

# When the twa

The days of the helpdesk and human resources (HR) hiding behind departmental anonymity and refusing to work together are numbered, argues Chris Butcher. Shared service delivery will include these departments with other back office functions because it makes practical and financial sense, and the use of internet telephony can help maximise these advantages.

**H**elpdesks should offer Human Resource (HR) department functionality. There, I've said it. This new thinking is not heresy but good business sense. There are huge benefits to be gained including reducing costs and increasing service deliverables - things all business leaders want. The technology is there to allow it, all it needs is the management - and some companies are already reaping the benefits.

By creating a shared service centre model for an enterprise, key resources can be freed up to do more value-add HR work. That service centre could deliver on-line training, employee benefits information, pay slips, induction courses, expenses reimbursement, equipment procurement in addition to the normal facilities management and IT support. By using web-enabled and voice-enabled self service, simple and effective solutions to routine office and staff issues can be delivered on demand to the employee's desk top.

This is happening now. A recent study in the US said 15 per cent of the companies participating currently have these on-line HR function available. It went on to reveal that 60% are expecting to deliver with the next six months.

## SELF SERVICE

Employee self service (ESS) and manager self service (MSS) are exploiting the power of the internet to extend the enterprise to key customers, suppliers and business partners. They are bringing together information sources throughout the business to ensure consistent service delivery.

But while empowering managers and employees in this way is, without doubt, a great idea, making it happen is

incredibly difficult. The vision needs to be clearly articulated - exciting the whole workforce with the possibilities. Of course, they must have regular access to a desktop/kiosk or home computer but, more importantly, they need to be open to the significant change in culture - "I own my data and my career".

Managers are required to manage their own employees with HR workflow over the web, replacing paperwork with electronic input for routine activities such as bonus payments and promotions. Employees can access the back end database for specific personal data or general company information historically provided manually in employee handbooks. There is two-way communication as the employee can update personal data direct - for example changes of address or bank account details for payroll processing.

This use of an internet protocol (IP)-based multi-channel contact centre solution to deliver a shared service may be new and disconcerting to some but it is happening today. Recently a global leader in financial services implemented a solution. Its approach was to 'gather common activities and processes under the umbrella of a single business group' including:

- < employee payroll and benefits administration
- < invoice processing and expense reimbursement
- < purchasing of equipment, goods and services
- < financial and management reporting
- < premises and facilities management
- < technology support and management

Key features of the vision include full use of the web through desktop or



kiosk to automate transaction initiation and retrieval, with single systems for both HR management and payroll and full integration between the two. The self service concept has been fully realised with customers, employees, managers and third parties accessing the web to carry out a variety of key processes such as: recruitment, personal data changes, training, time reporting, leave accounting, optional benefits enrolment, promotions, transfers, merit increases, salary budgeting, and performance appraisals.

The benefits are visible to all key stakeholders: shareholders see major

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cost savings, volume insensitivity and the ability to integrate future mergers and acquisitions quickly and efficiently, employees have 24/7 access to personal data and HR information transacting via the intranet and line managers have direct access to their own HR data so they can produce reports and analysis when and how they prefer, and the approval process is automated through workflow. Overall the implementation of the HR shared service model has led to a significant reduction in costs of systems, vendors, facilities and headcount. The service and data quality has improved, and HR can now focus on its business partnership and add strategic value.

## NOT WORKING

Another major consultancy and systems integration company realised recently that the 'old' style HR organisation just was not working. It was under budget pressure with headcount down and workload up. The department was structured by country, with many different local processes and no sharing of best practise. There was a declining satisfaction with HR.

The goal was world class HR - changing the traditional function into a customer orientated, integrated, technology-enabled environment. The approach taken was to redefine strategic HR delivery, re-engineer employee related processes, create an employee service centre and create a self-service environment.

The HR intranet was designed for ease of use by customers and the department itself. It is accessible to all worldwide employees - over 15,000 pages have been created with some 300,000 hits weekly.

The new approach is part of a new business model that is underpinned by people processes and delivered by enabling technology. That technology offers IP-based multi channel contact centre solutions, HR applications, portal technology, workflow, interactive voice response (IVR), data warehousing and middleware through the key delivery channels of the web

(ESS/MSS), the service centre and HR business partners.

The company has reported fantastic results - setting up service centres in the US, EMEA and Asia Pacific, using the advantages that IP-based multi channel helpdesk contact centres can offer. It has uniform, global HR web pages and support. The HR business expertise covers strategic HR, e-learning and knowledge management. Technical expertise covers major back office databases and niche HR applications, web and IP-telephony technology, middleware, data warehousing and networking. With a global presence and global delivery capability the company is successfully selling its proven expertise to the market in the planning and implementation of HR shared service solutions to move from manual processing to the e-business world.

The message to HR departments is simple - get better or be outsourced. HR will become the enabler for the company and its employees through embedded business partnerships. HR will be providers of value with virtual experts and web based service delivery. The change challenge presented is significant - however shared services combined with the e-HR concept is unstoppable.

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**Chris Butcher is a director at CosmoCom, a specialist in IP telephony.**

## What is IP telephony?

Internet protocol (IP) telephony is the process of sending or receiving all types of communication through a single telephone line. To explain the significance of this, we need to take a step-backwards.

The idea of integrating channels such as the web, e-mail and the phone is a popular trend at the moment and with good reason. With these channels linked together, the notion of delivering a constant message to customers is easier to realise, and so helps to avoid situations where customers have to repeat information that have already submitted through an alternate channel.

While integrated communication is desirable, it is difficult to achieve, because each of the channels require different lines in the building. The most popular way to side-step this problem is to build a central database that pools each communication, and presents them in a single system. This method often involves linking systems that are not compatible, meaning that the central database can be very complex and cumbersome, and very expensive to realise. The alternative is to unify each channel at the source, with a single 'pipe' handling and queuing each communication. This 'pipe' is internet protocol telephony.

Aside from creating this single queue, IP-telephony simplifies the process of creating computer telephony integration (CTI) functionality. The concept behind CTI, as the name suggests, is to integrate phone calls with data associated with that call. For example, when a customer rings the contact centre, caller identity software detects what number has called, and attempts to find a match with the in-house database. If there is a match, the customer's account details will appear on the screen of the agent at the same time as the call is answered, rapidly increasing the speed of the identity process. Because IP telephony has already linked the associated voice and data, it makes CTI simpler to install.