Think Twice Before You Twitter

With the choice of business communications broadening, are we spending enough time reflecting on the message instead of the medium?

By Naomi Bloom

Many of you know that I started my career as a programmer writing payroll applications in machine language to run in 4K memory. Over more years than most women would admit, I've focused my career on the application of information technology to HRM in order to achieve breakthroughs in business outcomes.

Not just on getting cheaper payroll operations or faster resume processing or even everyone's performance reviews done on time, I've worked at designing and automating total compensation plans that achieve more productivity for the dollars spent; collaborative and competency-centric staffing processes that achieve the fastest possible time to high performance of new and redeploying workers; and guided performance management processes that actually improve rather than just report on performance.

Over all these years, I've encouraged (some would say beaten on) HR executives to understand what technology could do for their business, to build the case for technology on the basis of improved business outcomes as well as direct cost savings, and to educate themselves and their staff on how to select and deploy (including via outsourcing) that technology to maximum effect.

I have also encouraged (and sometimes beaten on) my valued colleagues at the HRM software and outsourcing vendors to build better domain models, use the best available technology, and focus on the total cost of achieving HRM's business outcomes and the total cost of HRM service delivery rather than just on the total cost of technology ownership. And I've added my voice to that of many others in pushing for breakthroughs in the underlying technologies on which great HRM depends—from real-time, actionable analytics to standard HR-XML schemas to making application architectures systemically effective-dated and using Web 2.0 technologies appropriately.

We've truly made tremendous progress all around. Anyone who has checked out the latest releases from some of the best HRM software vendors will tell you that the user experience, degree of embedded intelligence, useful application of collaboration technologies and breadth of needed functionality are stunning when compared to what was available a release or two ago. It's even more impressive when compared to what is operational in most organizations today. And much of that newer functionality—because it's coming from vendors with truly multi-tenant SaaS architectures and business models—is available immediately to all clients (although available does not mean usefully implemented, but that's another story).

Add to this the explosion in personal communications, social networking, and productivity technology, much of which our employers are supporting for us in the interests of information sharing, workforce collaboration, faster cycle times, and the always-on workplace. There's really very little that we're missing from anyone's vision of HR technology nirvana. I review a dozen industry blogs and news services daily via direct feeds when something of interest to me triggers an alert. I'm accessible via wireless email when I don't even know where I am (we often travel pretty far off the grid). My extended family and friends know more about me than they should via Geni. And I guess I should be flattered that so many people want me to be their "friend" via Facebook or LinkedIn.

But amid all the advances and availability of technology and technology-enabled business communication and collaboration, I fear that something important may be lost. Are we still doing careful analysis and reflection when we're twittering away? Are we taking the time to think, then to craft eloquent discussions of how best to address our most important issues, let alone to contemplate what issues may be around the corner, and to propose solutions before those issues turn into problems? When is there time for HR, IT, or HRO professionals to execute against today's to-do list when we're all caught up in constant interruptions and information overload? And how many of us wish we had taken the time to think before we spoke, blogged, posted, twittered, text messaged, PowerPointed or otherwise left an electronic trail that would haunt us forever?

Do Web 2.0 mothers warn their children to think before they "speak" in a world that's always on, watching and remembering? I'm grateful that I've had my most embarrassing moments before they were captured by cell phone, twittered about in real time, and became a YouTube sensation. **HRO**

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