



The New and Improved HRIS 101: What it takes to be a Successful HRIS Professional in 2014

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The role of the HRIS professional today and, thus, the skills required to perform the job is influenced by three factors: the role of the Human Resources function in the organization, the technology that is commercially available and in use, and the globalization of the economy.

The HR professional's job has evolved in the past 40 years and along with it the role of the Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS) professional. Technology has advanced at an even faster pace than the HR function and the HRIS professional has had to adopt new competencies to keep up. It is not as if the original competencies are no longer relevant, but rather that new competencies were developed as business needs changed and technology became more sophisticated. Therefore, to understand the full scope of the HRIS professional's portfolio, we have to look at its historic evolution and the skills required in each era.

The 1980s – The Era of Compliance

During this time, when the responsibility of HR (formerly known as Personnel Administration) was to manage the organization's record keeping and employment compliance, the objective of HRIS was to support administrative systems that would make the record keeping and compliance tasks easier to perform. The IT department played the primary roles in procurement and maintenance of these systems as they were on-premise on mainframe or AS400 hardware. These systems were developed to track information for

compliance with U.S. labor regulations replacing manual paper based processes. During this era, most if not all systems used in the U.S. were U.S. centric, the idea of having a global HRIS was only discussed at the largest of companies and not yet a reality in the commercial marketplace.

When HR was an administrative function, using data about the people in the organization for making business decisions was never an expectation. Reports would be generated in the form of a roster that provided lists of employees for various purposes. However, these reports were used by HR to assist in managing the function and when shared with colleagues outside of HR the information was manually reworked into a presentation.

Consequently, the systems of that time focused on performing transactional data entry in the "best" way possible for HR to make the data administration as efficient as possible.

The systems that were available during that "administrative era" of HR were supported and maintained by an IT organization, as they required programming language skills and competency in IT tools like "TSO Editor" and creation of job routines via tools like Joint Command Language (JCL). Because of the deep technical expertise required to support and maintain these systems, the HRIS professional rarely, if ever, actually made any changes to the system.

The HRIS professional's role at that time was one of "custodian of the data." The primary job was to enter information into the system (or manage staff that performed this function), perform audits of the data in the system and be able to write reports to get data out of the system. They worked with the IT department to make sure the requirements were programmed into the systems.

Core job competencies for this era of professional were data management, data auditing, report writing, and communication of business requirements to IT.

The 1990s – The Era of Personal Computing

During this era, the personal computer became a necessity, not a luxury. With mainstream acceptance, it changed how organizations thought about work and also changed expectations about how quickly work could be performed. It was also in this era that the use of e-mail began to take hold as a standard means of communication.

Whether the HR role evolved before the technology, or the evolution of technology enabled the HR role to evolve, is a discussion for a separate time. However, they both did evolve. As HR was being asked to provide meaningful information about employees for decision-making, the personal computer was changing the way people worked in general. The mainframe/AS400 platform-based systems were replaced with "client server," an architecture that

allowed distribution of application and data across networks and eventually over the Web. This changed the dynamic between IT and HR and the role of the HRIS professional expanded. It was also during this time that organizations were planning for the millennium change. These older systems were built to accommodate a year up to 1999, and thus to rush to upgrade an existing system or purchase a new system to accommodate the year 2000 (Y2K) drove much activity during the latter part of this decade.

The HR function expanded as more organizations were building specialties in “learning and organizational” development. The recruiting function began to take advantage of personal computing and the Internet with applicant tracking systems. Benefits departments were talking about automation of the enrollment process with “self-service.” As more information was collected, additional needs for reporting of this information were surfacing.

Outsourcing all, or part, of the HR function gained wide acceptance during this time as well. The HRIS professional had to adapt to working with third-party vendors regarding information sharing and coordination of processes, and began to build skills in vendor management through the process.

The HRIS professional still needed the skills from the prior era, but also needed to perform business analysis and process design. Data management changed from that of working solely to keep data in the system accurate, to working with Excel and Access as tools to supplement reporting and data analysis that was offered by the HR software applications. This was the beginning of the broadening of process knowledge beyond HR and payroll processes. The HRIS professionals needed to learn about the other functions within HR.

With the advent of these new systems and the need to purchase new systems to be compliant with Y2K, the HRIS professional had to add software requirements identification, vendor evaluation, selection, and financial acumen to their skill inventory in order to manage the purchasing process and create business cases for these purchases. As the new systems were being implemented, the nature of these systems placed a larger responsibility on the HRIS professional for business process design, data analysis of converted data, and system testing.

Core job competencies for this era were data analysis, business requirements documentation, business process design, business case creation, and a broader knowledge of the HR function.

Those that were able to master the technology changes of the 1990s were poised and ready for what the 2000s had to bring.

The 2000s – The Era of Global Information Access and Software-as-a-Service (SaaS)

The global business economy of the 2000s forever changed the parameters of the HR function and the

requirements for the technology needed to support it. No longer was globalization solely for the large Fortune 500 organization. Business of all sizes were expanding around the globe. The Internet took flight and made communications around the world faster and easier. During this era, business and technology evolved faster than ever before.

Human Resources, perhaps for the first time ever, truly shifted from one of administration to strategic management of people. In this era, talent management became a formal discipline in the HR profession and to support that discipline new talent management applications were created. The challenges of knowing what jobs are needed, where they are needed, and who the right resources are had spanned across the globe from both an external and internal talent acquisition perspective. Processes for talent identification, management of performance, and succession planning grew in visibility and importance. Human Resources made it to the “C” suite and with that came an expectation of business acumen and metrics.

This era saw a tremendous growth in technology options that support the talent management processes and with it the introduction of systems hosted and delivered by the software vendor and the advent of Software-as-a-Service (SaaS). These SaaS systems also fundamentally changed the application maintenance and support model. These systems were configurable and no longer required deep technical expertise; rather, business analysis and process skills were required to support and maintain these systems. This fundamentally shifted the role of HRIS from system users to system owners.

These systems were separate from the core HR and payroll applications. At the beginning of this era, it was not uncommon to see one company have three, four or five separate systems to support these processes. The systems, consequently, required frequent data synchronization and a greater support effort. As this era came to a close, the “integrated talent management” suite of applications became more common, and enabled a consolidation of applications and better overall support of the business process.

The need of line managers and business leaders of global talent information stressed the traditional reporting tools provided by HR software. This decade saw the creation of analytic software designed specifically for human capital information. The data analysis and business process skills acquired by an HRIS professional were needed in order to be able to present the data that was meaningful to the business in ways that were easily viewable and understandable by business leaders.

The vendor evaluation and selection competencies increased in importance as new talent management and other HRMS replacement systems were being deployed. The global nature of business and information also required HRIS professionals to understand the systems’ implications, data privacy requirements, and information requirements

for the countries where their companies operated. This is particularly true in the context of a new application purchase where the ability to go beyond just language translation and currency requirements, when identifying how the systems needed to support a global process and workforce, is critical to making a well-informed software selection.

The HRIS professional has always needed business process design skills, and with the advent of global processes and the intersection of talent processes with core HR processes, this skill increased in importance. The data management skills developed earlier had to be adapted to master the data integrations needed to keep all of these systems data “in-sync.”

The greatest change for the HRIS professional, however, was the role of systems administrator. As personal computing became the norm, SaaS grew in adoption and Web-based applications became commonplace, the role of IT versus HRIS in supporting applications blurred. The HRIS professional had to acquire additional technical competencies in system configuration, and an understanding of how PC operating systems and Internet browser compatibility affected the performance of the business applications.

Core job competencies in this era for the HRIS professional were global data management and processes, vendor management, systems administration, business requirements documentation, business process design, business information creation, vendor evaluation and selection, and a deeper knowledge of the HR function.

The 2010s – A Social and Mobile Revolution

As the global economy changed the face of business in the 2000s, the mainstream acceptance of social technology and the proliferation of mobile technology are changing business and the workplace in ways that we are just beginning to understand. The expectation of employees that they will have access to any and all information to perform their job instantly and on their mobile device is challenging the traditional model of information control. For the HR function, this means an adaptation to more visibility into the worker, inside and outside of work. For IT, this means accepting the electronic device of one’s choosing and allowing access to traditionally “inside the firewall” applications and information from anywhere.

Some of the challenges for HR are the availability of commercial human capital management software via a mobile device as vendors continue to update their applications and some lag behind. Other challenges include the complexity of a process, as it exists today, and then redesigning it to work on a mobile application.

In addition to the job competencies acquired in the past 30 years, and those technical competencies that will be needed as technology evolves, the HRIS professional will also need these key behavioral competencies in order to be

successful:

- **Adaptability** – the ability to change and accept change. Having the capacity to readily change actions, and behavior;
- **Analysis** – analyzes problems, situations, and circumstances and their impact. Integrates information and requirements from a variety of sources to evaluate alternatives and make decisions;
- **Business Acumen** – demonstrates knowledge policies, practices, trends, and information affecting the business and organization. Understands the drivers for company profits and is aware of how strategies and tactics work in the marketplace;
- **Communication** – conveys information and ideas through various media in a manner that engages the user and helps them to understand and retain the information;
- **Self-Motivation** – accomplishes personal achievement and excellence for one’s own purpose and acquires the knowledge and skills needed for success independently; and,
- **Relationship Building** – establishes relationships and works effectively in collaboration with others across and outside the organization to achieve goals.

What it takes to be a successful HRIS professional in 2014 is a cumulative skillset that has evolved over the past four decades as organizational structure and internal/external requirements have changed, business competitiveness has increasingly focused on the true differentiator of talent and associated metrics, and technology has continued to develop at warp speed. It is a combination of high-tech and high-touch, with the added ingredients of flexibility and a willingness to accept and welcome whatever changes the future has in store.

About the Author



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