Lotus Workforce Management: Streamlining Human Resource Management

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ABSTRACT
Human Resources departments are often burdened with administrative tasks performed on behalf of employees who lack the tools necessary to complete these tasks themselves. A software approach known as self-service aims to streamline HR processes by providing employees with access and control of their personal information. Different approaches to self-service have been developed, including solutions offered by SAP, Sage Software, and IBM®. This article examines the approach taken by IBM Lotus® Workforce Management, which is a self-service solution for IBM WebSphere® Portal. Most of the self-service solutions available in the marketplace do provide HR capabilities for an organization’s workforce, however, these solutions are usually designed as “out-of-the-box” software that require an organization to adopt a particular approach and a specific set of functionality. Lotus Workforce Management, on the other hand, focuses on providing three key features that allow organizations more choice and control over the implementation of a self-service solution. These features are extensibility, customization, and ease of integration. Extensibility is provided through the WebSphere Portal framework that lets users add or remove components and functionality and determine the structure of communication between portal resources. Integration with IBM WebSphere Portlet Factory gives users the ability to customize and design a solution that is tailored to their needs. Finally, ease of integration with HR resources that reside in a back end system is important as most organizations would be reluctant to change or make complex configurations to that system. For this reason, Lotus Workforce Management uses existing components for SAP ERP systems and provides functional code for rapid and simple integration without extensive configuration.

Keywords: Portal Development, Portal Integration, Self-Service Pattern, Single Sign On, WebSphere

1. INTRODUCTION
This article describes an approach taken to develop a solution that streamlines Human Resource Management tasks with an emphasis on openness and flexibility to focus on the work performed by employees, managers and HR staff.

Interaction with Human Resource departments is not without problems. These issues affect all participants from average employees to managers to customer service representatives. All these users stand to benefit from a solution that streamlines their tasks and processes and removes or reduces pain points. In this article
we share our experiences and insight gained during the design and development of Lotus®
Workforce Management, a framework solution
built on WebSphere® Portal. This framework
provides a foundation to create flexible, exten-
sible, and readily customisable HR self-service
applications.

This article begins with a description of
the Human Resources Management space, the
major players within this space, and the issues
and ideas that led to the creation of the Lotus
Workforce Management framework. This ar-
ticle then describes the main components of
the framework and explains how these components
collaborate to fulfil the solution requirements.
The article closes with a summary of what we
have learned about the technical challenges in
the HR self-service domain from our customers
as well as some plans for the future.

1.1 Human Resource Management

Human Resource Management (HRM) is the
professional practice and academic theory that
relates to the structure and management of a
workforce. In nearly every major organization
today, there exists a Human Resources (HR)
department. Regardless or whether public or
private, profit or non-profit, organizations rely
on HR departments to ensure that they not only
attract a talented and competent workforce, but
that the individuals who make up that workforce
gain a sense of personal fulfilment and are en-
couraged to improve their skills and professional
abilities, thereby assuring the organization’s
retention of the workforce.

As HR evolved, the level of associated
administrative duties increased proportion-
ally. Research suggests that as much as 70%
of the time spent by the personnel of many
HR departments was performing administra-
tive tasks (Barron, 2002). These tasks were
largely manual, paper-based, and focused on
maintaining employee records. Information
was often difficult to locate and changing it
was a time-consuming affair. Data inaccuracy
was common. Correcting mistakes diverted
even more time and effort away from business-
related activities.

However, HR departments have increas-
ingly been able to make use of software systems
that streamline these administrative processes.
In turn, HR departments have been able to
gain back valuable time to focus on strategic
goals such as the recruitment and training of
employees, the development of specific business
practices and policies, and all the other functions
that focus on the efficiency and effectiveness
of an organization’s workforce.

Numerous HRM systems have been de-
veloped and implemented, all with varying
degrees of success. For the most part, though,
currently available HRM systems fail to deliver
true value to HR departments. The failures of
these software systems stem from a single cause;
employees are unable to take control of their
own information and must ultimately depend
on the HR department to complete common
tasks. Whether because their information was
spread over multiple systems, requiring mul-
tiple passwords, or because they were unable
to access their information at the time when
they needed to, employees often find HRM
systems problematic and end up contacting
their HR department to either enter the required
information or to verify that the information
was entered correctly. This failure has two ef-
ects: the first is that employees feel frustrated
and dissatisfied; the second is that HR depart-
ments become weighed down in unnecessary
administrative work.

A software approach known as self-service
has taken shape to deal with the failures of
previous HRM systems and not only give HR
departments the ability to focus on their strategic
objectives, but also to deliver a solution that is
truly of benefit to a workforce.

1.2 Self Service

In the context of HRM, self-service is the
ability of employees to manage their own HR
information easily and at any time. Research
has shown that HR departments benefit from
self-service solutions, whether ESS (Employee
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