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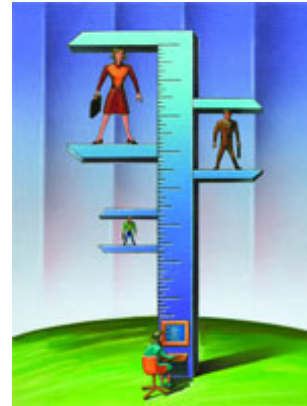
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Leveraging IT in HR

*Cutting-edge IT solutions play a significant role in HR management. **Faiz Askari** writes how companies have understood the relevance of using such tools for ease and efficiency.*

The HR department of any organization cannot function without IT solutions to make its task easier and more efficient. Use of technology in HR management now goes beyond the context of just managing the payroll system and other databases. Organizations today see it as an effective tool for talent management and a means for increasing employee productivity and skills.



"IT platforms free the HR professionals from being mere book-keepers of labour statistics. They provide them with an opportunity to play a key role in organizational renewal and revitalization"



- H Venkatesan
Senior Vice-President,
Global HR ISGN

Applications and solutions provided by IT vendors for HR departments are making the lives of HR managers and executives much easier. This is the primary reason why organizations are continuously strengthening their HR departments with updated IT solutions. Describing the importance of e-applications in today's HR practices, H Venkatesan, Senior Vice-president, Global Human Resource, ISGN, states, "IT platforms free the HR professionals from being mere book-keepers of labour statistics. They provide them with an opportunity to play a key role in organizational renewal and revitalization."

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Organizations have understood the imperative need of IT in their HR functioning. Explaining this, Rekhi Singh, Chairman and CEO, R Systems International says, "CEOs and CTOs have been devoting considerable time to use IT in HR functions. In our company, the P-CMM implementation has automated in a way which will prove to be a time-saving and cost-effective methodology in the long run."

Giving his views on the growing integration of IT in HR, Andrew Whelan, Director Quality & IT-Business Lines sector, Xchanging states, "Employee data must be stored somewhere, and even if personnel files are held in paper form, certain data is always held electronically. Small organizations may hold employee data in spreadsheet form while larger organizations may implement enterprise-wide systems that do far more than just hold employee data. They can be put to multi-purpose use like providing employees with Web-based self-service access to HR, managing recruitment of new staff, using to underpin performance



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management and much more.”

The right HRMS

The key to leverage utmost benefits is to choose the appropriate HRMS. Whelan lists down the key points to be considered while selecting the right fit. He says, “Enterprise-wide systems offer advanced functionality but can be expensive to implement and maintain. The choice of system must be aligned to business goals. The second challenge is to populate the system with accurate data. Organizations often overlook the effort involved in cleaning existing data which often has to be pulled together from multiple sources. The third challenge then becomes of maintenance and adoption. Users must be educated to help them get the best business benefits from the system and data must always be kept up-to-date.”

S Karthik, Vice-president and Head HR, India, 24/7 Customer informs about the IT adaptability in HR within his company, “The HR department is well supported by an indigenously designed HRMS, which is also integrated to the company’s intranet ‘Connect’. It is the backbone of HR operations, especially for all day-to-day activities.”

Importance of IT applications

Highlighting the potential of IT applications, Singh explains, “Cutting-edge IT solutions have played a major role and contributed in large measure in the area of HR management. Some of the areas that have been substantially benefited are process automation, resource utilization, quick handling of employee grievances and timely and objective performance management. Starting with attendance and engagement of employees at work place, it helps tracking billability status of resources engaged in the business.”



Online HRMS is also a very useful tool that assists in accessing and maintaining data of all employees through the employee life-cycle. Elaborating the importance of the role of IT in HR functionalities, Karthik adds that from generating the offer letter to completing joining formalities to all procedures of relieving, it does it all with ease. He states, “HRMS helps in generating critical reports on the demographics profile, performance on an individual basis, team performance etc., which help the business to do deep dive analysis, especially while planning and reallocation of resources. It also serves as a single repository for the business to access information on employees located in different locations, across the globe.”

Venkatesan emphasizes the growing realization and acceptance of such IT solutions and their relevance to HR department’s day-to-day working. “Raw data becomes information. Therefore access to information enhances the quality of daily operational decisions,” he remarks.

Information like attendance, leave, requests for any IT/administration resources, payroll processing, different policies of the company, details about individuals’ performance, their job role, contact details of different departments for different requirements, can be accessed at once.

In a normal environment, organizations believe that spending on an HR system is a one time investment and do not recognize the fact that constant upgradation of technology is critical to the success of both the



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HR function and the business as a whole. The widely prevalent mindset of the HR function being the custodian of data related to people has undergone a radical change. Further adding to this, Venkatesan says, "Democratization of the employee database has already happened through HR applications that provide direct access to people who run the business. HR professionals have to learn to proactively address the issues the organization faces as there will be facts and figures available at all levels through direct access of HR applications."

Training for managers

Lack of knowledge and training on relevant IT products and services leads to lower productivity. Every HR personnel needs to be trained on the prevailing HRMS to ensure optimum utilization of the facilities it provides. IT training to HR professionals in IT and non-IT organizations has become an integral part of their performance, thereby leading to enhanced productivity. The training also helps in eliminating heavy loads of paperwork, supporting which Karthik says, "Faster access to data at all times enables quick decision-making and releases bandwidth of HR team which can better utilize the time in effective employee engagement initiatives and adding strategic value to business. With the implementation of HRMS, the entire engine of people management goes on a fast track."

Tech offerings for HR

The success or failure of any story depends upon the people availing and implementing the facility. In doing that, it is vital to visualize it from the perspective of using the tool as well as the process. There are some cutting-edge technology solutions that are available for HR departments, right from quantitative representation of employee data to the current trend of building behavior models that can be used as predictive tools. "Commercial applications are available in the markets that help capture information and build models. An example is the HR balanced scorecard," suggests Venkatesan.

There are a number of IT solutions available in the market today that have HR modules. Prominent among them are Peoplesoft, SAP, Adrenalin, HR 2, Oracle, Solomon, JD Edwards, etc. These help in automation and better productivity. As Karthik adds, "To be precise, all vendor based HR systems are designed and developed exclusively to cater to the HR requirements. However, the success of such system largely depends on the extent to which they integrate business requirements and blend HR processes to it and are flexible enough to make changes to meet future needs."

There are some offerings by various software solution vendors that are a single integrated data model providing an up-to-date accurate view of HR related activities, including recruiting, performance management, learning, compensation, benefits, payroll, time management and real time analytics. Oracle is one of the software vendors that handles this market. The Oracle E-Business Suite Human Resources Management System family of applications automates the entire recruit-to-retire process, so that a company can align its workforce with strategic objectives.

Web-based tools

Web-based systems like threaded discussions and online surveys also provide useful new tools for the HR. These can be used productively for conflict resolution, project co-ordination, focus groups, surveys and 360 degree feedbacks. Every tool has its limitation, but technology is

improving. As HR departments are continuously progressing, technology will be viewed as integral to supporting work and change, becoming more transparent to users rather than a distraction from the real goal. Whelan puts it into perspective, "Society now readily accepts the notion of accessing confidential information over the Internet. Security and identity management are therefore more important than ever. Organizations must ensure that they remain up-to-date with security enhancements, and HR departments must ensure that they actively enforce policies defining acceptable use of IT."



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