

IHRIM.link

A Publication of the International Association for Human Resource Information Management • www.ihrim.org

Be Prepared — These Questions Are Coming Your Way

BY NAOMI LEE BLOOM

The HRMDS consists of the processes and information, both manual and automated, needed to develop and deliver the policies, programs and other aspects of HRM. Typically these processes, both manual and automated, respond to HRM business events. They collect, record, process, store, calculate, analyze, manage, disseminate and communicate the data, information and knowledge used by and/or created by the conduct of HRM. With smarter systems and other process automation techniques, the HRMDS can also perform some of the very complex advisory and decision-making processes that are critical to the business of HRM. With innovative communications and human interface technologies (e.g., multimedia and Web-based training) it's possible to provide each member of the workforce with a highly personalized portal to the organization's overall as well as HRM knowledge, information resources and event handling. The HRMDS is implemented via combinations of automated and manual distributed processes and data, provided via outsourcing (traditional, BPO and ASP), service centers(s), centers of excellence, self-service, insourcing and (all too often) brute force.

INTRODUCTION

There was a time (circa 1980 — not very long ago in Naomi years) when there wasn't a dime's worth of difference among the automated components of the human resource management delivery systems (HRMDS) of large, complex organizations. As late as 1990, PeopleSoft won a lawsuit by demonstrating that the data elements and user interface similarities between their new client/server product and that of the plaintiff's older mainframe product could be explained by noting the similarities across many of the major core HRIS (to use the then current term) packages of that era. What were being sold throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s (with Tesseract providing a rare exception and even PeopleSoft's early release not venturing far afield) were payroll systems to which a growing body of HR functionality had been added. To provide the HR functionality not delivered by "payroll plus" products, there was a growing but still very bounded set of niche applications doing a little resume management, a little succession planning, some training administration, and so on.

Over the last 20 years, there have been two explosions in the variety and market coverage of automated HRMDS products and services. The first explosion corresponded to the low cost of entry presented by the standalone or networked PC (to include client/server architectures); the second explosion corresponded to the low cost of entry presented by the Internet.

In part, because of PeopleSoft's rapid growth in the early 1990s, the talk was all about the joys of client/server, shorter product development cycles, a more intuitive user interface, relational databases and the growing technology budgets of HR organizations. Less visible, but equally important, was the emergence of PC-based HR systems for every market segment and the rapid growth in the number of niche HR applications aimed at larger organiza-

tions. If you subscribed to any of the (hard copy, of course) HRMS software directories of this period, you saw them get thicker and thicker even as you wondered how all of these vendors could make money. You were right. They couldn't. Many PC-based HRM software vendors faded quickly from the scene.

One must multiply these phenomena by an order of magnitude to get the scale of new HRMDS product and service creation in the Internet era. With (perhaps, because of) HR's growing IT budgets and organizational clout amid the talent shortages and globalization of the 1990's, many startups funded by VCs (some of whom had more money than good sense) as well as more established firms focused their energy in the

With all the Internet creativity
and venture capital bringing us
more solutions than we can keep
track of, the twin challenges
of developing an HRMDS strategy
and then implementing it
have never been greater.

HRMDS market. As recently as January 2001, many entrepreneurs and their investors, not to mention their customers, thought that there was easy money to be made in the HRMDS market. A quick glance at the IHRIM (www.ihrim.org) 2000 Spring Conference Proceedings tells the tale, but you may also want to glance down the list of participating companies in the HR-XML Consortium (www.hr-xml.org) to get a sense of just how many vendor newcomers there have been to our industry over the last few years. As in the previous explosion of HRMDS vendors, many of these new firms won't last long enough to exhibit at IHRIM 2002.

And therein lies one of the most obvious challenges for the HR community — selecting vendor partners who will be among the survivors. All

of these software, consulting, ASP, BPO and outsourcing vendors are spending megabucks to:

- convey their messages;
- persuade the IT analysts of the dollar value of their self-defined market niches;
- make the case either for their integrated suites or best-of-breed components;
- create self-service and portal envy; and
- confirm your worst fears about the potential for litigation if you're not using their product or service.

Given this level of vendor activity, it's little wonder that what used to be manageable — vendor evaluations, HRMDS strategies, business case development, to name just a few of the activities for whose outcomes we're responsible — has become overwhelming. And the questions for which we'd better be prepared are likely to get more complex and confusing before they again become manageable.

The good news is that the list of questions is very similar across industries, organizational size, and geography and that the set of viable vendors is shrinking very quickly.

Last fall, I had participated in a corporate-funded research project¹ whose focus was on helping the members (primarily very senior HR professionals and executives from large and complex organizations) share experiences around a wide range of issues related to their use of information technology in the HR function. In reviewing the detailed surveys conducted and meeting with their members I was struck by two things:

- The magnitude of differences in the current state of HRM delivery systems across organizations and even in the quality and sophistication of components within the same HRMDS; and
- The equally pronounced similarities in the participants' views of the challenges they were facing.

This experience was repeated when I met last fall with two different

groups of the HRIT/HRMS leaders at large, complex organizations, and it has been reinforced by my own client experiences and those of colleagues who help organizations address their HRM delivery system issues.

If I extrapolate from these admittedly not scientific samples to get a sense of the current state of our HRMDS, at least those at the larger, more complex organizations, we cover the spectrum from bleeding edge to just plain bleeding, often within a single HRMDS. There are still Fortune 1000 HRMDS depending for their core on no longer supported (except, perhaps, for getting new tax tables) mainframe payroll systems which have a few personnel data elements added (remember COBOL filler fields?) to their employee master flat file records. But these very same organizations may well have some of the latest Web-based staffing or e-learning applications delivered by an ASP whose path to profitability is littered with questionable assumptions. And then there are the many organizations moving to the latest releases of global ERP solutions and wondering whether or not to subsume their niche applications with the ERP vendors' often less-functional alternatives.

With all the Internet creativity and venture capital bringing us more solutions than we can keep track of, the twin challenges of developing an HRMDS strategy and then implementing it have never been greater. Regardless of the current state of your HRMDS, regardless of how cost-effectively you are serving your customers and partners, and regardless of whether you've emphasized administrative efficiency or competitive advantage in the design of your HRMDS, there are a set of questions for which you had best be prepared. They are the questions I am asked, in one way or another, by every client and wherever HRIT folks gather. And they are the questions that your management will be asking you.

The purpose of this article is to help you prepare your answers to these questions before answering

them turns into a midnight fire drill. There are no obvious right answers, no one-size-fits-all, but there are definitely best practices in how you think about these questions and answer them for your own organization. Even when (or if?) the market resumes its bull run, the answers to these questions will matter.

WHEN THE CEO ASKS — "SHOULD WE OUTSOURCE THE WHOLE THING?"

HR (in organizations large and small) has been outsourcing specific HR processes for many years. We've been using payroll service bureaus to calculate and disburse payrolls, retained contingency search firms (or do you prefer headhunters and executive search?) to find new employees and develop sales strategies to bring them on board, compensation and benefits consultants to design total compensation strategies and individual plans and to administer them, training providers for training programs, very expensive consultancies for executive assessments and development (not to mention interventions), third-party EAP providers to support employees, fund managers to provide 401(k) plan options, etc. The list is very long of HR processes that have been and are routinely outsourced, and only rarely has the CEO shown much interest. Beyond a specific incident of executive search, compensation, development, and succession, senior management has been singularly uninterested in how we delivered these HR products and services except to emphasize cost-consciousness in their delivery. So why has HRM outsourcing become such a hot topic increasingly viewed as relevant fodder for executive conversations? Are we doing such a poor job that senior management thinks outsourcing can't produce worse results?

I believe that there are three main reasons for the increased attention being paid to outsourcing HR processes, and to the very new concept of outsourcing an integrated package of such processes to a single provider, who may in turn use best-

of-breed sources to deliver an integrated HRM BPO service. First, it takes more capital, not to mention annual expenses, than anyone was willing to say or, at least, any of us budgeted for to create and sustain a state-of-the-art HRMDS. It takes really big bucks to create and support self-service with embedded intelligence; portals through which news, transactions, communities, etc., interact; constant ERP upgrades; well-equipped call centers and centers of HR process excellence; and niche applications to deliver that functionality (e.g., Internet recruitment and sales commission accounting) not "yet" provided by the ERP vendors. Then it takes more money, and considerable program/ portfolio management expertise, not to mention a tribe of systems integrators to tie everything together and keep it running smoothly through new releases of every component and while figuring out how to support wireless, mobile customers, etc. The bar has been raised so high by what's possible that the possible has become the expected. And it's hard to compete for talent in a tight labor market if their first impression, often from your own Web site, confirms that you're a Luddite. We have Amazon.com, which can't seem to make any money but whose user interface and self-service capabilities are superb, to thank for many of these upward pressures.

The second reason for this increased attention to outsourcing is the difficulty of attracting and retaining the necessary human resources to do these things in-house. So much of the HRM and HRMDS talent has migrated to vendors and consultancies that it's difficult for end-user organizations to compete with these labor market competitors in terms of compensation packages, access to the latest thinking and technology, and a career path up to senior management which is rarely possible except in firms whose business is HR and the HRMDS. Without the very best program/portfolio managers, HRMDS

systems planners, business object modelers, package implementers, HRM process redesigners, call center representatives and managers, etc., there's just no way to create and sustain the very best HRMDS.

Increasingly, the push for outsourcing has as much to do with getting better service levels as it has to do with improving current expenses.

A third reason, which is less well-understood but which is definitely a factor in the integrated BPO movement, is that it takes specialized skills, years of experience, and a rigorous competitive intelligence program to evaluate and select all of the vendors needed for each type of outsourcing arrangement and then even more so to negotiate and manage those pesky service level agreements (SLAs). Rather than having dozens of such agreements, some of which are always in play due to renegotiation or dispute, some end-user organizations are seeking to combine these separate outsourcing arrangements into one, integrated BPO offering — with all of the attendant pluses and minuses of putting more eggs into one basket. An integrated BPO offering is an opportunity to access the very best providers and systems with only one major relationship to negotiate and manage, and they represent a natural extension of the ongoing move to integrated outsourcing of IT. However, the stakes are really high here for selecting the right BPO firm and creating an SLA with which you can live.

So how should you prepare for the inevitable questions here? At a minimum, you'll want to have the following information at your fingertips (or in a Powerpoint that's ready to go except for updating the time-dependent variables):

➤ What are we outsourcing now? HRM policy/program design? HRM program administration? Litigation support? Software development? Systems integration? Hosted delivery of software (ASP)? Individual HRM processes (BPO)? At what costs and proposed benefits? Have those benefits been realized and/or those costs

been exceeded or under-run (as if this ever happens)? And don't forget the costs to enter into and then manage those outsourcing relationships.

➤ What other services do our current providers offer that may be of interest? Have any of them expanded their services in areas where we use a separate provider?

➤ What services aren't we outsourcing currently that could be candidates for outsourcing? Why are they being done in-house now? What would need to change (in our thinking, our culture, our systems, etc.) for us to consider outsourcing these processes?

The secret to having
the right answer
to zinger questions is
to have anticipated them in time
to do business with this thinking
as input to your decision-making.

➤ What processes do we consider off-limits for outsourcing? Why? What would need to change (in our thinking, our culture, our systems, etc.) for us to consider outsourcing these processes?

➤ What are our true, fully-loaded costs for conducting the HRM business? What is the relationship between those costs and various metrics of headcount? Would more or less outsourcing affect those costs in a positive way without adversely affecting the quality, timeliness or other important measures of process outcomes?

➤ What are our decision criteria for when, how, to whom and with what SLAs we will outsource each type of HRM process? Who makes these decisions? Any pending opportunities? How do we decide on the scope of each relationship? Are we inclined toward one-off or more integrated arrangements? Why?

➤ How do we manage these relationships? What are the performance metrics? Any problems with these relationships? What problem resolution techniques are we using?

➤ What's the HRM process model against which we consider processes for outsourcing? Does it match the SLAs in place? What, if any, changes are we considering?

➤ What's our process for monitoring the financial and market health of our providers? Are we the first to know if there's a pending M&A? A change in their offering? New providers that we should consider? What's the cost of our competitive intelligence effort versus the cost of not doing it?

The secret to being able to answer "zinger" questions is to anticipate them and have your facts in order. The secret to having the right answer to zinger questions is to have anticipated them in time to do business with this thinking as input to your decision-making. Every good consultant brings their list of zinger questions to each engagement so that the end user doesn't have to start from scratch, but there are always new questions that emerge. For example, with so many ASPs hosted in the San Francisco Bay Area, where would you be if a really major earthquake were to hit (and what about those "rolling blackouts")? Do you know the backup/recovery/ disaster plans not only of your ASP but also of their hosting site? Now that you've got the idea, let's tackle the next question.

WHEN THE CFO ASKS — "WHAT'S THE COST JUST TO GET ON THE NEW RELEASE?"

Even if your ongoing HRMDS budget is generous and did allow for new release upgrades, little did you suspect when you wrote it that some new releases would involve entirely new software, require undoing past customizations (didn't we advise you against doing those?), go more smoothly if you finally clean up your job codes, etc. Nor did you suspect that the add-on self-service package you bought and implemented because your core vendor still wasn't there would now be owned by a new company with an agenda far beyond self-service affecting its release schedule and interfaces not yet ready for your core vendor's latest release which, by

the way, now includes very similar self-service functionality. And what about the hot staffing application you bought from a vendor which didn't get their seventh round of funding, or the leadership development database you've built that can't scale and really should be subsumed by your now global implementation of your core vendor's current release? The list goes on, and it's daunting. Is it any wonder when the CFO hears what it's really going to cost to sustain your HRMDS, that information will quickly turn into the CEO question with which we started?

I guess we'd better get our hands around the real cost of creating and sustaining the HRMDS that's needed by your organization. So let's get out our spreadsheet software, internal financial "reports" and PowerPoint and turn our attention to the following preparations:

- What did we budget for the ongoing implementation costs to upgrade to each new release of each of our HRM software packages and/or outsourcing relationships? Is our budget adequate? What didn't we consider that we should have? Retraining our IT staff in an entirely new product? Travel to distant lands for that retraining? Bailing out a failing vendor to buy time to replace their product entirely? Converting unexpectedly to a new vendor when the old one decides to drop that line of business or goes out of business entirely? What about the very real costs of improving our coding structures to take advantage of product features that we need? For example, the software may support matrix organizations, but only if we can define and maintain our matrices.
- What investments have we made that, in retrospect, should have been expensed rather than capitalized? Capitalized rather than expensed? I don't pretend to know all of the accounting ins and outs, but when there's a new release that's going to require almost as much effort to implement as the original software we licensed, perhaps it's time to

rethink how we determine what goes in what bucket.

- Are all parts of the HRMDS worth upgrading or is now the time to reconsider our overall HRMDS strategy? Each major investment presents an opportunity to decide if that investment is the best use of organizational resources. Is now the time to consider further outsourcing? Is now the time to consider bringing an outsourced process in-house (perhaps because our core software vendor now offers this functionality within their core product)? Is now the time to fold lots of separate niche product implementations and our own custom add-ons into the core? To extend the use of a niche application because our core vendor just isn't moving fast enough in this area? Without an overall systems strategy, each individual decision can look very reasonable but look less so when put into the overall HRMDS context.

- How do these costs change with ASP or BPO? What could be gained, whether in the use of capital or ongoing expenses, by getting out of some further portions of our HRMDS support responsibilities? What would we lose? And see how closely linked this is to the questions above — doing one piece of research here can satisfy two O-level executives.

- Did we budget for the periodic, but very real, costs of regression testing when any piece of the delivery system changes? For correcting system integration problems? For redoing interfaces when one side of the interface changes its data structures?²

- Did we budget for the periodic cost of cleaning up our coding structures? Of creating more robust coding structures and process redesigns to support new businesses, globalization, other sources of change, etc.? Do we really want to divide the world into the U.S. and the rest or do we need more granular ways of expressing geography? One of the most costly undertakings of any implementation, whether upgrade or redo, is to design the data in such a way as to support current and future business needs.

Well, that was hard, but the results are worth their weight in gold when O-level executives come calling. And these preparations have definitely given us fuel for our discussions with the vendors about why they should give us some real help with that upgrade. But, let me ask just one more question about those upgrades, new products/services, and emerging solutions before we leave this topic entirely.

WHEN THE CIO ASKS — "HOW SOON WILL YOUR HRM SOFTWARE/SERVICE/ASP/BPO VENDOR COMPLY WITH ALL OF OUR CHANGING STANDARDS?"

This is not one of my personal favorites. My technologist's credentials have long since expired (if they were ever really current and had any depth), and there have been and continue to be no end of religious wars around IT standards. Whether we're talking about hardware platforms, DBMS software, operating systems (can you name all the UNIX variants?), and/or Java or XML flavors, there are subtle distinctions just looking to cause trouble. And that doesn't even begin to include middleware, which lurks between and among application components waiting to wreak havoc.

Not that shop standards aren't important, but they do seem unnecessarily difficult to pin down when it would be easy to comply (e.g., when sending out an RFI in which we could stipulate the absolute technology requirements), flexible only until we've publicized our selection of a vendor who deviates, and provable with vendors only after speaking with the real CTO. So I always recommend getting started as quickly as possible with the research here and then plan on very frequent updates as your own organization works feverishly to keep up.

And one more point on technology standards. The very first step is to identify the technology topics for which standards exist or are being defined. It much more difficult to discover later that you've left out an

entire topic, e.g., PDAs (for access to e-mail, Web-based self-service applications, etc.) than to keep up-to-date with the evolving standards for a given topic.

➤ With what standards must our HRM software, service providers, ASP or BPO comply? Why? At what cost? Who decides if compliance is achieved/promised/delivered? What support will IT provide to help ensure that we understand what the vendor is offering in this regard? With respect to outsourced processes, be sure to note whether or not bringing that capability in-house would be possible from an IT standards perspective should you ever wish to do so. For example, if your entire organization has standardized on one of the major ERP software packages to be run in-house for financials, order processing, etc., and you decide to use an ASP-delivered HRMS based on software from a different vendor, what are the implications if ASP delivery just doesn't work for you?

➤ For which of these standards are differences allowed? Encouraged? Tolerated? Why? Why not? Be sure to gather specific examples of allowed

deviations within your own firm under the current CIO, etc. And be sure to effective date everything on this topic since the rules will change while you're working with them. Which brings up another great question. How long do you have after standards change to bring the HRMDS into compliance and/or is grandfathering allowed?

➤ Why is our company's standard QQR507 when all the vendors we are seeing advocate QQR509?³ What additional cost, loss of functionality, PR risk, modification and/or custom code requirements, etc. are we willing to accept for the HRMDS in order to comply with our shop standard? This is particularly tricky because someone in the IT organization has given birth to the current standard, however non-standard it may appear when compared to the HRMDS marketplace.

➤ Won't XML (or you name the panacea for systems integration) solve all these problems? Be prepared to discuss the work of the HR-XML Consortium, and to take advantage of it. But it will be a snowball's day in a very hot place before SQLserver and

Oracle DBMSs get cozy, or before all browser-based applications have a really consistent look and feel at the application (as opposed to the screen structure) level. And don't even consider trying to make the case for running in-house one major vendor's payroll and another major vendor's HR software. Yes, I know that several companies are doing this, but even they know it's not sensible. While it's possible (with enough tools and/or brute force) to move data between any two systems, that doesn't mean that those two systems organize data in the same way or impart the same semantics to very similar-sounding data. What is the real meaning in your organization of hire date?

WHEN THE HR EXEC ASKS — "WHY CAN'T OUR HRMDS BE LIKE CISCO'S?"

No matter how much you've accomplished with your HRMDS budget, how well your HRMDS supports your organization, or how effectively you've pursued the real HRIT priorities of your organization, sooner or later your HR executive will come back from seeing a demo or hearing a pitch and wonder aloud why your

WHEN MANAGERS ASK — "WHY AM I DOING YOUR DATA ENTRY?"

- Why doesn't the system provide the competency models against which I should be guiding my staff?
- Why doesn't the system provide the e-learning tools to enhance time to productivity and ongoing development?
- Where are the behavioral questions for my next candidate interview and the guidance for what not to ask by context?
- Why doesn't the system notify me of pending actions?
- Where are the organizational design templates? The adverse action roadmap? All of the other personalized content and advice that I need?

Start looking for the answers to these and the next question by looking beyond administrative self-service, which too often looks like data entry to the people serving themselves. By adding personalized content, advisory capabilities, and electronic performance support mechanisms, you give the self-server a reason to do the data entry.

WHEN EMPLOYEES ASK — "WHY DOESN'T IT WORK LIKE AMAZON.COM?"

- Why doesn't it tell me that my new address is outside my HMO's coverage area? Which HMO in my new location has the special pediatric services we need?

- Why doesn't it tell me what my state withholding taxes will be at my new address? Provide the necessary "forms" to up my withholding? Explain taxing reciprocity?
- Why doesn't it suggest the courses I should take given my interest in a particular job? Notify me when such a job is open?
- Why doesn't it provide formal assessment tools so that I'll know what my competencies are?

THE BUCK STOPS HERE — "HOW DO I RECRUIT AND RETAIN COMPETENT HRIT PROFESSIONALS?"

- How do we know what we're looking for if this isn't our own core competency?
 - If we can find great people, how can we close the deal?
 - If we can find great people and close the deal, how will we keep their interest? Keep their enthusiasm?
 - Will great HRIT people do what's in our company's best interests even if it's career death for them?
 - How do we provide a career path for our great HRIT people?
- In the answers to these questions lies the root of the very first question about outsourcing. Increasingly, it takes a critical mass of expertise beyond that which many end-user organizations can recruit and retain, to create and support a state-of-the-art HRMDS.

corporate portal, employee self-service, applicant management, e-learning, etc. aren't in the same league as the comparable capabilities of the leaders in that area. Before you get defensive ("Didn't I ask for budget for that just last month?") or embarrassed ("Well, it's harder for our company to attract bright young IT people than it is for Cisco."), pull out your answers to these questions:

► In what areas do we need to be like (name the thought/practice leader)? In employment brand? As a showcase for what bandwidth can do? In the direct ROI for HRIT investments? In outsourcing our HR operations? To support very rapid growth in size, complexity of businesses, acquisitions, globalization, HRM practices? To minimize our costs while we scale back operations?

► Do we have an appropriate information technology infrastructure on which to emulate the HRMDS capabilities of the (name the thought/practice leader)? Can we afford such an infrastructure? Do we need such an infrastructure? Do we know how to build and sustain it? Can we outsource to get it? If we had such an infrastructure, what would be the real benefit to our organization — and that had better be well beyond the value of any HRMDS, however terrific.

► In what shape is our current HRM delivery system? Have we made good choices in the past upon which to build or do we need a substantial overhaul? Should we do the overhaul first or do the glitzy, highly visible stuff? Are our coding structures and historical data ready for self-service exposure? Please note that if you're presiding over a series of historical accidents or even misjudgments, you may want to put some extra energy into the outsourcing questions at the beginning of this paper.

► Are our managers and employees as wired and computer literate as those of the (name the thought/practice leader)? Should they be? What would it take to get them there and what would we gain by doing so?

Buying everyone a computer and online service may be a great idea for improving technical literacy, but will they accept your limited self-service after they've seen the best that the Web offers?

► What's the real price (including the opportunity cost) of our current situation? What's the ROI of achieving improved metrics? Would we really gain in revenue or profitability by having a showcase HRMDS? For specific components? Which ones?

What? You don't have answers ready to all of these questions? I'm not surprised. Rarely do we have the time or inclination to step back and do some overall HRMDS planning, let alone do that planning from a base of objective data about our current situation and the possibilities that the marketplace offers. But without an HRMDS strategy and overall systems plan, we run the risk — and it's a very big risk — of making a whole series of seemingly reasonable decisions only to discover just how unreasonable and even foolish they appear when looked at in the aggregate. For example, when we decide to outsource a process for all the right reasons and get reasonable results but then fail to monitor the health of that vendor (or of the entire sector), we may find ourselves (like many of Healthcon's former Benefits Central customers) with a vendor who will no longer offer the service and not enough time to evaluate, select and implement another.

As a consultant, my clients expect me to know the questions and offer guidance on how to develop the answers from within for their organization. They also expect me to help them avoid making bad decisions. Over the years, I've built up quite a library of questions, far more than we could address here. The sidebar offers a few more at the systems planning level of detail.

Developing your own list of important HRMDS questions and preparing answers before they're asked not only prepares you to face the boss; it helps

you begin HRMDS systems planning, the first step to improving those answers. So let's get started!

ENDNOTES

1 This research project was part of The HR Concours, a program of The Concours Group. More information on the HRI project can be found on their Web site at www.concoursgroup.com.

2 Re: Interfaces; you shouldn't be doing HRM software or services business with anyone who isn't an active (i.e. not merely a paying) member of the HR-XML Consortium (www.hr-xml.org). This is the primary organization working to develop XML data exchange vocabularies for the HRM industry. And just as important, find out if/when/how your vendors intend to implement the Consortium's emerging standards. At some point, you won't have to worry about writing most third-party interfaces because the vendors will provide (perhaps at some additional cost) mappings to and from the standards for their packages/services.

3 Yes, I know that there is no such standard as QQR507 (or at least I don't think so). Rather than risk life and limb here, I made up a standard. No matter what I would have cited as an example, I would have offended someone, shown my ignorance, betrayed something I know under NDA, etc. If the name I've selected for my completely fictitious standard is in actual use, let me say here and now that any relationship between the fiction and reality are purely coincidental.

About the Author

Naomi Lee Bloom (naomibloom@mindspring.com) managing partner, Bloom & Wallace, is a renowned consultant in the HRM delivery system industry. She works as a change agent and process coach for major corporations, including Cisco, The Limited, General Mills, International Paper and Hewlett-



Packard, using information technology to achieve breakthroughs in their HRM business. She also works as a consultant on product direction and positioning for many of the vendors in this industry, including Oracle, SAP, PeopleSoft, Authoria, Exult, and Great Plains Software (a Microsoft company) and for their investment partners. She has been a consultant to the HR-XML

Consortium, using her HRM Business Model "Starter Kit," which has been licensed by many HRM software and services vendors, as input to their HRM data exchange standards projects. A frequent author and speaker, she wrote *Human Resource Management and Information Technology: Achieving a Strategic Partnership*. Prior to founding Bloom & Wallace in 1987, Ms. Bloom, who

holds an MBA from Boston University, was a senior principal with American Management Systems. In 1995, her contributions to the industry were recognized by IHRIM's Summit Award.

COMMENTS?

Send an e-mail to the editor
(tomf@rector-duncan.com)
or fax 1.512.451.9556.