Chapter II

Integrating Handheld Computer Technology into HR Research and Practice

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Abstract

Current theory, applications, and future opportunities for the utilization of handheld computer technology in HR research and practice are presented in this chapter. Empirical research findings on the use of handheld computers for passive collection of workplace data and as a platform for electronic diaries are presented. Potential applications of handheld computers for HR practice are also presented. Finally, current issues and opportunities concerning integration of handheld computer technology into HR research and practice are discussed.
Introduction

The integration of handheld computer technology with human resource (HR) research and application is an area that has not received a great deal of attention from HR researchers or practitioners. However, as the efficiencies and economies associated with handheld computers have continued to increase over the past five years, with meaningful advancements in hardware (e.g., 400 MHz processor speeds, transflective color screens), storage (e.g., 1GB+ memory cards), software (e.g., MS Pocket PC 2003), and wireless connectivity options (e.g., Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, Sprint PCS 153 Kbps service), their utility to human resource research and practice is greater than ever. Based on our research, we believe that full utilization of handheld computers in HR will be most fully realized through the collaborative efforts of HR researchers, practitioners, and IT specialists.

In this chapter we bring together empirical research and practical knowledge on the integration of handheld computer technology with strategic human resource planning, management, and research theory into a working model that may serve as a foundation for future work in this area. We begin with an overview of how handheld computer technology fits into a model with HR research, HR practice, and IT infrastructure. We then review the role of handheld computers in strategic human resource practice and research, including the use of handheld computers to: (a) gather data for business process engineering, workflow mapping, and job analysis; (b) conduct organizational needs assessments; (c) gather and manage performance data, and provide employee feedback in performance management systems; (d) provide training to employees and gather training evaluation data; (e) conduct organizational surveying; and (f) enhance administrative tasks, such as scheduling, messaging, and provision of HR forms. Finally, we present our view of future research opportunities and challenges associated with the integration of handheld computer technology into strategic human resource planning, management, and research.

We hope readers find what we present in this chapter useful to their own HR research and practice. As in all applications of technology, the field is bursting with activity and constantly changing, but we believe that the material presented here will remain a relevant foundation for work in this area for the foreseeable future. It is our goal not only to inform the reader, but to increase interest in pursuing additional research in this area.
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