HR Software Selection - Myths & Legends

Myth #1: HR Software will solve all my problems

HR Software in the form of an HRIS automates processes that already exist. If you have a well-tuned HR function, HR software will simply make that well-tuned operation work much faster. If you have a poorly organized HR function, HR software will simply expose any problems or issues very rapidly.

The speed with which an HRIS operates has the direct result of allowing more work to get done and for it to be done more efficiently. This enables the HR function to be more vital, more visible, and more timely. If timeliness is a problem (and it can be with reporting), an HRIS will solve the problem. However, if reports are a problem due to missing or incorrect data, you will simply have the ability to create bad reports quickly.

Myth #2: HR Software will eliminate jobs in the HR Department

Very seldom does anyone actually lose a job when an HRIS is implemented. Staff members who slave over the filing cabinet retrieving and restoring files will lose those mundane duties and gain time for proactive tasks such as reporting and planning. Staff members will no longer serve the dreaded filing cabinet, but will serve the management staff as is appropriate.

In larger HR staffs in a manual environment, there may be an overstaff situation to compensate for the lack of automation. In this instance staff members are often reassigned from the filing job to a role that was not getting done before. For example, many former file clerks who have quit the filing habit have become employment specialists and focus their talents on recruiting, taking advantage of the applicant tracking capabilities of the recently implemented HR software.

Myth #3: HR Software is complex and thus very expensive

An HRIS is not complex at all when compared to accounting software, which can be very inexpensive. The key factor in an HRIS is width. An HRIS tracks a vast array of data for employees, applicants, jobs, positions, etc. However, that vast array of data is simply stored, reported on, and used for a few basic calculations. NASA would not use HR software to plan a mission to Mars.

Myth #4: HR Software always takes a long time to implement

In general, a well-run manual HR function within a small to mid-size business can be automated in a very short period of time, sometimes in just a week or two. Remember, automation merely causes existing functions to happen faster and more efficiently. If you have well-defined review procedures, salary grades, job codes and such, implementation is a matter of recording this information and then using it. If few or any of these are well-defined, the automation process may well force you to define them and implementation will likely be delayed.

The actual task of implementing an HRIS is composed of recording current and historical data and of adjusting procedures for the automated production of reports, letters, etc. There is no secret black hole into which you will pour hours of work and there is no mystery to the task. You just do it and it's done.

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Legend #5: HR Software requires lengthy and costly training

HRIS software merely automates tasks that you already perform (or need to be performing). Well-conceived and well-designed software should take into account the typical ways in which HR tasks are already performed. The wheel does not need to be reinvented.

Granted, you will need to learn how the HR software does things that you used to do manually, but we are dealing with the capture, storage, and retrieval of information. Any software that cannot simply automate the process of putting information into computer files instead of putting paper into filing cabinets, or that cannot replace an Excel spreadsheet, is probably not well conceived or well designed. There is an old saying in the software business. "If software is hard to use, it won't get used." An indication of how hard software is to use is how hard it is to learn. If you need weeks and weeks of training to learn how to do what you already know how to do, there is probably something wrong with the software, not you.

Yes, you will need some training with your HRIS, but if it is more than just a few days, you may be paying for badly designed software, not quality training.

Legend #6: Customizing HR Software Requires Very Expensive Consultants

The normal reason software needs to be customized is because you wish to change the software to more precisely meet your needs. If you know what you wish to change, the hard work is already done. Most quality HR software provides some type of user customization capability. A well-designed customization feature will allow you to make most, if not all, of your desired changes in just a few hours or less. It is very important that you purchase a product as close to your needs as possible. Determine if using the inherent user customization features will allow you to make the final adjustments yourself. You would not purchase a sports car and request the dealer to customize it into a van. Likewise, you would not purchase an HRIS product designed one way and then try to make it work another way. Wise research will assist you in getting a product close to your needs and in getting a product that you can easily and inexpensively customize to precisely meet your needs.

Legend #7: HR Software requires constant IS involvement

Some HRIS products may require constant IS involvement, but a well-designed and well-implemented product should not. If you are not getting constant IS involvement with your system now (manual or automated), you should not need it with a new automated system, unless of course, the HR software is poorly designed, poorly conceived, and/or poorly implemented.

Legend #8: Getting Technical Support is a problem with HR Software

There are endless horror stories about lengthy delays for returned calls, inexperienced support reps, voice mail, and of course, program errors (i.e. bugs). Well-designed HR software minimizes the need for technical support, but there is never, ever a replacement for the human touch. Well-trained reps can answer questions quickly and refer software problems to the development staff for speedy resolution. During the purchase process, you can determine the quality of support you are going to receive by demoing not only the software but also the technical support. Given that everyone is at their best before a sale, you can safely assume that if pre-sales efforts are weak, post sales efforts will be weaker.