

## IT is from Mars, HR is from Venus

*Bridging the gap with five HRMS requirements that will satisfy everyone*

Everyone has heard the saying that men are from Mars and women are from Venus. When it comes to implementing a global human resource management system (HRMS), the same could be said for an organization's information technology and human resource departments.

IT and HR professionals should heed the advice of *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* author John Gray and learn how to communicate more effectively to ensure the needs of each are taken into consideration and that an emphasis is placed on creating a peaceful union of organizational equals.

In this HRMS "marriage," it's assumed HR is better able to understand what type of communication is necessary and the best manner and timing with which it must be presented to achieve strategic outcomes.

IT, on the other hand, is presumably better able to handle the security imperatives and the underlying capabilities and tools needed to achieve these outcomes. However, without taking the time to truly identify each other's role and, more importantly, understand each other's strengths and weaknesses, this marriage may be heading for an irrevocable and bitter divorce.

### The HR mandate

As organizations strive to build and sustain a high-performing, satisfied workforce, they place an even greater emphasis on the effectiveness of the HR department. HR is viewed as a critical contributor to an organization's bottom line, facilitating the or-



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ganization's ability to attract top talent, reduce turnover and control the high cost of benefits.

However, to be truly effective, HR needs to have the right combination of people, processes and technology in place. With the help of HRMS technology, organizations can automate a range of functions, including employee assessment or satisfaction surveys; time-to-fill or cost-to-hire statistics; employee performance indexes; revenue-to-employee or productivity-to-employee metrics; and turnover rates.

While few will dispute the value of an HRMS, the road to adoption can be quite challenging and requires careful consideration and co-operation among all stakeholders, especially IT.

### The IT challenge

While companies increasingly rely upon technology to streamline business processes and create a competitive edge, they are quickly realizing that if they are to truly optimize IT investments they must first work to align IT with business goals.

This is particularly true with an HRMS,

which needs to be treated as more than just mere infrastructure or back-office application, given the major impact it has on an organization's overall business strategy, competitiveness and profitability.

### Five HRMS considerations designed to bridge HR and IT

To make the most of HR technology investments, organizations must be sure to communicate the overall goals and objectives of the HRMS and solicit input from both HR and IT. Careful consideration must be made to ensure the solution can improve the organization's business processes (not just recreate old paper processes); create efficient workflows with approval mechanisms; provide compliance reporting; and integrate all the major components of HR, including compensation and benefits administration, recruiting and training administration and strategic measurement tools like metrics, performance management and succession management.

To ensure a long-term, successful co-existence between HR and IT, organizations should speak in terms that each department will understand and jointly select a solution capable of supporting the unique needs of both. More specifically, organizations should adopt an HRMS capable of supporting the following five criteria:

**Scalable infrastructure:** To ensure the longevity of the HRMS, organizations should look for a solution capable of meeting the current and future needs of HR while reducing the involvement of IT. The HRMS needs to be scalable and highly flex-

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ible so once IT deploys the system, HR can use it to support the needs of its existing employees and extend the system to include new employees (as the company grows, either organically or through mergers and acquisitions), benefits plans and business processes.

The solution should also be capable of supporting multiple language profiles so all users at all locations can leverage a single, global HRMS platform to achieve an accurate picture of the company's HR goals and objectives without having to seek additional IT support.

**Strong reporting and query capability:** The HRMS should also have the ability to support various HR and compliance-related reporting needs. To ensure the long-term success of the system, IT teams should look for a solution that combines data from multiple systems, has built-in report writer features, offers native language and SQL query capabilities to ensure easy access by any level of user and supports unlimited security profiles capable of defining the fields, tasks and actions permitted by each user.

In doing so, HR professionals can easily add fields and tables to reflect the changing business and data needs of the organization, securely locate and disseminate information to appropriate and authorized stakeholders, generate sophisticated reports that comply with internal and external regulations and provide sophisticated HR-related metrics and data to senior managers for decision-making and goal alignment.

**Workload automation:** To support a "do more with less" work ethos, it's important to look for an HRMS that supports what is commonly known among IT departments as "workload automation."

Long recognized by technical staff for its ability to seamlessly incorporate event-driven activity with calendar and scheduling functions, workload automation allows HR to organize daily tasks, prioritize work and improve process efficiencies.

Leveraging automatic, user-defined triggers, HR departments can set up e-mail based alerts, notifications and reports that allow them to focus on more strategic tasks, improve communications and re-

spond faster to employee requests and organizational changes.

**Tight integration and import/export:** Some other important HRMS considerations — ones especially important to IT folks — involve the tight integration of other HR-related systems such as single sign-on, e-mail server integration, active directory, LDAP, third-party payroll services, benefit carriers or other internal legacy systems and the ability to import data from other source systems.

This is particularly important as HR professionals strive to create a central point of access capable of streamlining HR processes. The system should also enable HR to eliminate redundant data entry functions, increase data integrity (by having the ability to import historical data from outdated legacy systems) and, more importantly, provide additional analysis and reporting to other team members.

Lastly, organizations should consider an HRMS that is capable of easily exporting HR-related data to common software utilities such as Word and Excel.

In doing so, HR teams can provide additional analysis and reporting across the organization using existing systems and popular formats without the need for additional IT involvement. With improvements in architecture and the proliferation of Web 2.0, traditional imports and exports can be reduced to web service requests that makes the posting and exchange of information seamless and automatic.

This kind of advance allows both the manager and employee to manage data without worrying about the administrative task of running an import or export function to manage the integration of systems.

**Advanced workflow:** The final, and perhaps most important, HRMS consideration involves the system's advanced workflow functionality. Leveraging user-configurable menus and role-based forms, HR teams can automate time-intensive and multi-step/multi-person processes such as life change events (including things like a name change or a new dependant), new hire activity, terminations and training.

As a result, HR professionals will enhance their productivity, reduce training and administrative expenses, ensure faster and more accurate transaction processing and lower the cost of collecting and deliv-

ering HR-related services throughout the enterprise.

IT and HR departments alike should look for a solution capable of being deployed online, with employee self-service and manager self-service portals to encourage easy and secure access among employees, document company procedures and workflow and ensure compliance with legislation such as Sarbanes-Oxley. By selecting an HRMS that supports advanced workflow capabilities, HR and IT groups can optimize and extend the technology platform to drive bottom-line efficiencies and profitability.

If an organization is to build and sustain a high-performing and satisfied workforce, then a fruitful relationship between HR and IT must exist. So instead of thinking in terms of Mars versus Venus, IT and HR professionals should consider these five requirements and use them as a means to openly communicate goals, objectives and system requirements.

In doing so, and giving proper consideration to people, processes and technology, the organization will be well on its way to a long-lasting, satisfying marriage of HRMS equals who are working together to meet a mutually satisfying goal.

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