Chapter XII
What is the Potential of E–Recruitment to Transform the Recruitment Process and the Role of the Resourcing Team?

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ABSTRACT

HR practitioners are often expected to be both efficient administrators of the employment relationship and to act as a strategic partner to the business. Some authors have suggested that the use of e-HRM may be one way of achieving these dual aims as technology can both improve the efficiency of HR processes and help the HR function to become more strategic by freeing up time from the burden of administration and by providing reliable information on which to make strategic decisions. The authors investigated the potential of technology to transform the HR function into one that is both efficient and strategic by focusing on a single process area, recruitment. Through the use of three detailed case studies we showed that the use of e-recruitment can potentially have an impact on both the strategic role and efficiency of the resourcing team.

INTRODUCTION

HR practitioners have long been under pressure to transform the HR function into one that is both efficient and can contribute to an organisation strategically. More recently, there has been the suggestion that e-HRM could be a means to achieve these dual objectives. A number of authors, particularly in the US, have examined the proposition that e-HRM can facilitate the
move to an HR function that is both efficient and strategic through broad examinations of the impact of technology on HRM. However this is more difficult to do in the UK where the use of e-HRM across the whole spectrum of HRM is still relatively new and its full impact may not have been realised. This chapter will address this issue by taking a more detailed look at the use of e-HRM in a process area which is more mature in the UK, that of recruitment. We will examine how our three case study organisations have used technology to transform the recruitment process and to help the resourcing teams achieve the dual aims of being efficient and operating at a strategic level.

The transformation of the HR function to one that is more strategic has long been a subject of the academic literature with authors such as Legge (1978) noting that the HR function should be more involved in senior management decision-making. Paauwe (2004) summarised this literature by saying HR needed to become “more business oriented, more strategic and more oriented towards organisational change” (p183). Academics such as Guest and Peccei (1994) and Boxall and Purcell (2003) have set out the theoretical and empirical background to the claims that HR roles have strategic impact. HR practitioners have therefore become more concerned to add strategic value within an organisation and to become a ‘business partner’ to line managers (Ulrich, 1997).

Whilst this shift in focus to one of a “strategic business partner” has received much attention in the literature, there remains a need for HR to be efficient, and indeed, the desire to be more strategic may be accompanied with moves to reduce overhead costs. Ulrich, in his popular 1997 framework, suggested that HR professionals must learn to master both strategic (long term) and operational (short term) processes and be good business partners through the deliverables that include both strategy execution and administrative efficiency. According to this view, HR practitioners must therefore find ways in which they can both promote efficiency and facilitate a shift to a more strategic HR role.

There is an extensive literature on the strategic aspects of HRM, and on the challenges HR managers face in achieving such a role (Tyson, 1995; Purcell, 1999; Paauwe, 2004). These include the difficulties that HR managers experience in changing the expectations of line managers who have become content with the HR function as a largely administrative and transactional activity. HR staff may have little business experience and have often not been exposed to risk bearing action.

There are also questions about what HR strategy is, and whether there should be an HR strategy separate from an organisational strategy. Many of these issues are centred around the extent to which HR management can demonstrate its contribution to business performance. Studies, for example by Huselid (1995), and by researchers examining the impact of particular initiatives such as high performance work systems (Osterman, 1994; Youndt et al, 1996), learning organisations (Senge, 1990), the employee-customer value chain (Rucci et al, 1998; Murphy and Zandvakili, 2000), encouraged HR specialists in the view that there are strategic directions to be initiated and sustained which demonstrate the value of the alignment of an HR strategy with business goals. This has been further reinforced by the resource-based view, which has shifted the perspective of HRM towards playing a major role in the management and development of human capital to achieve competitive advantage. In order to become more strategic therefore HR managers need to take a different perspective in order to free themselves from administrative and often fire fighting roles so that they become more data driven and can show the business results from their interventions.

It has been suggested that the use of technology within HRM may both improve efficiency and facilitate the shift to a more strategic role for the HR function. Ruël, Bondarouk and Looise (2004) defined e-HRM as “a way of implementing HR
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