

You're Changing What?

Once you go self service, you'll never go back. But beware: changing providers or designs may lead to long-term improvements but short-term frustration. **By Naomi Bloom**



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Before we had self service, we were shielded from the idiosyncrasies (never call them errors, omissions, or data design failures!) of our organization's many business rules, data codes, and HRM software by hardworking people in HR, payroll, benefits administration, and the like. Never mind that employee status codes were a muddle of work schedule, duration of employment, eligibility for various benefits, and our priority for Lotto. Never mind that we gave fake social security numbers to non-U.S. workers so that our HRM software could keep track of their training. Never mind that we had to enter each employee's address into three or four systems with different address formats. Although we had to fill out forty different forms with clearly different designers, all of which required expert administrative folks to decipher or fill out for us, these idiosyncrasies rarely saw the light of day. So why clean up fifty years of bad data design?

Self service changes all of that. Now we're on our own to conduct the business of HRM, and those nice people in HR, payroll, and benefits are no longer available to fill out the forms for us. So that self-service user interface better be pretty good, or we're going to have a rash of errors, some of which won't surface until the worst possible moment.

Can you imagine being in the emergency room with a sick child only to be told that you should have changed HMOs when you moved across the state line? Can you imagine being a manager who learns that her

But assuming that the self-service user interface is well designed, intelligent, role-based, and all other good things, I am going to love the freedom, level of service, and efficiency that it brings—as soon as I've mastered it. Yes, I know that well-designed user interfaces should be self teaching with no formal instruction required. But that doesn't mean that we're immediately at peak productivity as soon as they are implemented. It takes time to master the intricacies of a user interface that's really working for us. But once we've invested the time to do that, woe be unto the people who create a discontinuity in that self service! Most people can adjust to new features that are a natural extension of what's already there and reuse what they've already learned about how the self-service user interface works. But get ready for a massive loss of productivity, not to mention frustration and anger, if you roll out something entirely new.

So when you sign up with an HRM BPO provider, especially a comprehensive HRM BPO provider, be aware that it is going to hit your whole organization's productivity hard as everyone learns the new self-service protocols. If you've never had more than rudimentary self service, that's a small price to pay for potentially much more useful self service. If you've had terrific self service and are carrying that with you to a provider who runs whatever you have (although it's hard to understand how such a provider can achieve the profit margins needed to survive long term), there's no immediate disruption. However, most HRM BPO providers use their own self service (whether licensed or custom developed), and your organization will get used to it with time. And then, should you ever consider moving to another provider (if, for example, you're not satisfied with the first one or, worse, if the first one isn't successful enough to remain independent), you will probably have to move your entire user population to another, quite different self-service user interface.

And you thought that all you needed to learn was the browser! The truth is that every self-service design is quite different—as different as the personalities of the design teams. And once you're up the learning curve on one such design, a change is very disruptive. And a change in self-service providers will always mean a change in self-service designs. Think Amazon.com to BarnesandNoble.com. **HRO**

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carefully apportioned performance bonuses have been given to those who missed, rather than made, their objectives because she misunderstood the screen design? I won't even touch on the productivity lost while self-service users come up to speed on new features or the frustration and bad feeling created from less-than-effective user interfaces.