HUMAN RESOURCES JOINS WITH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

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IT Accessed have teamed up with people and technology harmonisation specialists **Ryan Solutions** to produce a series of articles for the UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD). This article originally appeared in the CIPD's Winter 2007 newsletter for North Yorkshire, UK.

Are You Getting The Most Out Of Your Software??

Whenever Allyson and I meet up to discuss topics for the next newsletter we always spend time exchanging stories about problems in organisations caused by the failure to handle software implementation effectively. The subject is huge and our problem has always been if we start writing it's difficult to stop!! For this newsletter we decided to share some thoughts with you on four of the areas we think organisations frequently have problems with. These issues are particularly strongly relevant to the implementation of wide-ranging business system packages in larger companies but are also relevant to other situations. We hope this will get you thinking about your own implementations, past and future, so that you can avoid some of the pitfalls.

1. Harmonising Processes

Software systems are often seen as a total cure for recurring symptoms – why is it that I cannot see on my screen the total vacancies across my organisation? What is the current absence level across the business? The new system promises all, but when it's in, my line colleagues still challenge my figures.

There is no short cut to fully understanding how processes work within the organisation and how these could be improved working with the software. Only detailed analysis will show the differences between how the organisation **believes** a process operates; how it **actually** operates in practice [don't forget to ask those actually doing the job] and how the software process itself is **designed** to operate.

Altering processes has a "knock on" effect on both work and job design; it is likely that the jobs of many of those who interact with the software system will change in some way. Involvement of workers who interact with the system is key to harmonising people and technology; this includes both those for whom the system is a major part of their job and others

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 who interact with the system more infrequently for example line managers using an HR system.

Definitions of data elements are key; are all parts of the organisation working to the same definitions? Sounds straightforward but look under the surface and you may be surprised what you find!

To really squeeze the juice out of the system needs detailed understanding and a reiterative cycle of harmonising process, practice and software functionality.

2. Learn and Improve

Even in these relatively enlightened HR times it is surprising how many organisations still think a quick burst of training just prior to implementation is sufficient.

Looking at systems used in HR in particular, many have rich functionality which if introduced over too short a timescale can be a little overwhelming to users.

Software providers often include initial training in their offering but this should really be considered as a minimum introduction. Training material needs to be blended with the organisation's processes and culture to be effective for the user; bite sized chunks are easier to digest and can also form useful on line reference material for the user to refer back to at a later stage.
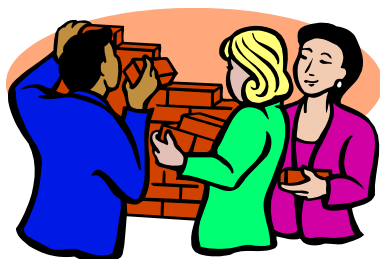
 Surgeries can be useful following implementation; here a knowledgeable user takes take a surgery during a specific time, say over the lunch period, users can drop in to ask questions or check ways of operating.

Providing a means of sharing experiences with system encourages the "learn and improve" cycle, this could be on line perhaps supplemented by workshops on specific topics from time to time.

Getting the most out of a system takes time, typically a few years for complex systems, and, don't forget the needs of new users especially line managers who perhaps only interact with the system occasionally.

3. Utilising Resources

Expectations of new systems are often high and actual costs frequently fail to keep within budget; manpower resources to support implementations are at a premium and senior management tend to look for reductions before the system is really capable of delivering full benefits.

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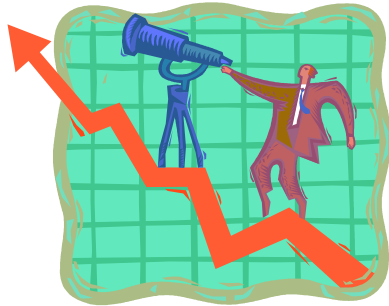
These concerns can be addressed by detailed forward planning; we are not covering detailed project planning issues in this article but a few reminders would not go amiss:

- Carry out some risk analysis – what could affect the resources you are relying on? How can you mitigate these risks?
- How much functionality can you realistically implement at any one time? What are the key timings for the organisation eg appraisal times; other planned events/changes in the organisation, negotiations/implementation of salary awards, mergers etc
- Where are the biggest benefits in functionality? Can these be tackled first?
- Who are the users you are relying on for a successful implementation? These need to be clearly recognised by all involved and their day to day operations perhaps supplemented by others.
- Whilst there is usually a core of users who are involved full time in implementation other manpower resources can be drafted in for short periods – cast around for individuals that are useful and enthusiastic.

4. Not A Top Management Issue

The fact that a new business system can totally change the way your business operates on a day to day basis and can cost a fortune to implement still doesn't persuade many top managers that implementation is anything to do with them.

The rest of this article indicates that difficult and/or expensive decisions need to be made if the implementation is to be a success – without the sheer power of top management to push these through an implementation will become bogged down or drift.

Some signs that top management is not taking the new system seriously are:

- Implementation responsibility is given to a business manager who needs to be given something to do before leaving the company. He/she has little credibility from the start and perhaps little incentive.
- The project is given to the IT department who know little about the business processes. Why should business departments change the way they work

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based solely on the experience of an IT professional? By the way, it is just as bad when business managers dictate to IT what technology should be used.

- The implementation isn't a regular on the agenda of top management meetings. When this is the case it **will** be on the agenda when costs escalate and business is interrupted ("sorry the new system would allow no despatches today").
- **Responsibility** for the project is not given to a senior and well respected member of the top management team.

Some thoughts to get you started.   If you have some interesting experiences in this area do write and let us know; your organisation can always be kept confidential !!!

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