

WHAT'S NEW IN HR TECHNOLOGY?

Five questions
you should be
asking IT to
ensure that your
organization's
HR function is
operating at
peak productivity.

A 1987 article in *The New York Times* by Nobel Prize-winning economist Robert Solow ignited a firestorm when it questioned the relationship between computers and productivity.

Though that debate still continues today on certain hot topics — the relative merits of being wired 24/7, for example — the majority of HR professionals are certain to acknowledge the role that computers and technology play in easing their departments' daily administrative burdens.

With rapid shifts in business technology happening almost daily, it's more vital than ever that your HR team maintains solid relations with your IT department, working together to ensure that your organization leverages today's best-of-breed human resources technology tools as effectively as possible.

Here are five questions you should be asking your IT department to start a productive dialogue:

1 HOW INTEGRATED ARE WE?

Growing companies often find themselves with "patchwork" HR IT solutions cobbled together and modified by necessity as new needs arise. Lack of integration across vital systems can have serious repercussions in terms of productivity and continuity.

Think about it — the common appearance and menu functionality across every program in the Microsoft Office suite isn't by accident. Non-integrated systems force a steeper learning curve when it comes to training new users, and repetitive data entry (entering payroll data in separate payroll and tax systems, for example) can lead to costly mistakes thanks to simple keystroke errors.

Fully integrated systems (also known as Human Resource Information Systems, or HRIS), bring together under a single interface interdependent HR processes such as payroll processing, benefits administration, and applicant tracking. With the latest generation of HR applications delivered over the web (known as SaaS, or "Software as a Service"), companies can skip the expensive investments in hardware that presented a significant barrier to implementation in the past. Upgrades, too, are simpler than ever, as developers can push out new features faster, allowing your business to adjust to shifting market conditions as needed.

2 HOW REDUNDANT ARE WE?

If people are your organization's most important asset, your HR data is equally important. A Pepperdine University study recently estimated that lost data costs U.S. companies an average of \$18.2 billion dollars each year.

What protections do you have in place to protect employees' privacy and guard against data loss — whether from hardware failure, environmental catastrophes like fire or flood, or external security breaches from malicious hackers or identity thieves?

Review your system protections with your IT pros to ensure that adequate data protections exist, your backup and recovery systems are tested regularly, and a business continuance plan is in place in the event that one or more of your offices becomes inaccessible. Even the best recovery system is useless if no one knows how to use it when disaster strikes.

3 HOW CAN WE BETTER MANAGE RECRUITMENT, STAFFING, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

The best workforce starts with the best hiring and retention tools. Applicant management programs are fast becoming the norm for automating functions like processing applications and ranking respondents' résumés — routine tasks that often consume the bulk of a hiring manager's time and attention. Screening and selection tools take the process one step further, using thorough candidate screenings to ensure compliance and reduce risk.

Once your organization's made the right hire, technology-based time and attendance solutions can streamline employee scheduling, track activities, and manage absences, helping you optimize your labor investment. To keep employees challenged and motivated, consider using performance appraisal or talent management software to simplify the process of tracking goals and identifying skills gaps.

4 DO WE HAVE A CLEARLY DEFINED TECHNOLOGY ACCESS POLICY?

Here's an issue that's sure to generate strong opinions on both sides of the argument. For many senior managers, access to social media technology — blogging, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube — is immediately seen as a distraction or time waster. Conversely, younger hires view them as must-have tools for collaboration and getting business done.

Before adopting a knee-jerk "no access" policy, consider the elements of social networking that may be in line with broader management strategies. For example, internal video blogs or knowledge banks can help employees more easily connect with one another and share information, especially in larger or far-flung organizations where simply walking down the hall to ask a question isn't possible.

As social media moves from strictly marketing and branding applications to tools for lead generation, customer communication, and internal communication and collaboration, companies of all sizes need to have a clear strategy for social media tools — and an equally clear policy on employee usage.



5 HOW USER-FRIENDLY ARE WE?

Respondents to a January 2009 study commissioned by ADP said that nearly half their HR team's time (45%) is spent on a combination of payroll-related activities (18%), HR administration (14%) and benefits administration (13%) — repetitive, time-consuming tasks that leave little room for more strategic contributions to your organization.

Companies are now turning to self-service portals that allow employees to access, maintain and modify information via a web browser. This shift to self-service functionality for employees and managers alike is a direct response to the competitive challenges of today's knowledge economy, making it the preferred method for improving internal service and enhancing the lines of communication between your company and its employees.

The benefits of these self-service portals are two-fold in positioning your organization as an employer of choice — demonstrating your responsiveness and techno-savvy to employees, while freeing your HR team to concentrate on more strategic initiatives to further reinforce that leadership position and attract top talent.

HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY TO DRIVE INNOVATION

With human capital the largest investment of just about every business, it makes sense to also invest in the technology needed to make the most of that valuable capital. By staying ahead of the technology curve and making sound investments, you'll ensure that your HR strategies and goals are aligned with the technology needed to achieve them. ■

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