

Achieving Buy-In



Investing in a new integrated HR Management System, with or without e-HR self-service capability, can bring major benefits to an organisation. Benefits which can be felt by the board, the shareholders, the HR department, every line manager and all employees. But while these benefits can be achieved, what will they be? It will depend on your ability to identify, set and manage the expectations of the various stakeholders involved – the board, your colleagues, the management and employees.

In this latest addition to our Business Benefits Booster series, we look at the vital third process which has to happen in parallel with the two well-recognised fundamentals – establishing the business case and managing the procurement project. The third process is the planned communication programme, which starts from way before a single order has been signed, and goes on long after the consultants have gone home. In short, we'll call it Achieving Buy-In; but that simple phrase covers a wide-ranging, detailed and – ultimately – indispensable process.

Why do you need to achieve buy-in?

If you're investing in a modern, intranet enabled system which allows for manager and employee self-service functions, you are going to be changing the way people work with and think about HR. That needs their willing understanding and participation if it's going to work. Even if you're just implementing a new system within the HR department, the way you work is going to impact on every member of staff: they need to know what's happening, and what's the benefit to them.

Each constituent part of your audience – the board, your colleagues in HR, line management and employees – will have different expectations from the HR system (whether they interact directly with it or not). They will get different types of benefit from it, for instance:

- Better management reporting and bottom-line gains for the board.
- More job satisfaction for HR.
- Structured assistance with people management issues for managers.
- Easier access to information and approvals for employees.

This structured programme is intended to help you identify those different benefits, and communicate them appropriately to their respective audiences.

PLANNING CHECKLIST

PRE-PLANNING PHASE

Internal data gathering

- Identify HR process costs
- Identify HR opportunity costs
- Collate HR data & trends

Constituencies & representatives

- Identify communities
- Update records per community
- Identify board-level champion
- Profile project team representatives

Internal attitude research

- List services available from HR
- List services offered by new system
- Formulate questionnaires
- Carry out research by community

External market research

- Obtain data from vendors
- Collate trade press articles
- Search web sources

PLANNING PHASE

Business Case

- Needs and objectives
- Timescales
- Costs
- Benefits and ROI
- Presentation to board
- Budget approval

Prospectus

- Internal & external research
- Proposed system change
- Benefits by community
- Outline project plan

Project team

- HR department responsibilities
- IT/Finance representatives
- Manager and employee representatives
- Marketing representative

Vendor research

- Selection team
- Vendor selection
- Short-list presentations
- Customer/user research
- Selection, negotiation and SLA

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

- Publish Prospectuses

Master Communication Plan

- Objectives
- Schedule of events
- Communication media map

Targeted Communication Plans

- Board/senior executives
- HR Team
- Line Managers
- Employees
- By region/site/subsidiary

ROLL-OUT PHASE

Scheduling

- Roll-out programmes by site/department
- Technical support requirements
- Phasing out of old systems/practices

Support

- Launch events/presentations
- Line manager/staff presentations

ONGOING PHASE

Feedback loop

- User groups
- Bulletin board
- Review programme

Communication loop

- Progress & ROI reports to board
- Achievement reports to managers/employees
- Recognition for project team

PHASE 1: PRE-PLANNING

Establish the stakeholders and their needs

While we've called this topic the 'third' process, chronologically it may well be the first. Because the process of managing the expectations and maximising the actual and perceived benefits of a Human Resource System (HRS) implementation starts with finding out what everyone can realistically expect – and want – to get out of it.

It's certainly worth investigating the HR solutions available, so you have a clear idea of what they can do, but then it's important to knuckle down and establish the groundwork which your project is to be built on, in considerable detail. While it's tempting to understand the benefits yourself and kick off a project, the detailed knowledge gained at this stage is going to be vital to your success in the long term.

Phase 1 should include the following activities.

Internal data gathering and benchmarking

Collate information from within your existing operations on all the statistics, trends, measurements and costs which you will subsequently aim to effect with a new system. You'd be surprised how many projects are deemed to have failed, simply because their owners can't prove that they've enhanced anything – because they didn't benchmark enough in advance. Even if it takes a couple of months to record, try to gather all available data on:

- HR process costs: times/costs associated with data entry (especially duplication), dealing with simple staff enquiries (by category), recruiting, carrying out manual tasks which an HRS could automate.
- HR opportunity costs: if possible, assess the cost or lost gain involved in processes or initiatives which HR cannot currently carry out, for lack of 'bandwidth'.
- Data and trends: sickness, absenteeism, turnover, benefit enquiries, recruitment costs, training effectiveness, staff satisfaction ratings, complaints, discipline, payroll issues etc...

Identifying constituencies and representatives

You will ultimately need to communicate with everyone according to their role in the organisation; in the interim, you'll need to establish two-way communication with their representatives at various stages.

Take some time to establish and identify your stakeholder communities:

- Board members/senior decision-making executives
- HR professionals
- Line and site managers/team leaders
- Employees

Make sure your records are up to date and matched to these communities.

Finding out what everybody wants

Before engaging in any expectation-management exercise, it's important to know what everyone thinks they want. Then, you can start by eliminating things they can't have, and persuade them to want only what you can provide. This then forms the benchmark for your successful achievement, and tells you which changes to promote and celebrate, and which are of no particular interest.

Prepare the ground with some basic but well-formulated research. Using your experience of the existing HR environment, plus your knowledge of what a new HRS infrastructure could provide, formulate survey questionnaires for each of the communities, asking them to rate by importance:

- Services, functions, reports etc that are currently available from HR.
- Services, functions, reports etc that might be available from a new HRS.
- Comments and other things that they might desire.

Note: don't ask them to rate current performance, only importance. There's no need to stimulate qualitative judgements which may make it more difficult to get positive perceptions later on.

Looking outside for inspiration

Use vendors, the trade press and the web during this period to gather data and evidence about what other organisations are doing and what results they are achieving from the sort of changes you envisage. This information will both help you persuade sceptics internally, and help you to set realistic goals and expectations.

PHASE 2: PLANNING

Condition expectations

Once you have gathered the necessary data about the current HR environment and your communities' needs and wants, there are two documents to be created:

- 1 Business case identifying the organisation's needs from a new HRS, its objectives and timescales for implementation, costs and quantifiable benefits leading to a measured and timed return-on-investment table.
- 2 Prospectus – a multi-part draft document which presents the benefits of a new HRS to each of your four communities in turn: the board/senior executives; the HR department; line managers; and all staff.

It should take account of the results of the research you have done; identifying where needs are being addressed, and where (and why) they are not. It should draw on external market research and anecdotal evidence to support your proposed changes; and it should clearly set out what the gains will be, in qualitative and/or quantitative terms, from the new system/service.

- The Business Case should be presented to the board by or with the senior executive who will be the 'champion' of the project at board level.
- The Prospectus cannot be completed until the budget has been approved and a specific HRS chosen; but it will help to convince the board that the benefits of this investment are deep and widespread – and that they can be identified and measured.
- Once the budget has been approved and the supplier chosen, the Prospectus should be completed and each part circulated to its relevant community. This is the start of the expectation-management process.

Also in this Planning phase, there are two groups of people to be established and brought into the process.

The **HR users** need to be consulted at team meetings and involved in the development of the Prospectuses for the various communities. They will have fed vital information into your research programmes, and will now want to be involved in the development of the project specification and the communication plan. They will also have a valuable role to play in the evaluation and selection of the new system.

Suggestion: make one HR team member responsible for Project Implementation, and another responsible for Project Communication. Schedule regular team meetings to bring the whole HR team up to date with progress: the most vital key to the success of your implementation is for the HR team to be 100% enthusiastic about it.

The **Project Team** needs to be put together with representatives of:

- HR (see above)
- IT department
- Finance department
- User community (line managers)
- Customer community (employees)

The line manager and employee representatives should be officially invited to participate, with the authorisation of their upward reports, and should be chosen in numbers and roles that can adequately represent their communities.

The Project Team should own the Project Communication Plan, as well as the Project Implementation Plan, with the executive support of your designated HR team members.

It may also make sense to include a member of the Marketing team, to help you structure your messaging and maximise the impact of your internal communications.

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION

Communicate appropriately with everyone

You have already given notice of the project and its intended outcomes through publishing your Prospectus to each community. From here on, it's a question of communicating appropriately with those communities.

Create a **Master Communication Plan** which contains the objectives of your communication programme, a broad schedule of events and a map of available communication media, eg:

- Existing meeting structures at each level.
- Reporting structures.
- Internal media: intranet facilities, email coverage, printed newsletters/memo circulation, noticeboards, staff groups/unions etc.

Within this framework, create **Targeted Communication Plans** which identify what types of information are required by each of your communities, and how/by whom that information will be obtained, collated and disseminated.

For clarity, at this point the project should be branded, or given a suitable name which exemplifies its positive nature and effects. This will prevent it being described in a variety of ways and give everyone a sense of focus and excitement about it.

Key factors to include in the targeted plans are likely to be:

Board/senior executives

- Regular progress reports at scheduled meetings.
- Liaison with delegated authority (eg regular briefings with your Champion).
- Preview demonstrations.
- Launch activities.

HR team

- Input into vendor selection process.
- Regular dedicated team progress meetings.
- Training and workshops with vendors.
- Internal communications coverage.
- Testing and roll-out planning.

Line managers

- Role and responsibilities briefing.
- Training needs assessment.
- Integration with Personal Development Planning and objectives.
- Regular progress bulletins (print/email).
- Reports for people chairing management meetings.
- Structured discussion/workshop kits.
- Roll-out schedule information (updated).

Employees

- Monthly branded bulletins (printed/email).
- Demonstrations and previews.
- Training planning.
- Progress reports for people chairing staff meetings.
- Intranet opinion surveys/discussion groups.
- Point of sale – news posters, desk items, countdown calendars.

Finally, make sure you have allocated appropriate budget to each of your Targeted Communication Plans, and got them authorised as part of the Business Case if they will not be covered by your staff communications budget line.

PHASE 4: ROLL-OUT

Manage expectations carefully

First, set a realistic schedule for the project, and agree it with the vendor at the outset. Make sure you add in testing time, change-of-plan time and contingent time for things that may delay the project.

Throughout the project's development, monitor progress against your schedule, and amend the schedule if necessary. Amending the schedule should be done as few times as possible during the project; if you have slipped, and can't reasonably expect to regain the time, push back the end-date further than you need, to avoid another reschedule which may give the impression of 'project drift'.

Inform your communities openly, explaining in detail why slippages occur. People find these matters interesting and understandable, and appreciate being told. When acknowledging a set-back, make sure you also acknowledge the progress you've made and the parts of the project that are going well.

In communicating aspects of the project, make sure you repeatedly tell people not just what, but why: reiterate the benefits you're expecting from the various parts of the system, rather than just repeating their technical names.

Phased roll-out

When the system is ready and tested, roll it out in phases. All new IT systems have teething issues – even if they're simply to do with unfamiliar users – and a 'big bang' roll-out is a recipe for disappointment.

For each department, site or division, create a roll-out programme as follows:

- Staff training.
- Go-live in 'Testing' phase.
- Feedback and workshops.
- Remedial work on software or people.
- Full Go-live: unveiling and celebration.

Intensive technical support

As the system rolls out to each new group, plan for 'saturation coverage' of support, both over the telephone and, for larger implementations, on site. Make sure your IT helpdesk and HR enquiries staff are briefed on all possible issues, trained on the system and prepared for increased workload.

Agree with the vendor to have software consultants, accompanied by HR staff, available for several days, to fix problems or answer queries rapidly, and make a detailed assessment of any additional training that's required.

Make sure that branded point-of-sale materials, such as posters and desktop guides, are available to employees so that they can quickly find the answers to their queries.

Launch the benefits

At the launch 'event' – which may be a small party or presentation – make sure that the goals of the new system (as outlined in the relevant Prospectus) are reiterated, and the benefits to the employee and the business as a whole are clear. Where the line manager's role has changed as a result of the new system (eg if e-HR self-service facilities have increased the manager's responsibilities for day-to-day team HR management), provide each manager with a packaged presentation, enabling them to present this change positively to their team members at a special meeting.

Enforce the change

Your new HRS will not succeed in its objectives, if people don't use it, or don't use it properly.

Having ensured that everyone – from the 'super-users' in HR to the employees who want to interact with it occasionally – has received the appropriate level of training at the right time (ie very shortly before their system goes live), keep driving them to use it.

If existing systems or practices are to be phased out, make these phases clear as part of the roll-out timetable, and stick to them. Build use of/familiarity with the system, appropriate to the individual, into performance appraisal discussions.

PHASE 5: LIVING WITH THE SYSTEM

Create long term success

Your new HRS, properly planned and executed, and then made to work to its full capacity and meet its expectations, can make a number of significant differences to the success of your business as a whole. You can reasonably expect a good quality integrated intranet-based HR system to:

- Help you recruit the best people and retain them.
- Cut your recruitment costs dramatically.
- Cut your HR administration costs substantially.
- Increase staff satisfaction and reduce turnover.
- Provide more information to decision makers.
- Give you better salary control.
- Enable you to offer flexible benefits more easily.
- Reduce staff queries to HR by up to 90%.
- Enable you to address and improve absenteeism.
- Make better use of the skills you have available.
- Cut contract labour costs.
- Give you a distinct competitive advantage.
- Free up HR professionals to do more high-level thinking.

However, to make sure you get these benefits, you must (a) make sure the new system is properly used and (b) make sure you manage, maintain and develop it over time.

User groups

Set up user groups among your employees and managers to gain feedback and continue focusing your communities on the benefits and development of the system. Use these to test 'next phase' ideas and get early warning of any issues which may be germinating. Set up a Bulletin Board so that these groups, and staff generally, can share thoughts on the system.

Review and report

At the completion of roll-out, publish a comprehensive report on the new system, describing the success of the project and the benefits available from the new system. Include user guides and useful hints and tips.

Set up a review process, involving user groups and review meetings with each of your communities after 3, 6 and 9 months of roll-out. Publish reports on these reviews by email or on the intranet.

CONCLUSION

We hope that this brief overview of the process of Achieving Buy-In has helped you to formulate your plans.

Most of what it contains is no doubt familiar to you already, or would be part of your approach, but our clients have found in the past that these 'Business Benefits Boosters' do help to reassure them that all the ground has been covered, in the right sequence – as well as persuading decision-makers or colleagues of the need to take on certain roles, responsibilities and, perhaps, costs.

Creating the business case, prospectus and communication plans

Northgate Information Solutions has long and deep experience in the implementation of projects such as these, both with clients and on our own behalf.

We are available to provide assistance and consultancy to help you in the formulation of the key elements in the planning stage and have a number of useful publications which may also assist you.

For further information on this or to request copies of other published items in our business benefits series please call **08702 401555** or visit our website: www.northgate-is.com/hrs

