

It's The Technology, Stupid!

There's no panacea out there for failing scenario-test pitched solutions. Remain vigilant about whether the considered technology can deliver what it promises.

By Naomi Bloom

Unlike so many of my peers, I'm not afraid of growing old, but I am very afraid of growing stupid. We are all susceptible to the disease of stupidity, and as yet there is no vaccine—although the Gates Foundation may be working on this. Fortunately, the symptoms are easy to recognize:

- A willingness to believe what we're told by folks who are trying to sell us something;
- A willingness to forget everything we have ever learned from personal and tribal experience about buying that something; and
- A willingness to believe that weight loss is possible without curbing intake or increasing exercise.

Stupidity, which can spread quickly throughout any team, can be prevented with hard facts, hard work, and plenty of skepticism, and that's the focus of my next few columns.

In politics, stupidity is a likely diagnosis if you don't worry about politics, don't research the issues, and don't make the effort to vote. After all:

- The candidates are all spinning anyway, and won't they be pretty much the same once they're in office?
- If I'm not pleased with whoever is elected, can't I just throw the bum out in a few years?
- My vote doesn't count anyway, and isn't it likely to be offset by some doofus who's voting on the basis of what his boss/church/neighbor/talk show screamer insists is right?

Similarly, in HR technology (and HRO provider) evaluation and selection, stupidity is a likely diagnosis if you don't worry about your HR technology, don't research the issues, and don't make the effort to scenario test your options. After all:

- The vendors are all spinning anyway, and couldn't I engage HRO so that I can forget about the technology?
- If I'm not pleased with the provider's service, can't I just throw the bum out in a few years?
- My opinion doesn't count anyway, and it's likely to be offset by my CIO's/CFO's/CEO's decision to proceed with BPO X regardless of what I think?

In the absence of a vaccine and in recognition that eternal vigilance is our best defense against contagion, we need to understand the critical role that applications software plays in HRM and the HRM delivery system, regardless of the BPO wrapper around that software.

By adopting an attitude of "trust but verify" when dealing with those who want to sell us something, we can use scripted scenario testing (including my Killer Scenarios script) to verify what the providers are saying and to demonstrate what we need and are expecting. If you don't see something that's important to you demoed in scenario testing, perhaps it can't be done in production.

With scripted scenarios, both what you send in advance to the providers and what you plan as "on the spot" follow-up questions are only used with your short-listed vendors. They should focus on your most important, differentiating capabilities and not on the basics. Scripted scenarios developed for BPO provider evaluation become the core of your much-more exhaustive acceptance and migration test cases. Reuse is designed into effective scenarios. If you don't know what scenarios to use, perhaps you need to spend more time determining what capabilities in the BPO relationship that you're evaluating will get you closest to achieving needed business outcomes and are essential to your organization's future.

Vendors take more seriously those prospects that have a business outcomes-based approach to evaluating their service delivery model, and they have been known to

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giggle behind closed doors at the exhaustive (and oddly similar) RFPs prepared from consultant boilerplates (and to which their answers are yes, yes, and yes).

Courtesy of *HRO Today*, my next few columns will present selections from my Killer Scenarios, the 2007 edition. These are the scenarios that focus on the most important, systemic behaviors of effective HRM applications software and on illuminating the good, the bad, and the ugly as quickly and clearly as possible. 



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