One If by Land, Two If by Sea!

Is your global HRM delivery system accessible by plane, train, or automobile?
By Naomi Bloom

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As an HRM delivery system (HRMDS) visionary (which is very close to being a hallucinary) and a strong proponent of cost-effective HRMDS, you might think that I would insist that all interactions with the HRMDS be done via intelligent, role-based, Web-native self-service. That is definitely not the case.

In the first place, high touch may be needed because of the nature of the interaction. In the second place, other methods are needed because Web-native self-service can not yet reach everyone. For both reasons, your provider's HRMDS must be able to cope with a multitude of contact methods. Providing a well thought out and integrated approach to contact management is one of the ways in which HRM outsourcing providers can distinguish themselves.

There are times when even the best of Web-based self-service (and most of what we see in HRM pales by comparison with the richness of the Amazon.com user experience) isn't sufficient to address my issues. Perhaps I want to send in a letter from my doctor that explains why I need special accommodation in my work arrangements. Or I may need to include samples of my work products, perhaps a geologist's sample rocks, in my application for employment.

And there are times, ideally as an option from within self-service, that I want to speak via phone or in person (where the "in person" could be seen via a special teleconference window in my self-service screen) with an actual HRM professional, preferably a very knowledgeable one. I, for one, do not intend to discuss sexual harassment with a computer nor argue with it about the disallowance of my claim for a particular medicine. But regardless of the contact method, the HRMDS must be able to bring together all of the relevant information around the person, application, environmental incident, open position, or whatever object is the focus of that information without losing either the information or its context.

Even when the nature of the interaction cries out for self-service, for all but the smallest and simplest organizations in highly developed economies, there are many people who just can't be reached yet by this technology. Even in highly developed economies, those members of the workforce (in addition to employees, this includes non-employee workers, external position seekers, and total compensation plan designees) whose work, work schedules, and work sites make them very difficult to reach with Web-based self-service require other contact methods. In addition, there are the challenges faced by those global organizations for which global doesn't just mean Canada, Europe, and highly developed parts of Asia. It's very hard to deliver Web-based self-service in places where reliable electricity and next morning package delivery are open questions.

For all of these reasons, HRMDS interactions will continue to require a mix of contact methods, including Web-based self-service, interactive voice response, land line and cellular phone calls, teleconference, click to speak, virtual and actual meetings, and paper via fax, Fedex, and snail mail. I haven't added pony express, smoke signals, or jungle drums, but those of you whose organizations create infrastructures, extract natural resources, or help improve living conditions in the developing world can empathize.

Managing global HRMDS contact methods is complicated enough when we're building our own HRMDS and when we can leverage our own organization's many methods of moving information, from periodic use of satellite phones to piggy-backing on the weekly courier runs. When you outsource all or portions of your HRMDS, your provider selection process must determine to what extent a prospective provider can really integrate, track, and control all of the contact methods that you need with adequate security, privacy, and back-up measures. Will you be able to find who has what when the "what" isn't electronic? Will everything that can be made electronic be made so? And how will you track those in-person interactions when the person is an HR generalist whose interaction with you must be conducted against a background of related information and previous interactions? A well designed HRMDS (and why would we outsource to anyone who doesn't have one?) should be able to track all interactions, regardless of contact method, so that none are lost or left unresolved. HRO