Leader-Driven IT

Your talent managment software is only as good as those who head up its implementation.

By Naomi Bloom

It's been seven years since I wrote my first Tech In Bloom column. That's seven years of adding my thoughts to the broader discussion of what, why, and how we achieve breakthroughs in organizational business outcomes via world-class human resource management (HRM) made operational through highly automated, cost-effective, and agile HRM delivery systems.

I've always believed, long before it was politically correct or even rationally considered, that the only source of sustainable organizational advantage was outstanding workforce performance. Capable, engaged, and effective workers, who understand, are focused on, and execute very well the work that drives organizational results, make all the difference between organizational success and failure. And I've been convinced since the beginning of my career, when I was writing my first Autocoder commission accounting programs (a.k.a. payroll for John Hancock's life insurance agents), that information technology was the power tool needed to enhance every aspect of human resource management (HRM), especially service delivery.

What was more promise than possible at the start of my career is very possible now. Smart software—chock full of embedded intelligence, content, actionable analytics, and similar capabilities, deployed in a socially active manner across the workforce and their professionally unleashed social networks—really can make the difference between pedestrian and world class human resource management *if* it's in the hands of world-class HR leaders. Great IT-enabled HRM can make the difference between an organization's achieving breakthroughs in strategic organizational outcomes and landing on the trash heap of failed enterprises. And this recession has only reinforced this point.

But effective HRM made operational through a great HRM delivery system (that's where IT comes in) is only possible, only practical, if we apply everything we've learned over the last 40 years to doing it right—right now! That has been the focus of my column from the very start, and I thank you for your kind words of encouragement along the way. While it's not yet time to declare victory and say that our collective efforts have banished forever ineffective, too expensive, activity versus outcomes-based HRM, it's definitely time to cele-brate various major accomplishments of this journey.

First, let's celebrate our acceptance of the reality that you can't get something for nothing. You can not make effective use of great talent management software/service delivery if you have never invested in the needed KSAOC models, assessment tools, position data, etc. You can not expect an HRO provider to use your over-customized, clumsy from the start, several releases back ERP as the foundation for a cost-effective, easily configured, social UI HRM delivery system. You can't administer 300-plus work week schedules at the same cost as 30. These and many other plain truths about the costs and needed heavy lifting in HRM, HR technology, the HRM delivery system, and HRO have been discussed widely enough—including in this column; so industry leaders are no longer free to use the "innocent spouse" defense.

Second, let's celebrate our understanding of the role that technology plays in delivering effective and efficient HRM processes. Users who purchase their flights, books, and wine online, who routinely use social networks in their personal and professional collaborations, who regard call center reps as the enemy of problem solving, and who want what they need when and where they need it are not going to accept data entry-style, content-free, nothing-in-it-for me self service. Users who are able to plan complex travel itineraries online are not going to accept anything less when it comes to planning their payroll deductions. And managers whose people management decisions really do drive business outcomes must be able to make those decisions based on real-time, actionable analytics without worrying about what data is coming from or going to where.

Finally, let's celebrate our collective survival of the worst economic period in even my long memory. It's a testament to our industry's leaders that the wreckage was far less than it could have been and, especially among the SaaS HRM vendors, there's even been some pretty impressive growth worthy of celebration. As for Bloom & Wallace, we're doing very well, thank you, and will be celebrating the end of 2009 with the launch of our blog: http://InFullBloom.US. We're looking forward to seizing the opportunities that the recovery will present in 2010 and hope you too are among the fortunate. **HRO**

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