When it comes to technology, HR should be control freaks

10 tips for HR to retain leadership of HR technology purchases

Harriet "HR" Robinson, vice-president of human resources, read the email from her CEO with dread. "We've signed a three-year contract with a new vendor for new workforce management technology. Please contact them to begin the implementation. We need to get started with this right away. We're expecting big things from this technology and are counting on you to make it happen."

Harriet, of course, is fictional but the scenario should be strikingly familiar to many HR professionals. Generally, requests from above are relatively benign with minimal risks — "Please hire the president's cousin's nephew for the summer internship."

Other requests, such as those that involve HR technology projects, have the potential to create serious problems and setbacks, including large financial losses for an organization.

Technology mandates come not only from senior management but from information technology departments. HR vendors often find it easier to sell to those who are familiar with technology but not to the HR functions the technology supports. To minimize the risk of being asked to implement a program that is doomed from the start, HR needs to maintain a leadership role in all technology purchases that directly affect HR functions.

The following 10 tips will help ensure HR plays a starring role in all HR technology purchasing decisions.

Know the technology: Keep up with legacy systems, current technology and future trends. Learn the pros and cons of each system and the vendor's performance record. Be ahead of the curve even for

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products you don't anticipate needing in the near future.

Keep a little black book: Keep a running list of all the vendors in the HR space. This should include both large enterprise providers and small niche vendors. As you hear positive feedback from colleagues and peers about the vendors and products, make a note in your book. Be specific — mark the best with five stars.

Listen-up for the bad guys: Keep your ears alert for information on problem vendors, technology that doesn't live up to expectations and vendors that are struggling financially. Note these in your vendor list as well.

Network with peers: Develop and maintain a network of HR professionals in-person and online. Talk with peers about technology and vendors and share lessons learned.

Nurture relationships internally: Develop a good relationship with the IT department. If the IT manager likes, trusts and respects you, she will come to you early on if any new HR technology is proposed.

Nurture relationships internally (part two): It's critical to have a good relationship

with the CEO and other senior leaders. They must feel confident in your skills and abilities when it comes to "all things people," including employee-related technology. The CEO shouldn't even think of making an HR technology decision without you.

Participate in the HR technology discussion: Whether it be through blogs or social networking sites, learn from others and share your expertise. Join LinkedIn HR groups, follow the top HR twitterers, read and comment on blogs or start your own blog. If you are not participating in the HR tech discussion, those outside of HR may assume you are afraid of technology.

Create an HR technology road map: Develop an HR technology plan with short- and long-term tech goals. Include a brief value proposition statement for each initiative. Share this map with senior management and IT.

Speak up: Talk about technology and HR vendors with senior management and IT. Summarize what you learn at HR technology conferences and provide a write-up of the most favourite and least favourite vendors. Talk about HR technology successes from peer companies. If executive and IT managers view you as knowledgeable in this area, they are more likely to include you in the conversation when a vendor calls. Better yet, they will happily refer vendor calls to you in the first place.

Be direct: Pre-empt being kept out of the loop by directly asking IT and senior management to include you in any discussions on specific types of workforce technology that are brought to their attention. Provide a specific list with all types of HR technology. Be aware some vendors will intentionally call HR-related programs something that sounds less like HR technology in order to keep HR out of the loop.

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