

Chapter 3

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 paper 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.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper 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 paper 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, extensible, and readily customisable HR self-service applications.

This paper 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 paper then describes the main components of the framework and explains how these components collaborate to fulfil the solution requirements. The paper 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 of 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 encouraged 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 proportionally. Research suggests that as much as 70% of the time spent by the personnel of many HR departments was performing administrative 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 increasingly 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 developed 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 multiple 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 effects: the first is that employees feel frustrated and dissatisfied; the

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