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HR in the era of collaboration and networking

Sudipta Dev analyzes how the Web 2.0 wave has impacted human capital management in organizations



From Blackberries to blogs and podcasts to portals, there is a constant stream of new methods to communicate with members of the workforce

In the era of globalization, with fading geographical boundaries and a globally dispersed workforce, networking and collaboration has brought forth a new scenario of how people work and are managed.

Human capital management solutions, which traditionally included functions like basic payroll processing to compensation management, learning and development, are now incorporating the latest in collaboration and networking.

The Web 2.0 wave has impacted HR technology in an unprecedented way. "Collaboration has synergized the processes across organizations in the world and networking has brought in a paradigm shift in the way technology is used in companies. We are in the age of new

economy where competition is global, capital is abundant, products are developed quickly and cheaply, and people are willing to change jobs often. In this kind of environment smart, committed, experienced people who are technologically literate, globally astute, and operationally agile are the new competitive advantage," stated Nagaraj Bhargava, VP-Marketing, SAP India.

The evolution of the Internet to Web 2.0 and beyond has given a strong impetus to HR technology, from professional networking through social networking sites to Second Life, from standard HR process automation to on-demand HR IT services, it has come a long way. "This has of course made a significant difference to employee

productivity and efficiency. More strategic interventions are possible in a well-defined response time. It has brought in parameters which help define the predictability of HR processes," explained Vikram Bhardwaj, MD, Redileon.

Impact on work culture

Wikis, blogs and social networking has changed the way people work and interact these days. This evidently impacts the existing systems in place, particularly knowledge boundaries. "This challenges everything about talent management. There exist innumerable possibilities through and for collaboration. This, in turn, challenges the basic business models and associated competitive advantage, which brings in challenges to HR in terms of how we appraise people, how you reward them, matters related to intellectual property and so on," said Sanjay Paul Antony, Senior VP, Human Resources, Subex.

Research is one of the fields where collaboration and networking can be easily applied. "The Open Source movement is a good example, but there are skeptics there as well," stated Antony, pointing out that already, there are organizations which have set up companies in a 'digital business park', in virtual space on the Web. Organizations should be able to merge globally dispersed virtual and flexible workforce. In a collaborative working environment where boundaries are bleak, HR needs to ensure that credit is given to those who deserve. "'Wikinomics', which taps into collaborative model on the Web into a business proposition, can thrive only on openness and fairness. If HR is not able to cater to this, this will lead to suspicion and also to questions on exploitation," added Antony.

Another aspect of this could be ▶

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►that in the collaborative business model, an organization need not hire a person. An organization which needs a solution to a business problem that requires expert advice, could host it for experts to comment on. "The person who provides the solution could be rewarded. The possibilities we open up through this are mind-boggling. While some organizations have seen benefits from this, it could take some more time for this to take a structured form and generate business results," explained Antony.

Future scenario

Effective communication would take a front seat in the days to come. From Blackberries to blogs and podcasts to portals, there is a constant stream of new methods to communicate with members of the workforce. "These innovative communication channels provide a conduit to deploy and integrate talent management functionality that is personalized to individuals. In fact, with today's highly mobile workforce, talent management systems, processes and content are increasingly dependent on employee self-service and mobile devices," added Bhargava.

The intranet, for example, provides a single point of access to personalized dashboards, applications,

content, search and analytics. "Portals enable organizations to build communities of interest, share projects and collaborate inside and outside the organization. Now a recruiter in Mumbai can message with a counterpart in Bangalore, access turnover analysis reports, approve a requisition via workflow, access a third party job site and send emails to prospective candidates, all from one place—the portal," pointed out Bhargava.

Antony believes that one of the significant areas would be taking forward the concept of collaborative content generation. Remuneration and rewards systems would have its own complexities, in a geographically dispersed workforce, which again need not have a fixed location to work from.

Technology will play a very important role where it helps in converting the vast data lying in the data pool into actionable information. "The senior management team (CXOs) are looking at a tool which will help them slice and dice data with no involvement of the IT experts. HR departments are now tasked with building motivated, trained and highly skilled teams that provide the organization a powerful competitive advantage. Yet very few have a comprehensive view of their data and the tools to analyze this



Nagaraj Bhargava

VICE-PRESIDENT, MARKETING, SAP INDIA

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information so they can align their activities with corporate strategy. Without analytics, which provides the ability to track both the "what" and the "why" of a situation, organizations are put in a reactive situation, usually waiting for a crisis to force change," felt Bhargava. It is crucial to determine which talent management elements can have the greatest impact on the business and provide a better basis for prioritization and implementation. ■

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