

Chapter 52

Assessment of Web 2.0 Applications Employed by Human Resource Departments in U.S. Cities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter argues cities are not realizing the vast potential of Web 2.0 applications to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their HR departments.

The chapter reviews the websites of the 50 most populous U.S. cities in terms of Web information available regarding human resources. This review found cities were generally not utilizing Web 2.0 applications. Additionally, the study found Web 2.0 applications, when available were predominately in English only, ignoring Spanish, the largest and fastest growing minority population.

Most local governments employ an intranet within the organization, to assist in human resources. A telephone survey of local government officials (n=17) found these intranet sites employ few Web 2.0 applications. The survey found most cities have plans to increase their use of Web 2.0 applications for human resources management. However, the recent economic recession has adversely impacted these plans. The chapter forwards recommendations to improve local governments' use of Web 2.0 applications while maintaining cost efficiencies.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter fills a significant void in the literature focused on local government Human Resources (HR) practices in the United States. Specifically, to what degree are HR departments in large cities employing Web 2.0 applications to make their practices more efficient, effective, and inclusive. Inclusiveness was measured as a function of the digital divide, to what degree have these cities expanded their content offerings beyond English, to Spanish speakers, the largest and fastest growing non-English speakers in the U.S.

BACKGROUND

Human Resources: A Brief Review

HR is one of the essential organizational functions. Its focus is human capital, one of several types of capital, including for example: finance, equipment, and land. Both private sector and public sector organizations employ capital to maintain themselves and to provide goods and/or services. Since HR deals with humans, it is one of the most complex of organizational functions. Most simply, HR is charged with ensuring an organization has the right people at the right place with the right skills. Specifically, HR links performance standards to rewards, and provides individuals with authority commensurate with their responsibilities (Guy, Klay, & Coursey, 2004; Zeidner, 2008b). The realm of HR is broad and complex, and includes recruitment; retention; skill development (training); morale; rewards (salary, benefits, and others); performance evaluations; communication with current and potential employees; outplacement (retirements and lay-offs); and compliance with federal, state, and local laws and regulations; among other functions. (Bohlander & Snell, 2010)

Human Resource Function in Local Government

The USGAO reports the three enablers of public sector management are: people, process, and technology and of these enablers, Doug Baker (2005) concurs with GAO that people are the most significant organizational asset. (USGAO, n.d.) According to Doris Wong, Vice President of Peoplesoft, appropriate application of technology is an essential contributor to human resource management (Inside View, 2008). A decade ago, choice of technology implied hardware and basic software. Today, key technological decisions surround use of the www and implementation of Web 2.0 applications (Inside View, 2008). Increasingly, HR links two key organizational assets, people and technology.

Expanding upon the above definitional assets, the complexity of HR comes to light:

- **“The right people”**: recruitment and retention, and outplacement (lay-off and retirement).
- **“The right place”**: geographic, organizational, and temporal location (access).
- **“The right skills”**: employee development (i.e. training and career ladders).

These three assets are impacted by innovations associated with Web 2.0, and in turn impact an organization’s ability to effectively employ the many potential advantages presented by Web 2.0 applications.

Public Policy and Human Resources

Public policy interests impact HR, possibly more than any organizational function. For example, affirmative action and the Americans with Disabilities Act greatly expanded diversity within the workplace and made hiring and promotion practices more transparent and possibly more complex. The HR function in the public sector

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