Communicate with the Staff**

This result (as a new 2010 survey question) is also surprising in that for 2010, a total of 82.0% of the respondents regard Blogging as unimportant or slightly important. The result is also different from the forecast for 2020 45.8% (unimportant or slightly important combined), but is significant. The trend for the use of ultra-modern communication means by HR to communicate with employees is clearly not yet commonplace.

The result is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level as shown in Table 5. The significant level of the result indicates that more organisations will have to gear themselves to use Blogging as a means to communicate in future.

## **4.7 HR Use of LinkedIn to Communicate with the Staff**

LinkedIn as a means of communication (a new 2010 survey question) has become popular amongst particularly skilled employees at all employment levels across industries and professions. The results for 2010 are, however, surprisingly low for the suggestion that HR should use it as a means to communicate with staff - 79.1% (unimportant or slightly important combined) when compared to the forecast for 2020. This is still low, at 56.9% (unimportant or slightly important combined), but significant compared to 2010.

The result is significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level as shown in Table 5. This significance clearly indicates that this approach should be carefully taken note of for the future and although it is still far below being important, it should not be underestimated as a tool for HR to use in the future.

According to Bell (2012) LinkedIn has already become a dominant recruiting network, not only to external interested persons, but also existing staff. Furthermore, as indicated in the literature survey, more and more organisations' HR staff use

social media to communicate with staff and this trend will probably increase rapidly in future.

### **5. Implications of the Findings**

The results from this empirical longitudinal study show that social media are not yet considered as important channels of communication with staff by HR in New Zealand as it is in other countries. It is perhaps unwise to believe that social media may not become as popular as e-mail as an internal organisational communication tool in future in New Zealand as well.

HR staff has to fully utilise the skills and knowledge of web-based information to apply e- HRM, HRIS and social media as internal communications in the workplace in future. This must also be viewed in the light of employees' perceptions that open communication leads to staff satisfaction, and that bottom-up, top-down and horizontal communication enhances the relationship between workers and management (Abdullah & Antony 2012; Strack et al. 2008; Welch 2012).

Social media can also be used instantly to update staff with the latest information on organisations' current events, change of policies, achievements and any other issues related to their jobs, industry or competitors. Abdullah & Antony (2012) argued that timely dispersal of the information would make employees feel valued by the organisation, which would subsequently increase job satisfaction. Social media could, therefore, transform HRM roles in the organisation by being a facilitator as well as moderator of the information published in the social media channels (Deloitte 2012).

As a limitation on the findings it must be pointed out that some components of the current research survey cannot be compared with the previous survey results. This is because social media such as Twitter and Facebook were not in existence in 2000. However, because they have become critical HR tools in the management of human capital in recent years, they were included in the current survey. The future use of social media is, however, clearly on the rise, although it appears to be underestimated according to the New Zealand survey as it is less prominent than in other advanced countries in the world like the USA, UK and Germany.

### **6. Conclusion**

It is clear from the results that contemporary social media communication by HR staff has not gained as much popularity as expected. However, the differences between the 2000 and 2010 results compared to 2020 are significant and noteworthy. HR departments and functionaries regularly communicating with staff should therefore take note that a rapid change in the means of communication is taking place, as highlighted by various researchers (Strack et al. 2008; Nel Du Plessis & Josefino 2011). The means of social media has therefore become very important in the range of tools and methodologies HR could utilise to manage staff better in organisations, since it enables HR to provide a better service to top management to achieve their objectives of being more competitive in the business environment.

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Contemporary means of communication such as Facebook, Twitter and blogging could perhaps take centre stage in future to communicate with the ever younger and electronic au fait personnel in organisations, since the baby boomer generation are currently rapidly increasing their exit from organisations. Generation Y is familiar with this means of communication via the availability of personal electronic equipment such as iPhones and iPads, so using social media is becoming an ever more popular means of communication inside and outside organisations (Deloitte 2011). Furthermore, organisations need to audit the use of social media in terms of who is using which sites and for what purposes and also identify ways to coordinate and improve the organisation's social media footprint (Ulrich et al. 2012: p. 273).

The landscape of HR communication is, therefore, anticipated to change noticeably in the foreseeable future for employer and employee communication both internally and externally. This includes social media, as was shown in the results of this empirical research in New Zealand. Further research could focus on a particular industry as well as the age profile and occupational position of staff. In other words, it should reverse the research focus and obtain empirical data from staff regarding their preferred communication means with the HR department. Finally, it is very likely that even greater involvement in technology systems that enhance communication as well as social media usage will be the order of the day in future HR practice, which was identified by the longitudinal empirical research reported in this article. Is HR staff ready for social media's future use? This in particular, is perhaps the million dollar question for HR practitioners in New Zealand.

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