

HR Systems & Technology Edition Article for March 1999

Key Points:

- HR function has changed
- HRIS model antiquated
- HR dogged by it's past and existing technology
- HR systems and processes have not changed
- Intranet technology is a solution
- We must embrace this and step out of personnel admin

“Power to the People”

“Information is the power Marty!” was the line shouted on the rooftop in the climactic scene of the 1992 Robert Redford movie *Sneakers*. Similar to the villan in *Seakers*, we as a profession are finally starting to understand the value and power contained in presenting the right information in the right format to the right person at the right time.

We have seen major changes in the positioning of the Human Resouces function within organisations over the past decade, namely, the decentralisation of human resource management to the line manager, and, secondly, the HR function becoming business focused and taking on an internal consulting model at a tactical and strategic level.

As line management responds to managing their human resources as well as the traditional financial and physical resources, the requirement to decentralise the information of their people poses a new challenge for the HR profession.

Incumbent in moving to a decentralised model of HRM is providing “just in time” information to add value to decision making processes which effect employees. Whilst we have implemented this model, our HRIS have struggled to keep up with the change. Our traditional HRIS were designed around a centralised data input and reporting model via the HR and Payroll departments. With HR information being analysed and decisions being made and implemented locally by line managers, this centralised “for HR eyes only” model of most HRIS has become somewhat antiquated.

Existing systems provide accessible reporting utilities that are used for standard reports such as turnover, leave, headcount, salary history, etc. However, with this “report-ability” being held centrally by HR gatekeepers, both employees and managers are often delayed or unable to get the right information required to make informed decisions. Indeed, it is unlikely that many managers know the type of information stored within *their* HRIS. Remember, the HRIS belongs to the company – not HR or Payroll!

At the same time HR professionals are establishing themselves as internal consultants acting in partnership with the senior management team to provide

tactical and strategic value. Whilst this change is happening in many organisations, it is often the case that the day to day administration and fire fighting incumbent in maintaining employees distracts the HR function from focusing on the critical business issues.

It would not be uncommon for a HR Manager in a small to medium sized company working on a HR Strategic Plan, to receive a phone call from Joe the Engineer in Adelaide who was not sure on the policy on Long Service Leave. Joe can't locate the P&P Manual which was last updated in 1992. After the phone call the HR Manager would be just as likely to receive an email with Mary the Receptionists new home address for the personnel file.

Such administration and low value activities are the bane in the life of the HR Strategist, and pull us back into our personnel administration past. Whilst the business is expecting newer, higher value outputs, the same old processes and administration still need to be performed. Can you imagine the HR Manager replying "oh yeah, sorry Joe, you didn't get paid this month because we were working on the 1999 HR Strategic Plan, can we take care of it next month?"

It is the same old story of our business and purpose changing, but not the systems and processes that are required to support the new change in direction! It would be unfair to say that it is the HR profession is reluctant in providing HR information to the business, or have wanted to continue administering paperwork processes, it has been more an issue of the technology not being available.

This obstacle is now being overcome through the use of internet browser technology being used as "shop fronts" for HR information, access to the HRIS and for automating HR processes via electronic forms and workflow.

HR Intranets can be used for information giving of HR policies, recruitment, benefits, corporate information and company news. Employees are able to access and update their own information including address, bank account details, payslips and remuneration packages online. The icing on any HR intranet is the ability to workflow the low value HR and Payroll administrative processes such as leave requests, time sheets, overtime claims, etc.

The use of a HR intranet assists both problem, firstly, managers can access vital HR information needed to help them manage their business better. Secondly, HR then becomes their business partner (and in some cases leader) by jointly analysing the data and situation to provide a HR solution to a business problem, as opposed to merely being the information gatherer and provider.

So it is that we now have technology that can be leveraged to allow us to reduce HR administration, and to provide better customer service to our customers. It is now our challenge to embrace new technology and to fully step out of our personnel administration history and take our places shoulder to shoulder with the business leaders.

The key to it all is information management - providing the right information in the right format to the right person at the right time. This can easily be done through your existing web browsers linking to the HR intanet site. Because remember, "Information is the Power, Marty!"