

Hello, May I Take Your Order?

Don't get confounded by all the menu choices next time you're ordering a self-service application. Instead, set-up a consistent HRM self-service interface that will improve employee productivity.

By Naomi Bloom

Recently I took advantage of the online, end-of-summer sales to stock up on madras shirts and khaki shorts, which have become my husband's Florida uniform. After visiting six online retailers, I couldn't help but notice that each Web site worked very differently—with me losing considerable productivity as I moved from one to another. Menus across the top, down the sides (sometimes right, sometimes left, sometimes both), menus you hover over, menus on which you click to expand, “sales” as a menu item that you must expand in order to find sale items, and “sales” as a submenu choice within the specific types of items—the list of dialogue differences goes on. And then there are the data differences—middle name requested here, just initial there; include the dashes in your credit card number here, but leave them out or get an error message there; three-day delivery is “standard” on one site, but five-day is “standard” on another.

I hate every minute of these hunt-and-peck dialogues and data-semantic puzzles, but I do realize that eliminating those differences would require all of the world's application designers to conform to a style book and data standards developed by the United Nations, a project not likely to be completed in this millennium. However, what we may put up with in our free time is completely unacceptable when using the self-service applications deployed for our work productivity and for the enhanced productivity of our organization. And organizations can't afford this nonsense because they are paying dearly for our productivity.

In a world that is pushing for productivity, common self-service protocols and data semantics are very strong arguments for building all of an organization's business applications on a common data and applications architecture. It's critical to productivity that the self-service interactions used by large portions of the workforce—benefits enrollment, payroll inquiries, training registration, performance appraisals, travel and expense, small purchases, and service requests—operate in the same way and make the same assumptions about such related data as the organizational structures (both financial and HRM), physical and virtual work locations, and who is permitted to do what. The broad range of processes that give rise to this mixture of HRM and not-HRM employee self-service interac-

tions—from onboarding to purchasing, from facilities to event management, and from business travel to relocation—must be integrated not only as self-service protocol but also to share these and many other common data structures. Self service and our drive for greater workforce productivity have erased the tidy boundaries between HRM and many other enterprise processes, to become the catalyst for deploying true business process applications.

If your organization has or will standardize using any one of the major administrative application backbone providers—SAP, PeopleSoft, Oracle, or Lawson—then you should be able to move easily across those applications to achieve business process integration. But don't believe it until you've tested it in different scenarios, because not all of these suites are equally and completely integrated. You should be able to connect travel and expense processing with an applicant interaction when that applicant is invited to travel to an interview, and to weave together the many threads needed to make onboarding a seamless business process even though many different parts of the organization are involved. In fact, you should expect your backbone provider to have created these business process applications for you, and at no additional charge, once you've licensed the underlying functional applications.

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If you really can't do these things with your current backbone vendor, shame on them for not meeting these obvious self-service and productivity requirements and shame on you for not fussing much louder. Presuming that you have or are going to achieve this productivity-enhancing standard for self service across many applications, why would you give it up in order to outsource one or a bundle of processes to a single HRM BPO provider unless they can offer the same degree of self-service breadth and integration? Now that we've defined how we want self service to work, Part II of this column, in next month's magazine will bring that definition forward into the world of HR outsourcing. **HR**



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