Chapter VIII
HRIS Project Teams
Skills and Knowledge: A Human Capital Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Global, enterprise-wide, information systems (GEIS) projects are often delayed with budget over-runs often due to a lack of understanding of the key roles required on the project. The “hybrid” knowledge and skills requirement of functional GEIS teams, typically composed of both IT personnel and representatives from the departments where the system is going to be used, are generally not acknowledged and understood. This chapter presents the findings of a study conducted with project teams working in a multi-national organisation implementing and maintaining the HR “pillar” of an SAP GEIS located in four countries. The main purpose of that study was the identification of HRIS skills and knowledge in the key roles on the global project and make suggestions for development of project team members. Using a human capital frame of reference, we provide a guiding framework which can be used as a sensemaking tool by those responsible for managing people working in hybrid roles on such projects.
INTRODUCTION

The development of human resource information systems (HRIS) over the last twenty years has been driven by imperatives to improve the service of the HR function, further compounded by the growth of global enterprise-wide information systems (GEIS). A GEIS is a software system that allows an organisation to share common data across functional areas of enterprises operating transnationally and which produce and access information in a real-time environment (see Davenport, 1998; Klaus et al., 2000). During the 1990s, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems became the de facto standard for replacement of legacy systems in large and, in particular, multinational companies (Holland et al 1996; Holland et al 1999).

Adoption of GEIS can be long, complicated and problematic, involving major technical and organisational challenges of business process reorganisation, often involving delays and budget over-runs and ending in failure (Cozijnsen et al 2000; Matta and Ashkenas 2003; Robey et al 2002; Shanks and Seddon 2000). In addition, a number of writers note the role of human factors in the failure or the success of these technological changes (Guérin et al 2001; Martinsons and Chong 1999; Paré and Elam 1995). There can be many reasons for this, but often overlooked is whether the skills and knowledge requirements of those on international project teams are available at the right time and place. Each functional GEIS is typically composed of both IT personnel and representatives from the departments where the system is going to be used in the representative country. Such teams are populated by individuals with a blend of knowledge, skills and talents and who necessarily traverse different disciplines as ‘hybrids’. However, there is often a lack of understanding of the key roles required on the project and the need for ‘new’ roles for specialist areas (because of the multi-disciplinary nature of the knowledge and skills required).

Historically human resourcing specialists have focused their skills and knowledge on HR management processes, such as resourcing, training and development, rewards, performance management and employee relations. However in recent years, and mirroring other functional specialisms, another role has been added to the HR specialist’s remit: responsibility for the implementation and management of human resource management information systems (HRIS) projects. The introduction of this technological resource suggests the introduction of new skills and competencies for the HR specialist, in particular project management and information systems. The requirement for these new skills and knowledge sets has been a challenging learning journey for many within the HR profession.

Although there has been a growing body of academic interest in HRIS, the majority of interest is around how HRIS supports and integrates with corporate strategy to enable competitive advantage (Broderick and Boudreau 1992; Hannan et al 1996; Minneman 1996; Tansley et al 2001; Williams 2000), and the presence and ‘fit’ in different organisations (Ball 2001; CIPD 2007). There is limited and dated research around the information systems skills and knowledge of the HR specialist (Beaumont et al 1992; Kinnie and Arthurs 1996).

We present here the findings of a study conducted with project teams working in a transnational organisation implementing and maintaining the HR ‘pillar’ of an SAP GEIS on their UK, Germany, Canada and the USA sites. The main purpose of that study was the identification of HRIS skills and knowledge in the key roles on the global project and the clarification of talent management issues relating to project team members. Using a human capital frame of reference, in this paper we identify key issues of resourcing project teams and offer a framework for identifying the appropriate mix of skills and knowledge requirements.
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