

Scenes from an HRO Marriage

THIS CONCLUSION TO A TWO-PART SERIES ON FIT CONSIDERS BUYER AND PROVIDER ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK. BY NAOMI LEE BLOOM

Last month, I began a two-part column focusing on ensuring that the assumptions about work and workers that are embedded in a service provider's software platform are a good match for those upon which your organization's business operates. Since same or similar assumptions lead to a reasonable fit, and truly different assumptions lead both you and a provider into trouble, it's important to include in your evaluation of outsourcing providers sufficient, well-selected software evaluation scenarios to illuminate any differences in these assumptions. Last month's column focused on workers and their working arrangements; now we move on to innovations in the organization of work. For example, do you:

- Have retail or other standalone operations (think chain restaurants, branch banking, chain hotels/motels, copy centers or gasoline stations or dry-cleaning shops) that depend on having many part-time positions to meet the flow of work at each work location? With work locations that are near enough to one another to be within easy commuting distance? With a target workforce that would prefer to have full-time pay and benefits even if it means taking two part-time positions, which could be at different work locations, even crossing business units and/or income taxing jurisdictions? With each such part-time position having its own performance evaluation, payroll cycle, work rules, and attendance standards?

- Conduct business via matrices that allow you to organize simultaneously by country/geography, product line, customer/customer industry, and/or distribution channels? Are employees organized within these matrices with a primary position that has adjunct responsibilities or with a series of assignments within the broader context of a position? Do you account for fully loaded labor costs across the various dimensions of these organizational matrices?

- Make use of those ancillary work roles to which we're all assigned today but that don't affect how we're paid or how our labor costs are accounted for but which do require access to particular HRM delivery system capabilities (examples include committee members who need access to committee distribution lists and member contact information; floor safety coordinators who need access to health and safety information on specific individuals as well to the details of who is working where at a particular time; and members of cross-functional teams who need training related to the project as well as tools for monitoring project resources and progress)?

FLEXIBILITY AND CONCURRENCY

Just as with the many variations on the kinds of workers and working arrangements needed to support today's organizational needs for flexibility, agility, and accommodation of worker preferences, there is also an increasing need for organizational design flexibility and concurrency (i.e., one individual playing multiple concurrent work roles within the organization and one or more concurrent relationship roles with respect to the organization as a whole).

Unless you're a strict command-and-control organization composed solely of full-time, ongoing positions, each of which is filled by one and only one full-time, ongoing employee (and here I do mean employee in the legal sense of that term), make sure that your outsourcing provider of choice can recognize, deal with, report on, payroll, and manage (in terms of the day-to-day work) all of the quite common variations described here—and cope with changes to these variations that occur during a payroll period as well as retrospectively, retroactively, and prospectively. Sounds like more scenarios for your evaluation of competing outsourcing software platforms. 



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Make sure your outsourcing provider can deal with all the variations described here—and cope with changes.

- Organize your work in teams, which may have multiple reporting lines, including “dotted” lines, rather than in strict hierarchical sections, departments, and divisions? Are your teams led by an official manager or are they more or less self-directed? Do teams come into being around projects or are they ongoing and organized around customers, transaction types, sales regions, etc.? Are there team-related work schedules, work rules, incentive compensation plans, and work environment programs?