



# Empowered Decision-Making for Purchasing HR Technology

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# Humans + Technology

Prior to the 1700s, the ability for people to create or manufacture something relied upon simple machines such as levers, inclined planes, pulleys and the like. This is important to consider when evaluating the sheer ingenuity of the human race and our continued quest to improve our conditions generationally. In just a little over 300 years, we have gone from the simplicity of basic manufacturing machines to considering the proliferation and implication of cognitive technology on both society as a whole and more specifically, the workforce.



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American Inventor [Ray Kurzweil](#) predicts that by 2029, AI will match if not exceed the intelligence of humans as well as our capacity to possess and express emotions. Whereas we created technology to help us improve how we live and work, it is becoming increasingly clear that technology will no longer be a means to an end in the future. We are in an age of rapid transformation and innovation where we will have to be willing to learn, re-learn and un-learn new things in an effort to keep up with the shifts and pivots in business and society.

In essence, we will be learning from the very computers and machines we have created and in turn, they will be learning from us. This concept of humans and machines learning from one another is something that either excites you or scares you depending on how you choose to view it.

The emergence of autonomous cars, supermarkets without cashiers, banks with no tellers, and humanoid robots has left many questioning if we have gone too far and counting the days to the dissolution of their livelihoods. The progression of humanity has always meant gains and losses along the journey. If I were to ask you right now to think of technologies, retailers and jobs that existed from 1990-2000 how many would you be able to say still exist today? Something as simple as a flip phone was all the rage as of 2005 and yet in 2018 you would be hard-pressed to find anyone using it.

Poet Cesare Pavese is quoted as saying: **“If you wish to travel far and fast travel light.”** We have to lose jobs, technologies, and the old ways of doing things to create and adopt better approaches to how we live and work. Technology is not our adversary. It should be seen as an ally and co-creator in improving the things at home and work that continue to be difficult, elusive, or out-of-reach.

In all of our efforts to move humanity forward, we are still at a deficit for better insights. We still don't understand what it takes to keep people happy at work, and we haven't solved for what makes one person a better hire from the next from a qualitative standpoint. We are still trying to get leadership and diversity and inclusion right. In all of these things mentioned and more, we have the ability to form an imperfect, yet unstoppable allegiance with technology to better understand the people, their emotions, behaviors, motivations and areas where we simply need to do better.



# Shifts in the World of Work

The nature of work is changing. As of December 2017, the Bureau for Labor Statistics reported that the unemployment rate was down to 4.1%. Wade Burgess, CEO of Shiftgig, said it best in a January 2018 article called “Three Ways Technology Will Change The Gig Economy In 2018” that it is a “buyer’s market for most jobseekers”. Meaning for the first time ever jobseekers have a variety of options and they are exercising those options. A more empowered, savvy worker has arrived and they know what they are worth, the type of work they want to do and has ideas of a myriad of ways they can do the work you need them to in a way that is advantageous to their own way of life.

According to [GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com](http://GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com), 80-90% of the US workforce says they would like to telework at least part-time. Freelancers and independent contractors are fast becoming the new norm providing employers with additional options to not only staff their companies, but maintain productivity. People are working full-time and part-time jobs while building businesses on the side in accordance with their varied interests. Beyond the different arrangements of how people choose to work, we must not turn a blind eye to the impact of connectivity on the workforce. We are firmly in the age of the Internet of Things (IoT) and mobile. Your average employee is not merely showing up to work and leaving life outside of your doors to fend for itself until 5pm. Through the increasing use of wearable devices, social media, the internet, smartphones, and other mobile devices, there is never a time that your employees aren’t connected to the outside world. To give you a sense of how this works, your average employee probably awakes to an alarm set by Alexa or a Google Home. They likely own a Fitbit or Apple Watch where they are tracking their daily steps while competing with people across the globe via a fitness app. Social media isn’t likely on the periphery of their day, but rather a necessary activity that may involve any range of usage from using it to check the latest breaking news to posting a coffee shot from their cubicle to say “good morning” to their cyber co-workers.

Technology has made the world smaller and the world of work exponentially smaller. Somewhere in one of your employee’s text message threads lays a conversation about your companies’ inefficiencies or challenges with a list of suggestions. Somewhere on a Twitter chat or in a Facebook group is an employee of yours seeking either support or answers to work-related challenges. This phenomenon speaks to a shift from a mostly isolated workforce over the past 30 to 40 years that was limited by the notion that knowledge hoarding was a measure of success not only for individuals, but imperative to the health of the business.

The defining factor in this shift has been how we share information as a society. Bryan Kramer states in his book “Shareology: How Sharing Is Powering The Human Economy” that “sharing is a fundamental human behavior that is central to our survival as a human race.” What we have seen over the past 20 years is the rapid growth of technology, but more specifically the emergence of sharing and collaboration that surpasses the walls of any one institution. As the saying goes, there is the family you are born with and the family that you choose. In the world of work, people are actively choosing their work tribe. They are making daily determinations to be more informed within and outside of their specific focus of work. People are empowered by technology to share what they know, how they accomplish daily work tasks in an effort to contribute to an overall knowledge collective that benefits everyone so long as you choose to participate.

Knowledge is everywhere. Some would argue we have too much information as a result of technology. What is clear; however is that we are no longer in a time where we have to work day-to-day oblivious to better ways of executing ideas. We no longer have to spend an inordinate amount of hours reinventing the wheel or trying to solve for something that may have an existing solution present. We have technology to thank for that.



# The State of HR Technology

According to a January 2018 report by Grand View Research, the global Human Capital Management (HCM) market is reported to reach \$30 billion by 2025 due to the emergence and integration of big data, machine learning, artificial intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT). The focus of HR Technology no longer merely focuses on Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) and Core HR solutions alone. This expansive market is now addressing HR practitioner pain points across a number of functional areas within HR, such as: wellness, benefits administration, talent management, team collaboration, Core HR, workforce planning and more.

## An ever-expanding HCM market means the following:

- ✓ Buyers of HCM solutions will have more options than ever to solve for both core HR needs as well as to augment or improve the overall effectiveness of their respective organizations.
- ✓ Sourcing for and purchasing new HCM solutions has gotten that much harder due to the sheer number of options. For the average buyer, “more” isn’t necessarily better as they often don’t have a concrete way of deciding what is important in their next technology acquisition and what is not.
- ✓ Vendors will have to be clear on the value propositions of their solutions, so that buyers have the clarity they need to make sound and expedient purchasing decisions.

Admittedly, the HR technology industry is likely lightyears ahead of the primary market we serve, which are HR practitioners and their respective organizations. There is evidence that this is true when the top trends for 2018 in HR technology according to the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) were:

- Blockchain
- AI
- Intelligent Apps and Analytics
- Intelligent Things Come To Work (also known as the Internet of Things) (IoT)
- Conversational Platforms

In stark contrast to the trends listed above, Deloitte reports in their new, High-Impact HR (HIHR) research that only 45% of companies are still focused on basic process automation. In essence, the HR technology industry whose core focus is HR practitioners is focused on Robotics Process Automation, while a substantial portion of their market is still stuck in executing basic process automation.

Additionally, Sierra Cedar’s Annual HR Systems Survey Whitepaper provides a lens into how likely an organization is to adopt emerging technology trends. The survey results indicate that an overwhelming majority of organizations have no plans to adopt technology trends such as: benchmarking databases, wearables/IoT, sentiment analysis, and machine learning.

There is some dissonance between the current and rather expansive supply chain within HR technology and the demand HR practitioners have for technology that meets them where they are in their respective businesses.

That aside, there is utility in exploring these trends and understanding how they stand to impact our lives collectively and our experiences at work. As specified earlier, we are building intelligent machines that are projected to surpass human intelligence in the next 10 years. Having this knowledge at our fingertips should empower you as an HR practitioner to not become a victim of the next wave of innovation, but rather be an optimistic and engaged participant in this journey towards a new normal in life and business.



# Refining HR's Value Proposition

HR can sometimes feel isolated, like it's on an abandoned island with little water or food to sustain itself. I would encourage you as a practitioner to stop merely surviving and start thriving within your respective organizations. When was the last time you evaluated how you serve the organization? How about evaluating the gaps in how you can provide the business with the value it requires to meet its objectives?

The challenge for HR departments everywhere is quite simply evolution and adaptation. Things are moving so rapidly in business that it is safe to say HR's demise would be imminent if we continue to allow change to happen to us; rather than us driving the change. Therefore, HR, like many other facets of business, has to evolve at a rate that presents some difficulty and discomfort. Regarding "adaptation," HR has to be prepared to adapt in an almost chameleon-like manner to support the intermittent shifts and changes that may require the function to bend or suspend some of its familiar processes, procedures, and standard ways of operating. In other words, it's time to get comfortable with the uncomfortable.

One thing is clear, participation in the shifts of your business is necessary. Don't wait to be invited to C-Suite meetings. Instead, suggest your involvement in various aspects of the business's continued expansion. This is the time to position HR as a true partner to the C-Suite by consistently demonstrating and communicating the impact the HR team has on the business. Remember that numbers are going to be vital in achieving this. Always be armed with the metrics to show how HR has impacted the company specifically.

Data is your friend. As I discuss data here, I don't mean big, complex data either. If you are collecting data around how your current systems are performing or under-performing, start to put together a story, timeline, and organizational journey that illustrates new opportunities as well as current deficits (and what those are costing the business).

If you have no data, or the data you have is no good, no problem. Start fresh by collecting instances or cases where what you have is not working. Research and find supporting documentation that supports why the solution will provide the company with positive outcomes. Define those positive outcomes clearly and tie it back to the organization's overarching strategic goals and mission.

However you choose to make a difference within your organization, consider these four sentiments shared at Unleash Vegas 2018 by Mo Gawdat, Former Chief Business Officer for Google X on "moonshot thinking":

- Assume that everything is possible.
- Commit to the problem.
- Nothing less than radical innovation.
- In any change you endeavor to make, you must improve the problem you are trying to solve to the magnitude of 10 times better than the current experience.

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## Becoming an Empowered Buyer

You've decided enough is enough. The only path forward to productivity, efficiency and perhaps some piece of mind is to acquire new technology for your organization. It would seem that simply deciding that you will purchase a new technology is enough. The truth is, it is not. Even if you have been gifted a substantial budget to fund this endeavor it is important that some research, thought, and planning occur in advance of sourcing for a new solution.





But before you start contacting vendors and setting up demos, take this advice: “Stop, breathe, organize.” The first thing to know is once you engage a vendor for a demo of your prospective work lifesaver, you are likely to be caught in a never-ending web of sales probes via email and phone propositioning, all urging you to take the next step towards purchasing. This is necessary for the health of the vendor’s business, but it is not the most logical web to be caught up in as a buyer. At this point, you are inquisitive at best. You are quite unlikely to be coined a “prospective buyer”; because the reality is you haven’t really evaluated the breadth and depth of your specific need nor have you canvassed your organization to understand the opportunities and potential roadblocks to acquiring your solution of choice.

## Now that you have taken a minute or two to pause before making hasty decisions, here are three steps to becoming an empowered buyer:



### **Grab a pad or and your team**

to discuss the reasons why you need this technology. Identifying the specific problems that you have with your systems and mapping the technology journey within your organization so far will help you understand what problems you are looking to address in your next technology acquisition. With some extra due diligence, this initial evaluation period will also help you identify and address any internal procedural or strategic roadblocks that would lead to similar outcomes should you reach the point of acquisition. Moreover, it would serve you well to fix any process or procedural bottlenecks ahead of implementing a new solution. It is in the realm of the old adage: garbage in, garbage out. You want to make sure that you have sanitized your internal processes so they don’t impede the promise of the solution you choose.



### **Research and Recognition of Necessity.**

Now that you’ve taken a good look at what you have and the challenges and problems ahead, you need to do your vendor research. You should be researching the solutions that address your biggest challenges at hand. This is where the recognition of necessity (RoN) comes in. As an empowered buyer, you need to become grounded in what is absolutely necessary for your workforce to do their job. It is far too easy to get caught up fantasizing about the promise of advanced functionality in your next solution. This is a distraction and can lead you down a rabbit hole of implementing a lot of things you don’t need while overlooking absolute necessities. Once you have researched potential vendors, see what current and past customers have to say about them. There are a number of tools on the market like G2 that can provide you with crowd-sourced feedback on solutions and even connect you to contacts willing to provide further insights.



### **Assess potential workforce and business impact.**

Adoption of a new HR solution can be intimidating for numerous reasons, even in spite of doing all the right things to prepare your organization for a new implementation. A sure way to lower that adoption rate even more is to be oblivious to the impact this system will have on your organization’s day-to-day operations and your people. It may seem silly to ask, but do you know how your current workforce interacts with the technologies that you have in place today? Additionally, if you have nothing at all in place in the way of technology, have you assessed what changes, adjustments, and resources you may need to assess before rolling out a new solution? People respect communication, preparation, and adequate training (if needed) to adjust to new circumstances. You owe it to yourselves, your employees, and the organization to carefully consider the impact of the solution before engaging vendors



## **A bonus step to consider**

While there are no true industry “best practices” for purchasing new HCM technology, you can—and should—note practices that led to positive HCM purchase outcomes for comparable companies. However, no matter how similar other companies are to yours in size and scope, don’t plan to rely solely upon the specific steps of any one company to make a sound purchasing decision for your organization. While some benchmarking makes sense, it’s far more advantageous to you and the business to focus on the specific challenges and needs of your company and employees.

# Defining Your Technology Needs

Having a clear technology strategy within your organization will not only act as your anchor as you go through the HR technology purchasing process, it will also serve as a roadmap for how new technology will be utilized and who will be accountable for it.

Remember to be specific when listing your needs so that you end up procuring the right solution for your company.

One of the ways that you can do this is by creating a Scope of Work (SOW) compliance matrix. This matrix has two columns side by side. In the column to the left, list the proposed functionality, implementation, and configuration needs of your organization. Then, when approaching potential vendors, supply them with this matrix and ask them to go through your list of requirements line by line.

## This SOW compliance matrix does two things:

- It helps you and your teams get on the same page regarding your technology needs.
- It ensures you're making your needs clear, driving your own sales process rather than being bound by the vendor's own contracts. The vendor in turn has no choice but to answer to the requirements you have provided or potentially lose the ability to do business with you.

# Mobilizing Advocates, Teams, and Allies for your HR Technology

Depending on where your organization lies on the continuum of accepting change and adoption, you will have to take thoughtful steps in engaging the right people to help you execute everything from making the business case for your solution all the way through to the actual implementation.

After all, people are everything in business. People can make or break a project on any given day. And the process of acquiring new technology is no different. You will need to know who you can count on to make your technology acquisition, implementation, and post-implementation a success.

An easy way of doing this is presenting the business case for the solution to various departments and holding a Q&A with them to understand their pain points at the departmental level while also identifying and engaging individuals who show interest in how it will assist them in their day-to-day work. These people are your allies. They're the ones you should consider for the project team or, at a minimum, to become advocates for your preferred technology solution.

When speaking with prospective vendors, ensure that you understand what your implementation team will look like. Knowing in advance who will be assisting with your implementation, along with their credentials, will help you fill in any gaps in team members and/or company resources. It also allows you to reallocate duties and tasks if you will be utilizing non-IT team members to assist with implementation. One of the biggest gripes of team members during this process is the expectation that normal levels of productivity is expected to be maintained while some team members are pulled in to fill-in gaps on the implementation team. If you want your team to be excited about the roll-out of a new solution, be sure to communicate the expectations, pain points, and team deliverables early. You should also follow up with regular communication along the way.



# Making a Strong Business Case for a Big Investment in Technology

Making the case for such a large technology investment is not an easy endeavor. And it's especially difficult when the function asking for it is HR. That said, making the case for a new HCM solution is not impossible, you just need an actionable framework to work from.

## Here are five steps to making a strong business case for big investment in technology:



### 1. Become a good marketer.

You will need to be able to illustrate and sell the solution based on a clear narrative around the problems to be solved while drawing the C-Suite's attention to an ideal future state that includes the system you are interested in procuring. **Create a brief presentation** that illustrates the current state, while providing a vision for the intended future state with a new HCM solution.



### 2. Make sense of the cents.

The worst thing you can do is to put a single dollar amount on the screen and gracefully walk away envisioning immediate investment. **Break the cost down** so it is understood how you and the prospective vendors arrived at the overarching number. It makes the whole endeavor a bit more palatable to the C-Suite's tastes.



### 3. Anticipate additional questions and cynicism.

It is likely you will have to answer a lot of questions prior to receiving a soft "yes" to your solution being funded. Keep your initial presentation concise, but anticipate additional questions that could come up by **preparing a more in-depth report of prospective vendors** evaluated, any information gathered on the vendors (both good and bad), team mapping and anecdotes from departments where you have discussed the solution, as well as case studies of similar companies who have invested in this technology and their success with it. Be sure that a lack of due diligence on your part is never the reason for a "no."



### 4. Be flexible and have a backup plan to your ideal state.

You could be fully funded to procure your HCM solution. Conversely, you may have portions of your proposed solution funded. In that case, think of this implementation in phases. Funding of one phase is better than nothing. Be flexible in having it funded in waves and be **prepared to prove the business** impact to fund subsequent phases. If you can prove that the identified issues have been addressed and, even better, that the organization's bottom-line has been positively impacted, chances are you'll receive funding for the remaining scope of your project.



### 5. Cultivate favor for HR.

You don't need to be perfect, but it helps if people already feel you add value to the organization. Taking extra steps to **ensure that HR is doing their part** organization-wide makes your job somewhat easier in making the case for your proposed technology solution. Ideally, you're already seen as a valued business partner and your ask for a new HCM solution is just another way in which you are providing value to the organization



It's an exciting time to be in both HR and HR technology. I hope you take advantage of the opportunities to advance your organizations in a meaningful way. **Happy shopping!**

#### About the Author



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Janine is the Owner/Chief Innovations Officer for [Talent Think Innovations, LLC](#), a business strategy and management consulting firm. Her career spans over twelve years in HR and Talent Acquisition that has taken her through the world of pharmaceuticals, healthcare, staffing and R&D. Janine is a dynamic speaker, entrepreneur, and an important and respected voice bringing both a human touch and business savvy to the companies and businesses she works with.

It is through the trials and tribulations of her career travels and her passion for Business, Technology, Social Media and Talent Management that she created Talent Think Innovations in January 2013. Her aim is to provide practical and sustainable solutions, programs and strategies that are a catalyst for innovation. Through her work she is using her experience to get businesses and individuals from surviving to thriving allowing them to succeed in an age of rapid transformation. Check out her videos on YouTube at [youtube.com/TheAristocracyofHR](https://youtube.com/TheAristocracyofHR).