DIGITALISING THE HR FUNCTION:

The Place Of Human Resource Information System

Timi Tope Ologunoye, MBA | MCIPM | SPHRi

Introduction

Today's business world is becoming more global, more mobile, and more digitised; any HR team that will make huge impact in it has to be a technology-enabled, company-leading function that drives huge value through the company's people. The business landscape is being reinvented by workplace innovators, traditional management systems are being disrupted daily due to innovation explosions and it has now become a necessity to redesign your business for agility by building out light-weight approaches to keep you fast moving; otherwise, you will be outpaced in the race to digital.

The multigenerational workforces that now characterise the present day companies is increasingly making the adoption of digital technologies become widespread. This of course is driven by the need to keep the new generation who now appears to be in the majority engaged, productive and efficient.

People are profoundly changing the way they interact with each other at home and at work and as the idea of work changes, the tools for managing people and work should also change. A good human resources team's immediate responsibility is to empower and enable its people to do their best work. This should certainly start with understanding your people and removing traditional workplace business models which continue to serve as obstacles to your company's competitiveness. This is where a good human resource information system finds its place. As the HR team keeps using technology to eliminate many of the administrative tasks required to keep a company running, HR professionals in the company will become the strategic leaders who drive growth within the organisation.

A digital HR function is one that allows work to be delivered in a usable, coherent and productive way through an integrated set of platforms, tools and environments. In a general sense, digital means having an organisational mind-set that embraces constant innovation, flat decision making, and the integration of technology into all phases of the business. Whether or not to digitalise your HR function is no longer a debate, with big changes that continue to impact people, technology, legal requirements and infrastructure. A lot of organisations are now more open to adopting new technologies to improve their workforce planning, measure and track the impact of HR initiatives on the business as well as support the business with analytics. Some of the operational areas where the digitalising of the HR function is seriously making big wins include mobility, analytics, social media and the cloud in that order.

Radically Changing the HR Function with Technology

The development of new technologies has dramatically changed the way many HR practices are performed. HR portals within the human resource information system for example, allow employees to access their own personal information and other company resources, including benefits from their own computers or from kiosks placed in convenient locations without relying on HR specialists. From the same portal, managers can review and approve basic personnel actions such as terminations, relocations, and salary changes. Managers usually appreciate this self-service arrangements since it allows them greater flexibility and quicker decision-making. These online self-service tools allow managers to have more control over transactional HR tasks, such as

reviewing and approving merit bonuses and incentives, learning management activities, and recruitment functions, including opening requisitions, reviewing resumes, and evaluating candidates. Communication devices allow employers to communicate with each employee in a variety of ways, and team members can work together in virtual teams from multiple places around the globe.

The impact of technology on the way we work is massive. You now have access to the best and brightest ideas across the globe and this alone can leverage your organisation into an industry-leading position if well deployed. For example, instead of relying on 'real life' connections to gather intelligence from what other organisations are doing, the internet of things allows you to collaborate and share information with new connections and rediscovered old ones in a quick way. You are able to quickly crowdsource a strategy or policy solution across multiple industries by simply putting a general call out on a professional group on LinkedIn and you are instantly linked with more than five people who have relevant, up-to-date information and research that they are willing to share. As the workforce continues to age with quite a huge number of baby boomers entering retirement and taking a significant amount of knowledge and experience with them; preserving this wealth of knowledge and expertise will be fundamental to the productivity of current and future employees. So, whether you choose to

codify the knowledge or personalise it, you will still require technology as a pivot. Today's employees now crave for more flexible working hours, or flextime which is an attractive alternative to the standard workweek and locations, meaning that the office can no longer be seen as a single space.

1. Technology makes it possible for groups of people to effectively work together without being in the same location; thus they are called virtual teams.

Virtual teams have become increasingly popular among multinational companies who have employees located in distant locations around the globe. Technologies

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that allow virtual teams to share information include e-mail, intranets and the internet, video conferencing, video chats, teleconferencing, webcasts, shared electronic whiteboards, voice over IP and groupware. The intranet for example is a repository for information and effective internal communication channel that

reaches all staff, at both corporate and business-unit levels. It is a place for doing things, not just reading things. It's a good tool for celebrating the current culture or supporting culture change because it connects staff with each other and allows them to collaborate efficiently. Workplace intranets clearly comes out as a great tool for new employee onboarding and allows new hires all over the globe to participate in onboarding together, in a social way that you will not find in a more traditional setting. Instant messaging and text messaging also allow all team members to be in constant touch regardless of their locations and time zones.

More than half of the workforce of today are millennials, who expect modern technology that's at par with consumer apps. Employees are increasingly looking for opportunities to work with the technologies of their choice and responding to this need would bring great results for any organization. The right HR software enables your organization to do the great work of career development by equipping managers with tools and data they need while providing employees with access to relevant information to help them manage their career. Today, the real customers for any HR software is no longer the HR team, but your employees and their managers.

Our lives are increasingly now being lived on our palms and/or on our wrists via mobile devices. People are looking for ways to manage life and work without
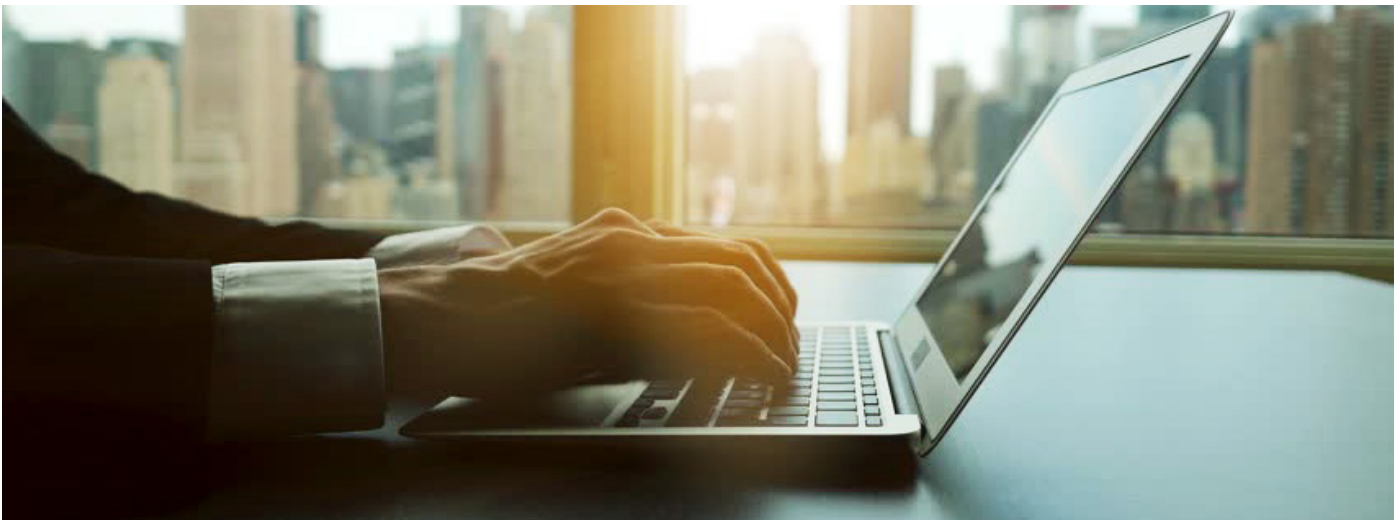
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feeling like there is a separation between the two. Employees now expect their work environment to provide technology of the same quality and reliability, whether mobile or desktop. They now want personal computing experiences that are intuitive, engaging, user-friendly, employee-focused and help them achieve more in less time. While HR technology is never going to replace people, the right HRIS empowers employees, makes their lives easier, helps them grow and develop while delivering greater value to your workforce over the long haul.

Using a piece of recruiting software to eliminate manual job posting, track candidates and collaborate with the hiring team can significantly change HR's role in the hiring process from administrative to strategic. With an applicant tracking system in place for example, you can then have more time to spend coaching hiring managers, screening candidates more thoroughly, and onboarding new employees. From the applicant tracking system, onboarding tools, staff bio-data, payroll, leave administration, performance management platform and more, you have the opportunity to create a great experience for your employees with your technology. Consumer demands for technology and personalised recommendations are

shaping what employees now want in their workplace technology. Many surveys have shown that employees have high expectations for the kind of technology they use at work. Since the release of the first iPhone in 2007, we've seen an increased number of companies focusing on delightful user experience as a key driver of HR technology selection decisions.

2 The apps, video content, and social capabilities of the smartphone era have enabled users to be more productive, especially with learning interventions at work. Personalised recommendations based on what similar users liked on online retails stores like #Jumia or #Konga now applies to talent technology in the form of guided experiences. Employees appreciate having a personalised experience with technology without it feeling too scripted or mandatory. The benefit of personalized experience for business leaders is less time spent walking employees through the software or tailoring it to each individual's needs. It's a win-win for both parties and helps to keep users engaged.

The Human Resource Information System (HRIS)

Many companies centralise their HR functions using a shared services model

designed to promote HR expertise and deliver improved companywide services for large diversified companies by administering HR activities that involve interacting with employees through a service center. These service centers provide a central unit for HR-related administrative and transactional tasks that employees, retirees, and business unit managers are able to access through online portals and phones. The benefit of the shared services model come from having standardized services for all business units that can be administered uniformly from a central service center.

A typical human resources information system will allow employees to:
- Access portals which provide personalised information to help employees evaluate the options and make informed decisions.
- Access their retirement and savings accounts or long term incentive plans, share options and manage their investments.
- Participate in wellness and engagement surveys and receive targeted information regarding events and programmes of interest to them.
- Search for applicable HR policies and review the company's employee handbook.

These software programs used to be traditionally purchased by employers and loaded on their hardware. In such cases, the employer is responsible for implementing, customising and maintaining the program and the employer controls the data. Where there are updates or problems, the employer's IT staff has the responsibility of handling them. However, given the continuing democratisation of technology, a lot of companies now prefer an alternative arrangement called software-as-a-service (SAAS) where the vendors make software programs available to employers for an annual fee or per usage. The vendor in this case operates the application, maintains the database, and handles updates and security. The employer owns the data and access to the program through the Internet with a web browser. These arrangements, also called "cloud computing", allow businesses to escape the high cost of buying software and huge server infrastructure. A major benefit of SAAS arrangement is that they can be installed and updated more quickly because they provide a standardised service for multiple users. The disadvantage is that if they are standardised they cannot be customised for each employer. To the extent that they are customised, the benefits of rapid implementation and updating are lost.

Access and Security

To continue to engage employees effectively, organisations will need to become more comfortable with granting appropriate access to employees as a matter of fostering productivity, flexibility and efficiency. The harder you make it for employees to access important information needed to do their job the more you will see productivity suffer. While it's true that more access brings more concerns for security, having clear guidance around security precautions and also investing in technology that makes security a priority is a necessity.

Selecting the Appropriate Technology

There have been significant shift in technology from the static, administrative-focused HRIS versions to the talent-focused systems that many technology vendors are developing today. With a good HRIS, the HR team saves time, eliminates stress, and provides their employees with a seamless technology experience. Unfortunately,

many HR leaders continue to lament huge investment in buying HR Technology modules that virtually turn out ineffective, inefficient and useless. Some of these applications have no reporting, searching, or other core capabilities that would make the system a valuable tool to help improve the HR team's service delivery.

Therefore, HR professionals looking to digitalise their HR function need to leverage the use cases as a primary part of the selection process and hence; must master

the art of creating fantastic use cases before selecting any HR software. Ensure you circulate the list of use cases to all internal stakeholders and keep updating your requirements until there is consensus. This ensures a good fit for you and your user-employees. Involve all the possible people that will interact with the system – from IT Staff, management, employees, HR, to all other parties that will use the system. Put yourself in the position of each user. Focus on specific needs that must be addressed beyond just features that eventually may never be used. For each employee user type, document a series of action-oriented steps you want demonstrated, discussed as a service requirement, or performed as part of a test drive. Before inviting vendors to demonstrate their ability to meet the needs of your defined use case which must have been previously sent to them, you need to have created an evaluation form to grade

the system during demonstrations and during your own testing by each of the user groups. This will help you understand how the system will meet your needs and quickly expose any areas of weakness or issues requiring workarounds.

The first responsibility of every HR leader is to ensure your organization is in alignment; the right solutions going with the right processes in place to support it. Otherwise, you find yourself in a place where you have to buy different HR systems doing different

things. This costs you a lot of money, time and trouble to keep them talking to one another. Doing these integrations by hired consultants most times take forever and even when it works you're mostly disappointed. Making a decision to get a boutique application (suite) from the onset may be a productivity and cost saving decision as it helps you consolidate vendors and ensure a uniform data set across the various platforms. To create a good alignment, some important questions to ask yourself include:

- How can I create a good user experience for users using the current tools we have?
- What tools are needed to supplement existing tools?
- Can we integrate all these tools to provide a more seamless experience, and reduce double handling?
- What governance models can I use as a

benchmark for our organisation?

- What organisation policies and industry regulations must we comply with?
- What monitoring systems do we have in place that keep our data secure?
- What organisational policies are set that advise employees on what data can be shared?
- What crisis management plans are in place should there be a security breach?
- What are the risks for our organisation if our data ended up in the wrong hands?
- What restrictions can we put in place to ensure personal work is not done on organisation's time?
- How can we protect sensitive information from Malware or Ransomware?
- What communication and collaboration platforms are currently in place?
- Can communication and collaboration between teams be improved?
- What remote solutions or telecommuting options would benefit the employees?
- What are the collaboration challenges employees are facing?
- Are there enterprise collaboration tools and social networking platforms such as instant messaging tools and team workspaces available?
- What are the gaps in social networking and collaboration we need to fill? In choosing a vendor, you can ask the following questions:
- What does your platform do seven times better than anyone else?
- How do you integrate with other applications?
- How many organizations are currently using your application? This helps check for application's depth and precision in resolving problems from multiple environments.

It is also good to ask questions developed by internal stakeholders and multiple users based on specific use-cases. The more HR executives demand data and analytics from their vendor partners, the more robust and mature those functionalities will become over time.

Implementation and Employee Adoption

Before implementing any digital initiative, you will need to watch out for the biggest areas of challenges to employee adoption. Most technology solutions are designed to solve the sponsor's or company's problem – not solve the user's problem. It could be that the technology adds value for the company, but is a task to the user. Make sure that any technology you launch has a user benefit and sell such benefits.

The way companies shape the human experience is completely within their control. Organisations therefore need to connect the technology they are seeking to deploy and the behaviour change they are looking to create. Ensure there is technology change reinforcement with some sort of recognition, relentless communication and visibility plan for early adopters. Nothing drives adoption more than seeing others using the technology successfully. Find early success stories and share them with employees.

The mindset and approach of your HR team is the best guarantee of success in implementation. HR professionals who are use-cases and data-driven, process-oriented, and communicative tend to have better implementation experience. First have a clear project owner and decision making framework up front. Stick to the project plan that is in place and ensure you are meeting the necessary deadlines on your end. Make sure your employee and HR data is complete and in a format that allows for upload into the new system. Ensure a continuous, open communication with the vendor to overcome roadblocks and keep the process moving forward

In conclusion, employees must feel that the HRIS adds value to their work and makes their lives less burdensome or restricted. HR professionals can ensure this happens by going for systems that are tailored to the unique needs of the company in a flexible and continuously relevant way for as long as the company chooses to exist or before the next curve of innovation-driven change. The earlier a company begins its race towards the digitisation of its HR function the clearer the competitive advantage in overall employee satisfaction, productivity, innovation, and collaboration required to survive and thrive. The definition of a successful business in the future will be broken down walls of divide between people, technology and the workplace – to the extent that it becomes difficult to differentiate them.

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Timi Tope Ologunoye,
MCIPM, SPHRi is the Executive General Manager, HR & Shared Services, Genesis Group.

Ologunoye is a certified Life Coach who holds a First Class degree in Banking & Finance, MBA in Financial Management and Professional Diploma in Human Resource Management. He is also a member of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) among many other professional bodies.