



# Is your HR function future proof?

How good is your human resources function? Does it contribute to the company, providing business intelligence that helps keep the company lean? Because if it doesn't you're missing a trick.

That's the message from Ian Dowd, marketing director for Britain and Ireland with NGA Human Resources, an end-to-end outsourced service provider and HR software specialist.

"One of the major challenges to the HR function we're seeing at the moment is the need to provide strong analytics and reporting. HR people are sitting on potentially really valuable data and should be able to use it to produce insight to help their organisations grow," said Dowd.

"The goal should be to align the people in a company with that organisation's strategy. That means having all the information you need at the tips of your fingers on everything from absenteeism to productivity and knowing what causes those things and how to make them better."

"This includes everything from recruitment, on-boarding, paying, managing talent and training, through to off-boarding at the appropriate point," said Dowd.

NGA HR provides integrated software that allows organisations to run HR and payroll functions covering the employee lifecycle. In Ireland it works with Aer Lingus, as well as other large and medium-sized companies.

According to Dowd: "The question HR should be asking is, do we have the right people in the organisation for what we need to do today and do we have the right skills and people for what we want to do in five year's time?"

"We worked recently with the HR director of an Irish company who wanted to examine sickness and absentee-



Ian Dowd, marketing director for Britain and Ireland with NGA Human Resources

ism and their effect on attrition in their organisation. They knew there was a relationship between those two things, but not exactly what it was."

The HR director knew that if people went off sick a lot, the company was likely to lose them later on, but they didn't know why. What they found was that one of the determining factors was how often people changed roles.

"The people who tended to stay were those whose roles or responsibilities tended to change every 18 months to two years or so. The people who tended towards higher levels of absenteeism were likely to have very little change in their role for longer periods of time."

"That's a great example of how the HR department in an organisation was able to make better use of the data it had access to in order to help the business," he said.

Companies unsure of how to improve their HR function should first and foremost start the conversation.

"Different companies are at different points along a continuum. Some organisations do HR very well, and some just don't and need a lot of help doing it. It really depends on what's happening in that company at the time," said Dowd.

# From payroll to payday

With Irish employers processing €70 billion in wages each year and collecting around €22 billion in statutory deductions, there is no doubt that having trained payroll staff is important. Yet according to the Irish Payroll Association (IPASS) a huge number of companies don't have specially trained staff handling their payroll functions.



Helena Holdwright, director of IPASS

Holdwright, director of IPASS. "The reason is that, by its nature payroll is repetitive so if a mistake is made it's likely to be made across the board and repeated again and again."

According to Holdwright, a good payroll person needs to have a good head for figures and good attention to detail. While they don't need to be an accountant, they do need to share that interest in and love of the fine detail. "It's a totally undervalued position when you consider how challenging it is, but you have to love it to work in it – it's not something you'll keep doing if you don't enjoy it."

IPASS is the main national representative body for payroll professionals in Ireland, set up in 2000 to set the standard in payroll and Vat training. Its aim is to train, develop and support the payroll profession and provide training courses and education nationwide in the operation of PAYE, PRSI, the Universal Social Charge (USC), the operation of employment law and the operation of British PAYE and national insurance contributions (NIC).

"The range of potential questions employees can have and the situations they can find themselves in is enormous. Expecting an untrained person to have the answers to all those possible questions without training is a tall order," said Holdwright. "All of our payroll training courses are accredited by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and to date we've trained over 10,000 payroll professionals who are now IPASS qualified. We have a current membership body of around 2000, which is all to say we have a proven track record in providing excellence in training and support to our members and clients."

For modern payroll staff, working with specialist software is a universal fact of the job, but there's more to the role than merely operating a PC. "In general, all payroll personnel use payroll software to carry out processing of payroll, but where our training is most important is in dealing with the myriad of queries that can arise from employees. To be honest, many employees look at their payslips and really just see the net take home pay and they don't understand the deductions that are made from them," said Holdwright. "The number of rules, regulations and anomalies that can appear between the standard deductions for all employees, be it PRSI, PAYE or USC – the range of questions that can occur would swamp an untrained person."

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