



Workday launched its first data-as-a-service offering with Workday Benchmarking and also provided deeper insights with Workday Prism Analytics



by Calyn Yap

## Newwave in HR management

**T**HE intersection between human resource and technology is rapidly gaining interest among human resource (HR) practitioners.

HR technology is seeing new developments and innovations in artificial intelligence and data analytics. Hence, HR departments must adopt new approaches to staff management.

In recent years, technological advancements have rapidly changed the way HR departments work, paving the way for meaningful reallocation of existing resources.

Today, the adoption of HR technologies is fast gaining traction in the country, with even smaller businesses jumping onto the bandwagon.

More SMEs are turning to technology to cut costs and hike productivity and efficiency.

Driven by the Cloud's scalable, pay-as-you-go model, HR technology is becoming easier to implement.

It used to take several years to do so and integrate new internal company-wide technologies for mid- to large-scale businesses, but Workday Asia Pacific president David Hope says companies can now be up-and-running within three to four months.

"Generally, many HR departments are dealing well with technology and recognising the enhanced capabilities it offers.

"For instance, they are transitioning away from the pen-and-paper systems of old and moving towards more accessible and convenient digital HR platforms such as mobile or the Cloud," says Hope.

- **Adoption of HR technologies is fast gaining traction in the country**

- **The focus of attracting the new generation of talent lies in the digital space**

### More than automation

Today, HR professionals can tap onto different platforms and use the digital world effectively to help them hire and retain good talent.

At the same time, digital platforms can be used for effective employer brand marketing and to source and screen for talent.

"If used correctly, these tools not only help companies save money, they also give them a competitive edge and to focus on more strategic matters," says Wobb Sdn Bhd founder and CEO Derek Toh.

He runs a work culture-centric job search platform called Wobb.

Topics such as web, mobile and social media marketing – once predominantly the domain of marketing departments – are now being used by HR counterparts to build a strong presence and create an employer brand to attract talent.

Those that do not do so will find it extremely challenging

to attract, retain and manage the expectations of the younger workforce.

At a time when the focus of attracting the new generation of talent lies in the digital space, companies will need to invest in more resources to ensure they can attract them.

This is especially true with the emergence of the new workforce, with more than 50% globally being millennials by 2030.

Hence, it presents the case and the impetus for HR departments to change faster than ever.

Toh says there is also a realisation that in a candidate-driven market, employers need to build digital assets or employer brands to compete for talent.

"It is so inexpensive to do this in the digital space if an employer knows how," he says.

### Rapid developments

Technological capabilities – especially digital platforms – have moved beyond automation and simplifying the day-to-day processes that traditionally formed the core of a HR department's function.

Through the automation of repetitive tasks, HR departments and leaders are instead empowered to engage in better HR management and employee engagement.

"To the layperson in corporate discourse, automation is what is very quickly associated with technology.

"But it is really just one aspect of how technology can shape the



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future workforce," says Hope.

He says by leveraging on emerging technology such as the cloud, big data analytics, machine learning and artificial intelligence among others, HR departments can streamline and enhance conventional functions such as payroll, recruiting and talent management.

Demand is also spurring the development of increasingly sophisticated technologies.

Late last year, Workday, for example, opened new avenues of technological innovation.

It launched its first data-as-a-service offering called Workday Benchmarking. The company also

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## Call to action

**W**HILE there are many SMEs that have invested in HR technologies, there are still a number of smaller companies that are resistant to change.

Workday Asia Pacific president David Hope says: "One of the problems in adopting new technologies, not just in human resources (HR) but also generally, is that people are resistant to disruption.

"They are cautious around new initiatives or systems and may often be too invested in 'how we're used to doing things'."

He says the onus is on digital and HR leaders to facilitate training, create a welcoming environment for change and lead the way in enacting meaningful digital transformation.

However, Wobb Sdn Bhd founder and CEO Derek Toh cautions that while it may not feel like an urgent priority at the moment, companies that lag behind will have to play catch up and lose out in terms of competitiveness.

As for issues that arise from technology adoption, he believes that in most cases, potential problems do not crop up from the technology but its implementation.

"Problems could come from poor implementation due to a lack of resources in a company, or a lack of understanding.

"It could be from a management change issue, which causes existing employees to not understand how to use the tools correctly.

"Or it could even come from a gap between what the CEO wants and believes is possible versus the capabilities of his or her own team to maximise the technology."

## Advanced HR tools can result in better data analysis

From P.19 provided deeper insights through its Workday Prism Analytics. With these tools, HR professionals can depend on better data analysis to identify the best candidates for a role.

Even good employees that are at risk of leaving early can be identified. This allows managers to take pre-emptive measures to retain them.

Wobb, on the other hand, recently launched a virtual interviewer called Aivi, which is powered by artificial intelligence.

Aivi automates the screening process for employers who advertise on its website by uncovering candidates that are genuinely interested in their companies before employers reach out to them.

There are also systems that enable employees to see their annual personal performance scores and the types of skill sets and competencies they need to acquire to tap into future career opportunities.

### Empowering employees

In doing so, it empowers employees to make their own decisions on the way they want to grow in a certain organisation.

Acting as an enabler, such systems are breaking down departmental silos and aligning various corporate units on the same platform. It is also bringing the HR department to the front-lines of the business.

Toh says: "We have increasingly seen a lot of collaboration between a company's marketing and HR departments, especially when they use platforms like Wobb to attract talent.

"We have also seen more collaboration between a company's technology department with HR teams when rolling out new tools to help it automate HR processes."

Malaysian Institute of Human Resource Management deputy president Dr Henry Yeoh, who is also Loob Holding Sdn Bhd's vice-president for people and culture, emphasises that the HR department does not carry out an isolated function.

He says HR should be part of the corporate ecosystem and take on a business role, instead of an operational one.

The department must be involved in the business planning process and the vision of the company, as it can be a critical business success factor if given due prominence and recognition.

Currently, in many SMEs, most HR professionals are often still delegated to operational and transactional tasks.

As a result, most are busy "firefighting" and coping with last-minute requests for talent with specific skill sets.

"As part of their own challenges, HR leaders in the organisation suffer a fair bit of

**"We have also seen more collaboration between a company's technology department with HR teams when rolling out new tools to help the company automate its HR processes."**  
—Toh

frustration trying to cope with the expectations that come with business requirements.

"This is especially so when the department is not kept in the communication loop of where the business wants to be in the coming years," Yeoh says.

On the other hand, keeping the HR department in the loop enables its team to be proactive, especially in equipping the workforce with knowledge at the right time.

"People development requires time in order to ensure that skills are properly developed and new learning actually takes place effectively.

"If HR does not have that development lead time, they'll only be able to achieve half of it, and when you have half-baked talent doing a job, you will experience adverse consequences to the business and customers," he says.

Such reactive decisions are not optimal in terms of resource utilisation. And it may even cost businesses more in the long term as more resources have to be spent on fulfilling a short-term talent demand.

### Consumer behaviour

The new generation of consumers has brought about a wave of change in consumer behaviour, with shorter attention spans and higher expectations, especially when it comes to the speed of delivery.

As these expectations have to be served by human touchpoints, technology has to play a supporting role to drive down direct labour costs.

"Adopting the right technology



**Yeoh says the HR department is not an isolated function and should be part of the corporate ecosystem**

in our processes means we can ensure higher customer service satisfaction, and build skill sets for better customer service delivery," says Yeoh.

In the food and beverage sector, human capital represents one of the highest costs of doing business. This is why it is embracing emerging technologies.

For instance, there are restaurants in Ipoh that have employed robotic servers to reduce the waiting time for customers.

"As far as the adoption of robotics in the workplace goes, while it is still very much in its

infancy, I believe it's just a precursor to a higher rate of adoption in time to come.

"This is where technology and human collaboration will be like in the near future," Yeoh says.

He says Loob Holding does this by actively pursuing technology adoption in its practices and improving the skill set of its existing employees.

This helps them to operate more sophisticated F&B technology.

While the country is pushing for Industry 4.0, the gap between technology players and business requirements remains.

He believes that identifying the relevant technology to benefit business will be a game changer this century.

Such changes, Yeoh says, still depends on the company culture such as core values and founders' beliefs, integrating customer expectations and aligning how they want employees to behave.

"Today, especially with the younger workforce, leadership that walks the talk is more important than ever. If they want to see real change with people living the values of the company, they have to do that."

Hope echoes this sentiment and says, "One of the most important things to remember during the digital transformation process is that it is important for hearts and minds to be behind it.

"There must be due attention given to the company culture and making it conducive to innovation and technological change.

"Otherwise there won't be a meaningful fit between technology and HR." **FocusM1**

## Upskilling HR professionals

Embracing new approaches to human resource (HR) management is not just about technological change, but the necessity of upskilling and retraining existing professionals.

Malaysian Institute of Human Resource Management deputy president Dr Henry Yeoh stresses that the HR practice in the next three to five years will be technology-driven, which means it is necessary to change current practices.

"Companies are able to analyse data and make meaningful interpretations of it for better decision-making, but HR professionals must equip themselves with the necessary skills in big data and analytics.

"Instead of being only a touchpoint with internal staff, it is necessary to have knowledge of customers and what's happening in the outside business environment," Yeoh says.

Inviting key customers to sit in customer service training to receive well-rounded feedback and assessment is one case in point of HR departments shifting from internal core functions to a customer-facing one.

"The downside is, we're not training talents aggressively enough to cater to the gaps. We hope to create a more urgent need and awareness for HR practitioners to get up to speed in



**HR departments need to keep their fingers on the pulse, and understand and recognise how technology and business developments will impact their companies**

terms of acquiring technology skills and knowledge," he says.

Agility, thinking, and strategy formulation to keep up with the pace of technology in a business environment is key.

HR departments need to keep their fingers on the pulse and understand and recognise how these developments will impact their companies.

Trends such as Bring-Your-Own-Device, remoteworking and flexible work hours are among what the younger generation of talent demand, especially

at a timewhere globalisation is inevitable.

"With global talent now available, the idea of requiring a physical workspace is fading even more rapidly.

"People can be productive irrespective of where they are, so this is what HR departments need to be aware of.

"They have to move fast enough to recognise all the trends and come up with strategies to deal with them.

"Falling behind will mean that the HR managers and their employers will lose their competitive edge," says Yeoh.