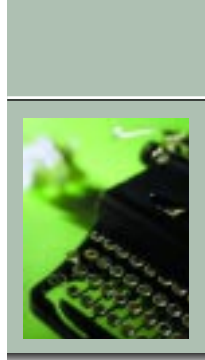

From the Editors

By Robert H. Stambaugh and Karen V. Beaman



In this first “double” issue of the *IHRIM Journal*, we have collected a diverse group of articles from an equally diverse group of authors — university professors, technologists, non-HR business leaders, HR system vendors, practitioners and consultants. These contributions are tied together by a common focus: they are all responses to a question we asked when first soliciting contributors to the issue: what’s going on “out-

technology” aspects of the systems and programs we operate with today. They make persuasive arguments that we should reduce the focus on IT or perhaps use it to enhance the “human” parts of the business — not the routine aspects we have engineered and modeled to death in the 1990s. Jac Fitz-Enz, perhaps the “father of HR quantification” also weighs in with thoughts that support the human side of the equation.

us all the opportunity of self-diagnosing where we stand today, and hence how ready we are for more efficient systems in the future. Jim Spoor also addresses some of the same concerns about past behavior and possible changes — but at a much higher level. One might suggest reading Spoor’s article and thinking about its broad implications, then shifting to Bloom’s for a guide to specific action plans. Both Eric Lane and Davis Klaila expand this line of thinking a little farther, with their discussions of the knowledge management components of our business and the workforce measurement issues that we are being asked to provide by managers everywhere. As if that weren’t enough to force a rethinking and expansion of HRIS roles and actions, Brian McIntyre identifies a whole new charter area for HR and HRIS: using creativity for the graphics and messaging we need to develop our own branding, culture, and the magnets that attract and then retain new talent in today’s shifting labor market.

... what’s going on “outside the box” that contains HRIS and what should HRIS professionals and managers do in response?

side the box” that contains HRIS and what should HRIS professionals and managers do in response? In a few instances, our contributors have provided a very straightforward assessment of new trends or issues and some of the corresponding prescriptions they believe HR and HRIS must make. Other articles present a set of trends and suggest paths that HRIS managers, and sometimes vendors, ought to follow. More often, however, the observations you’ll encounter in these pages leave the interpretation of what’s occurring and the appropriate response up to the readers of the articles themselves. They ask the reader to internalize and personalize the issues at hand, and then to develop equally personal responses via systems and behaviors that will “fit” their own organizations and agendas.

Discovery of this issue of “fit” is itself one of the outcomes of collecting this set of articles. Several writers point out what they consider an imbalance in today’s approach to HRIS, information technology and knowledge management. In their separate articles, Dee Hock and Margaret Wheatley draw from their vast experience with large organizations and prescribe a greater emphasis on the “human” as opposed to the

Will such “humane” approaches flourish in today’s organizations? Dave Arella chronicles his experiences at Apple Computer and later parts of his career, and sees the potential for tremendous positive impact via personalization, conscious use of corporate culture and good system design. But John Sullivan, who teaches and consults extensively in the corridors of Silicon Valley’s high-tech operations, advances a different, yet credible argument for a view of an HR department (and presumably the support HRIS) as an instrument of war between people, programs and budgets. Our value, he says, in this sure to be controversial article, lies in our contribution to the war effort.

There are many approaches to deciding where on the “humane/warfare” continuum you think your system belongs — now and in the future. We would suggest you consider Al Walker’s balanced (or “unbalanced”) scorecard approach as a starting point for this assessment.

But how can we contribute if what we produce is out of touch, out of date, or simply off the mark in today’s business climate? Naomi Bloom identifies some of the mistakes we have made in the past and then offers one prescription for changing our habits — and it contains enough checklists and choices to allow

We can look at the above set of diagnoses and prescriptions as candidates for relatively short term planning and action, but another group of authors have chosen as their point of reference an even broader landscape — the cultures and workings of the organizations within which our HR systems exist. Tom Davenport, for example, poses a fundamental question for anyone in business today — but particularly for over-informed HR and HRIS stakeholders: how do we command the attention of our customers when they’re inundated with a flood of competing data and information? His observations and suggestions merit serious thought and almost certainly lead to a radical rethinking of reports, report libraries and “data” delivery within organizations.

And speaking of serious thought — and the slack time companies need to allow for it as a part of every worker’s regular routine — there’s Chuck House’s

panoramic view of HR, recruitment, competencies, and societal forces that needs to be read several times over, then digested and applied throughout the organization.

The Davenport and House articles, at a minimum, illustrate how broad the reach of HR and HRIS can be and has become. Likewise, Dave Ulrich's analysis of the environment in which our HR function exists, and his suggestions for some of the ways we might behave in response, make us realize how much different today's HR/HRIS function is than what we experienced a generation ago. This last trio of articles ought to be highlighted and left on executive desks everywhere in your organization — not just in HR and IT.

Speaking of differences, there's also Wayne Baker's discussion of "social capital" — a concept of which most people in HR and HRIS were unaware as little as two or three years ago. Wayne's portrayal of what is for most of us an entirely new facet of organizational life — along with some of the challenges and even potential legal issues that the new dimension introduces — suggests we should go back and reread every other article again, this time with that new — social — dimension in mind.

It's just possible that many of the *Journal's* more technically-oriented readers will feel a little lost in the face of such an overwhelming groundswell of "soft" issues. If it's any consolation, a solid outside the box technical assessment actually leads to similar conclusions: look at Bennett Reddin's discussion of where we're headed for just such an approach and conclusion.

It's difficult not to be overwhelmed by the sheer breadth of challenge that we face in the short-term period of, say the

next two to three years. We're asked to become more human and perhaps a little less precise, but at the same time we're told that we need to measure more and better. We're given specific prescriptions for fixing broken systems, but we're also being told that many components of systems heretofore believed to be essential to their use are actually neutral or damaging at best. We hear good reasons to model our systems better as a prerequisite to managing them better, but we also hear how the side effects of ERP and other techniques may suffocate diversity and innovation — and thus undermine both our systems and our organizations.

Small wonder we've stayed so close to home with our own musings about HRIS and the environment it inhabits: there's so much ambiguity and perhaps hostility out there that it simply appears at first glance to be an unattractive and dangerous territory to explore. However, that's just at first glance. What we hope you'll see from the small collection of articles and authors presented here is that there are already explorers whose discoveries are taming these territories, if we only know how to look for them.

As you read these articles, we'd like to recommend a short exercise to kick-start your exploration. For each article, ask yourself the following questions:

- Was I aware of this topic before I read the article — and if not, why not?
- How does the content relate to my company's HR and HRIS capability — right now, and a year or so down the line?
- What three (or four) possible demands does the content suggest I should prioritize as part of my HRIS?
- Do I have the expertise to accomplish them now — if not, where do I find the expertise?

➤ Do my competitors have the expertise to beat me to implementation or adoption?

➤ Can I describe the problem and solution to my management?

You should then be able to assign a rough prioritization to the list of problems you've listed. Then ask one more question; how do I get started?

Our final suggestion is to include in your action plan a resolution to read a little more, and to make sure that what you read is a little broader than what it was a year or two ago. Supplement what you read with attendance at trade shows and conferences — which Bill Kutik assures us will be around as guides for some time to come, albeit in forms we may not immediately recognize if we think only of today's show format and approach. Most of what is truly new and promising for HR and HRIS is just over the horizon, and it's up to our profession to find it and apply it first. While we don't think the *IHRIM Journal* is the entire answer, we do suggest it's a great place to find some hints that point you to the answers.

Robert H. Stambaugh

Guest Editor, *IHRIM Journal*
Vice President, HRchitect
BStambaugh@HRchitect.com
Kekaha, HI USA

Karen V. Beaman

Editor-in-Chief, *IHRIM Journal*
Vice President/General Manager,
ADP/AGConsulting
KBeaman@AGConsult.com
Portland, OR USA