

## Exploring the latest in HRMS Technology

From Chatbots to blockchain to virtual reality, there's plenty for HR to learn

By Ian Turnbull

**Vendors** of HR, Payroll and Time Management regularly produce stories about the latest technology on offer. They all sound interesting and make us add them to our wish lists.

What are they and what do they offer? Before we go on, consider this:

"Does my organization have a fully-functional human resources management system (HRMS) that contains complete and accurate data?" If your answers to that question is "Yes", proceed to read and make plans. But if you answered "No", read on but remember that you should have a fully functional HRMS before you can act on any of this.

**Artificial Intelligence (AI)** – This is what makes your Roomba vacuum smarter than us. Imagine robotic thinking. It can be applied in many situations, especially those that are more administrative. Not only can it be more efficient and effective than people, it can also remove bias, intended or not. At this (relatively early) stage it is suggested that it be used to augment human input rather than replace it.

In order to use AI you must be able to clearly define your processes, your decision options, and any criteria that needs to be considered.

**Biometrics** – Ranges from finger or palm prints, retina scans, or RFD chips imbedded under the skin. Used primarily as security tests for access to buildings or systems. It is expensive and in limited use. Great if you need it but has experienced some challenges based on religious beliefs.

### **Bitcoin and Blockchain**

Bitcoin is the first of many "crypto-currencies", currency that exists only in the digital world. Blockchain is a digital ledger of transactions, such as those when people buy/sell Bitcoin. Bitcoin is best known as the favoured currency of criminals because it completely avoids the banking system with its audit trails and links to policing agencies.

Blockchain can unlink processes and create cross-platform architecture that makes volume processing more effective and efficient.

Bitcoin can be bought/sold by individuals or any size organization but because cryptocurrencies are not part of the banking system, they also do not offer traditional safeguards. At these early stages blockchain is probably best left to very large firms.



**Bring Your Own Devices (BYOD)** – Organizations are unable to stop employees from bringing personal devices (laptops, tablets, and smart phones – of every conceivable make) to their workplace, and to use those devices to access privileged company information, applications, and databases. One survey shows around 95% of workers state that they use at least one personal device for work.

The challenge for organizations is how to control access and how to maintain security and privacy. Meanwhile research is divided on the pros/cons of BYOD. Work with I/T to establish a policy and the means of enforcement.

**Business Intelligence (BI)** – A business approach (and sometimes specialized systems) to combine data and provide analysis across the entire organization. It includes the concept of "big data" – that is, data from across the organization that is too voluminous or complex to be analysed by a single system (like your HRMS). Neither concept works unless the core data is complete and accurate. Is yours?

**Chatbots** – We have all experienced a Chatbot when we skim shopping websites. That use models how Chatbots could be used by HR – as part of a web site, perhaps providing information to workers about benefits, organization events, etc.

They could also be used to provide organization

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information to potential workers. Unlike several other technologies on this list, the Chatbot concept is ready for use by your organization.

**The Cloud** – Where the servers where your HRMS could reside; e.g., not inside your offices. It also implies a system that is essentially “one-size-fits-all”. Your I/T people may like it because it reduces direct investment in I/T equipment inside your organization and can simplify system management. It can also make mobile access easier.

A well designed and managed system can operate in the Cloud as well as (better than?) on your organization’s own servers.

**Electronic Signature** – This is rapidly becoming an “oldie”. Electronic (digital) signatures are increasingly common and essential to a more automated environment. The USA enacted a law in 2000 that legalized electronic signatures. Canada has three (3) Acts that touch on various aspects of the necessary proofs attached to electronic signatures. You may use them, and you should.

**Gamification** - Activities and processes to solve problems by using or applying the characteristics of game elements. In HR it can be used to improve recruitment and evaluation and learning, and it is generally considered to be an effective tool. If it sounds intriguing, you need to learn a lot more about it. Start slowly.

**Virtual reality (VR)** – VR, and its companion, Augmented Reality (AR), use ski-style goggles (and often earphones, and sometimes avatars) to simulate and immerse users into environments that can be fantasy or of reality. The concept goes back at least to the 1950s and is still experiencing development.

Up to 40% of users have reported various side effects similar to motion sickness. Various militaries have used the technology for training purposes and there have been training developments in health care. As exciting and useful it may seem it is expensive and a long way from being a proven and affordable technology.

**Workflow** – The term may mean different things to different people (and software vendors) but is essentially process mapping gone wild. Imagine a performance management form that is sent from HR to workers and supervisors where it bounces back and forth before eventually returning to HR, hopefully completed and signed. Now imagine the same scenario but not on paper but electronic.

That's it. Properly implemented it can significantly increase process efficiency and effectiveness while reducing the demand for paper and filing cabinets.

**Social Media and Communication Tools** – You all have used and have

opinions about Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, Texting, eMail, etc.

There are three (3) key issues that HR needs to be concerned about.

First, a documented trail. Using any of these tools except eMail may leave trails around the digital universe, but not in a linked, traceable manner. Unless you print and file everything – which sort of negates the idea of digital communication – any communication to/from workers will not form part of a worker’s record. That's bad!

Second (and third), are the co-joined issues of Privacy and Security of personal data. Even if your I/T group has wonderful security measures in place, go back up in this article and re-read BYOB. None of these tools offer reliable security (and therefore, Privacy). Witness the recent flurry of concerns about Facebook.

**Summary** - To summarize, many of these technological offerings sound exciting, and they are. The breadth and depth of technological innovation is inspiring. But as I implied at the beginning of this article, these offerings are distractions from your key task; to have a fully functional human resources management system (HRMS) that

contains complete and accurate **data**. If you can honestly state that your organization is there, well done and move on.

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Look for his **NEW BOOK** on **HRMS - HR Manager’s Guide to Managing Information Systems**, 2nd Ed. from Thomson Reuters - Carswell in the fall of 2019.

