

Planning for the Day After

A litany of tasks awaits the buyer and provider after the champagne has run dry. Day one marks the start of the real work ahead in the implementation of HR transformation.

By Paul Davies

The party was a hit, and everyone was there along for the ride, making sure they were seen. All the correct hands were shaken and proud backs patted. Then, the morning after, there's just you and a Mount Everest of work. Welcome to the first day of an HRO deal.

There's a tendency among some senior management to regard the press release as the job itself. The announcement that a deal has been done somehow overshadows the fact that the work hasn't. It is a perspective not helped by the protracted nature of the sourcing and contracting process, which itself often assumes the trappings of the actual objective. But the highs and lows of the implementation are still to come, and day one is just the start of a long haul.

There are of course different scales of a deal. The outsourcing of recruitment only or the lift and shift of an already standing call center are different from standardizing all global HR processes, deploying new systems, and introducing employee and manager self-service. However, in almost every case, the first thing to think about on day one is managing the rush to get everything done. In the real world, just gearing up for a large-scale HRO implementation can take months.

Getting the right quality and quantity of resources in place is not an overnight matter, particularly where people have to be hired. Sometimes financial agreements can be put in place in advance to gain a head start on hiring. Or small parts of the deal can be singled out for early attention by understaffed teams. However, the essential point still stands that one must put the people in place to get the job done properly, and this is rarely in place on the morning after the deal announcement.

This goes for the buyer as well as the provider. In some quarters, it is argued that the provider can bear the brunt and this is part of the attraction of outsourcing. However, even if it can be done, the result will be better if the buyer is fully staffed with counterparts to the provider's project and management staff. This goes for contract interpretation, change control, project plan conformance, and especially systems deployment as well as the usual contract/relationship management roles.

Another day-one item overlooked in the rush toward

achievements can be the implementation plan; not that it will be forgotten, but senior management will expect one to be produced immediately, which all sounds very reasonable given the fact that a deal has just been signed. The problem is that unless one opted for the due diligence process from hell, the provider won't know enough to come up with a detailed implementation plan until the respective teams have done a few months of joint work. Even then, the kind of planning that allows the project milestones to fit neatly into control cycles, like technology releases or even the buyer's holiday patterns, is harder to come by.

Nevertheless, a reliable plan will be required to inform and condition a sometimes reluctant customer base regarding the competence of the change coming their way. This lobbying effort is another day-one item. Much can and should be done about this during the sourcing process, but after a public announcement there is a need to get out there and evangelize. Communication is not enough. A fervent effort to condition and convince the customer base is required even when one knows that realistically speaking the converts will be few.

But the objective isn't to win them over; it is to convince them that the change will happen and be performed competently. In addition, it is essential to inform the inevitable debate. Those been deeply involved in putting a deal together often underestimate the ignorance concerning outsourcing, self-service, and offshoring in general. Engaging widely and at the grass roots in this debate can at least bring recognition that the concept isn't Satan's own strategy even in those who continue to disagree with it. However not having a robust plan to publicize during these efforts is likely to demonstrate convincingly that the whole idea is after all a sign of the last days.

There are of course a multitude of day one items to think about not least of which might be to take a week off. However, completing hiring activities, creating a joint plan and evangelizing the customer base are high order activities if one is to avoid the eager and headlong rush to less-than-optimum results. Stop, take a breath, and put down twelve weeks foundation work before insisting that anyone map their admin. processes or sign off system requirements. Day one preparation can save you from a lot of heartache later. **HRO**



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