

Welcoming Web 2.0 to HR



Steve Foster, strategic consultant at NorthgateArinso discusses the recent 'consumerisation' he's seen in HR processes.

The rapid growth and acceptance of Amazon, iGoogle, facebook and a variety of social media channels are opening the doors to a revolution in the way that business processes are delivered, with the latest business technology offering intuitive, seamless applications that mirror the simplicity and style of non-work applications.

This is largely a response to the new generation of informed, internet-savvy consumers bringing their demands and expectations into the workplace. Web 2.0 allows people to use web applications for interaction, information sharing and collaboration on the Internet, via social networking sites, blogs, mash-ups and video-sharing sites. For consumers, it means that information is available at any time, anywhere, setting an expectation that the workplace will be the same.

However, HR departments have generally been conservative about social media, often tending to limit access to social networking sites. Likewise, press coverage has tended to condemn social media for distracting employees and blaming it for plummeting work levels. History shows that many new technologies have been demonised in this way, because it has challenged accepted ways of working and potentially reduced managerial control.

As the line between business and personal technology becomes blurred, it creates a new set of expectations and potentially leads to more productive ways of working, offering

many benefits. It is too late to stop this progression – the technology is already out there whether organisations like it or not and it may be counter-productive to restrict employees' use. Perhaps the question asked by HR should now be "how do we exploit social media's appeal, and make use of these new tools?"

'Consumerisation' of HR

It's easy to write off these applications as little more than a gimmick, but Web 2.0 is revolutionising the way that organisations work. In my view, there is a real opportunity for HR to become a hub between the internal workforce and the outside world, drawing on data from the employment market, potential new recruits, alumni, partners and suppliers.

Tech-savvy staff who are keen to use Web 2.0 technology really ought to be given the opportunity to explore new ways of working and provided with the tools to do so. People management, training and development, communications and change management are already being heavily influenced by developments in Web 2.0 technologies and there are clear advantages for HR in supporting these developments.

We know that Web 2.0 tools are already playing a role in many HR processes, with CVs posted online, collaborative online learning, threaded discussions, knowledge management and employee opinion tools (online surveys, for example). Innovative organisations are now successfully recruiting on platforms such as SecondLife and building communities to develop future talent pools. Others are using tools such as Google Calendar as an alternative to the more formal shared calendars available through Outlook.

New tools are appearing fast – keep an eye out for Google Wave, a collaboration tool currently being beta tested that will allow employees to create their own communities and share documents and ideas; video conferencing tools such as Oovoo and Skype allow employees to talk to each other without the restrictions of corporate IT systems.

Technology providers are also tapping into this consumerisation of HR and helping to redefine the traditional boundaries of what an HR system should include. For example, following the recent launch of NorthgateArinso's ResourceLink Aurora, a web-enabled platform for HR and payroll, HR professionals can take full advantage of this new breed of consumer-driven solutions. Using integration and 'mash-up' tools, it's now possible to put information at the fingertips of HR and payroll professionals, not just drawing on the data from the system itself, but through channels to external websites and data. This means it's possible to access information wherever and whenever it's needed, creating efficiencies in processes and improving productivity. And this is just the beginning as HR and payroll technology continues to evolve. It's not a time for HR to be sceptical about these changes, but to realise that with the right tools, HR can make a real difference to the rest of the business.

For more information

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