

Go Configure

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The business case for an automated interrogatory approach to your HR software.

By Naomi Bloom



September's column announced that multi-tenancy had gone mainstream as a required foundation for any HRM SaaS product or BPO platform worthy of the name. The sole exception, perhaps, can be found at the most complex/global end of the market, where ERP/HRMS still reigns (but for how long?) as the official system of record. October's column described what we expect in highly configurable multi-tenant HRM software, to include the effective-dating of those configurations, full inheritance across and within tenants, and no disruption of configurations as the vendor applies new releases. Sounds wonderful, and many HRM software vendors are on this path, as are those BPO providers wise enough to use this type of software for their delivery system platform.

Even in configuration, all those available choices have to be analyzed, selected, tested, and implemented—individually and in combination with other choices. And this is done not only during the initial implementation but every time business needs change, software upgrades are applied (even when applied as SaaS mostly opt-in updates), regulatory rules appear/change to include retroactively, new executives bring new perspectives, etc. Every time configurations must be changed, all those choices must be re-evaluated against the needed changes, and then new choices made, tested, and implemented. Furthermore, the implications of those configuration changes for the downstream processes must be analyzed and actions taken to at least inform users of those implications.

So, while we may be able to eliminate most of the programming implementation work by having great configuration tools delivered with our SaaS HRM software, we have by no means reduced the business analyst time and expertise needed to keep things running properly. And great models-based business analysts are even scarcer and more expensive than Java or similar programmers.

HRM software vendors, and their implementation/ consulting/BPO partners, address the elapsed time, workload, and institutionalizing good practice challenges of configuration with various tool kits: data gathering templates for the needed business

rules, spreadsheet-based loading of high volume business rules, wizards to walk power users through the modification of delivered work flows, etc. to help mitigate the analytical and mechanical challenges of using delivered configuration capabilities.

The best of these tools are tied together into an implementation methodology to ensure that the right tool is used for the right purpose, in the right sequence, and with some boundaries around the results of mixing and matching configuration options. But all of these tools and methodologies leave far too much decision-making, implication analysis, and other knowledge-intensive work to the business analysts—and the same goes for the hard work of doing manual configurations without any errors. What's more, many to most of today's business analysts lack the broad HRM and HRM delivery system experience needed to do this well.

This is the business case for automated configuration of highly configurable, multi-tenant HRM SaaS to include when used in BPO platforms. Interrogatory configuration poses a series of questions, just as the very best HRM business analyst would do, about the customer's overall business, and then about its overall HRM business, and then about its specific HRM programs/plans/practices, and so on. With each question comes clear explanations of what is being asked, why it is being asked in terms of the downstream implications of each possible answer to this question, some commentary on how/when/why organizations might choose one or more of the possible answers to this question, an explanation of how the answers to this question are going to be used to configure the software, etc.

Depending on how the customer business analyst answers these automated questions, three important things happen. First, the selected answers are used by the interrogatory configurator to directly, without human intervention, configure that specific set of options within the software as of the selected effective date. Second, the customer is shown the configured results of that question and how those results will impact previous configurations and historical data. Finally, once those answers are approved by the customer, the software is configured and the next questions will be asked, shaped by the previous responses.

Reducing dramatically the elapsed time and cost of HRM software implementation is an important enough business outcome for HRM SaaS vendors and BPO providers to justify their building interrogatory configurators. Doing this requires software architectures that enable configuration without miles of procedural code. It also requires that the product's designers know and are able to express the patterns of good practice in a whole range of HRM areas, from organizational designs to hiring practices, and the good practice combinations of the same. If your vendor/provider isn't working on this, won't it be awkward when their competitors make the leap?

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