



# The Back Story

## Looking for Technology that's in it for Life

By Katherine Jones, Bersin by Deloitte

We can see from the articles in this issue that today's software indeed can touch every part of employee life — from the proverbial hire to retire/fire. This brings to mind one of the most overused phases in tech talk: “end-to-end.” It has meant that the software did everything possible in a business cycle (order to cash, for example), everything possible in an entire company (raw materials to billing and beyond), or in the case of employees, everything from the time they applied for a position to their afterlife upon leaving the company.

While today's software providers may shun the cliché, the movement to integrated talent management has reignited the concept of a virtual cradle-to-grave people management environment at work. Originally, the concept of life-cycle management went from the point of hire to the point of exit — rather an “inside-the-four-walls” concept of the employee.

Today that has changed. Let's look at “end-to-end and then some” and the data management ramifications for HR professionals.

Companies — via technology — begin collecting information about people long before they may even consider becoming an applicant to that company. And given the transparency to information available on social networks and through search engines, a great deal can be known — and maintained— about potential future employees. In the past, the candidate application was the first point of data collection about an employee — now it is not only much earlier, but often far more informative.

Social networking continues to collect information about the individual once an active employee. While LinkedIn profiles will still likely be eyed and perhaps saved, organizational networks prove vehicles for collecting interests, gripes, collaborative tendencies (or lack thereof), engagement, and much else. Participation in informal groups is likely captured somewhere in some form or another (the video of the company rock band or the winning baseball team), adding to our ability to make judgments about the engagement and sociability of the employee.

We have never had more data about our employees — and it seems to be growing dramatically. Yesterday's “employee self-service” applications have morphed into systems of engagement, once-a-year performance reviews

have become a continuous coaching and feedback loop, and anything that was once a static “event” — such as, for example, an annual survey, is rapidly being replaced by a wide variety of real-time feedback, social sensing, and analytics systems that can gauge and measure employee feedback quickly. The ability to get the pulse rate of the entire population in real-time will appeal to HR, and mean more inbound data more often, all to be stored and analyzed.

In today's corporate world, the contact with the employee may be never ending. Once, employees who quit (especially if they were going to a competitor) were walked out the door and virtually banished from the company forever as a traitor to the cause. Today that too is sometimes different: companies are often willing and even encouraging to talent that leaves, maintains contact with them during their “sabbatical” at another firm, and consider them positively should they seek to return. They see (and likely maintain) their contact and communication information with the now ex-employee, any Yelp or Glassdoor comments or feedback that may be posted, and watch for an updating of his or her profile on LinkedIn to indicate that the individual may be back in the job market.

Likewise, retirees are now treated like emeritus professors, communicated with on an ongoing basis, often with continuing corporate email accounts, which allow them to mentor and give advice to current workers, and as with the employee who voluntarily quit for another position, both ex-employees are regarded as a source of referrals to the company.

The result? Concerned about a pipeline of talent, an engaged workforce, and a positive employment brand, today's HR collects more and more information about all members, not-yet-members, and ex-members of its workforce. Is this big data? No, but it's *lots* of data — a high and growing volume of both structured and unstructured data.

Gathering, analyzing, storing, and reanalyzing... more data, more often. Real-time data generally requires real-time responses. Think about it: your employees come in to the office and send frownie faces in response to a computerized “mood ring” on their smartphone or computer (several programs today support this). How is HR to respond? Does 700 frownie faces mean a crisis? Does 20? Will HR now receive engagement-related data that it is ill-equipped to respond to? Each smiley and frownie “happiness” indicator, each kudo or reward badge from one employee to another is a data point to be kept, analyzed and saved for longer-term trend analysis. And in our integrated talent management world, each

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data point relates to something else: the kudos may relate to a performance goal achieved, the badges may indicate an internal social network of “go-to” employees HR wasn’t aware of, the smileys to employee satisfaction, the frownies to retention risks or overstressed, overburdened workers.

There are several impacts from this literal life-long association with the individual – vastly more data is collected, and the storage and retrieval mechanisms must be there to support it. Unstructured data of many types will be added to the already-large amount of structured data maintained today (think applications, performance reviews, compensation information, etc.) as videos from interviews and coaching sessions are stored; YouTube data demonstrating the employee’s skillsets are added to traditional dashboards listing skills; biometric data is created and maintained for use with secure access devices – and much of this may be stored into perpetuity. Not only issues of the volume of data stored, but the policy issues of “who has access to what” over time require careful consideration.

Look at the many areas of employee-related technology discussed in this issue of *Workforce Solutions Review*. Each will not only assist in the functional task at hand – each will add data to your ever-growing knowledge store, to be saved, reported upon, analyzed and likely reanalyzed. Managing the uber life cycle of an employee? A great concept – just prepare to manage the onslaught of information that goes with it.

## About the Author



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