

Technology

COMPUTERS

An all-enCompassing way to evaluate employees

New software cuts through the silo-like makeup of human resources departments

BY JOANNA SMITH

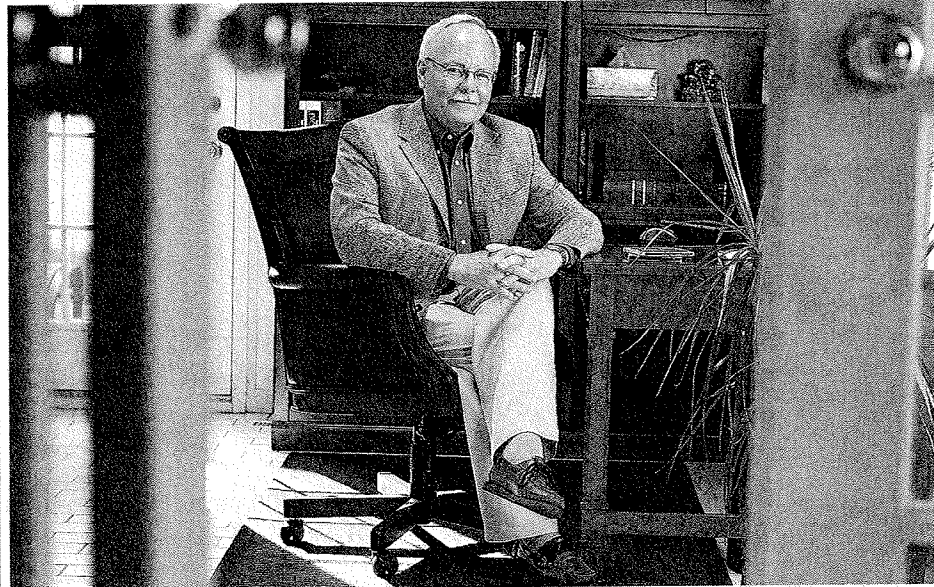
Doug Chapman was tired of the fractured method with which his office evaluated employees. Like a game of broken telephone – where one person whispers a message and it continues down the line until its original meaning is lost – everything from training and development to job evaluation was handled by separate groups with their own agendas, criteria and expectations.

Researching the issue, the former human resources manager, who spent a total of 13 years at Bank of Nova Scotia and then Petro-Canada, recognized much of the problem lay in the silo-like makeup of human resources departments: Training and development professionals would deliver a workshop and then months later an entirely new group of people would measure job performance; a recruiting agency would conduct job interviews and then someone else would look at succession planning.

So, in 1990, Mr. Chapman changed course to form JPS Management Consulting Ltd. and develop computer software to replace those silos with a more harmonious system.

The result is enCompassing Visions, a Web-based system that helps companies integrate the different areas of human resource management in order to efficiently monitor employee progress in a fair and accurate way, all the while making sure corporate culture, financial goals and strategic objectives remain a priority.

Of traditional human resources, Mr. Chapman says: "Each [manager] is focused on the best practices of their particular area of expertise and they're doing their own thing and it looks great." The result, though, would often reveal a disconnect between what executives considered priorities and what employees figured



Clients for Doug Chapman's software include insurance companies, banks and the federal government. CHRIS BOLIN FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

was important based on the behaviours they saw being rewarded.

"When it's a corporation and it's the strategic message that we want everyone to understand, that's not fun," he says.

Mr. Chapman's clients include insurance companies, banks and the federal government, which is using the technology in a pilot project.

Peter Mosher, the manager of corporate compensation for the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia in North Vancouver, said he was attracted to enCompassing because it integrates all the different processes of human resources into one centralized unit.

"Now we can evaluate jobs within four hours, whereas before it used to take a couple of

days," says Mr. Mosher, whose organization has been using the system for a decade.

The key to ending this costly game of broken telephone lies in accurately defining the work people do.

The software begins with a standard multiple-choice form that's designed to ask questions about any element of any job – from the CEO to the mail-room clerk. The survey helps managers determine what types of technical and interpersonal skills are needed in order to get the job done.

Based on responses, the software automatically generates a job description, job posting and even a list of questions for the recruiter to ask when interviewing potential candidates.

When the system automat-

ically prompts the manager when it is time to conduct a performance review, managers can measure performance against the specific criteria for which the employee was hired.

That same information is then used to create an individualized training and development program.

"I can click on a button and the system will identify the biggest gaps between what the job expected and what the performance of the employee in the job was seen to be," Mr. Chapman says.

The software allows management looking to fill an open position to examine the entire database of employees through a set of filtering criteria, such as location and technical skills, and based on performance re-

views calculate how well they would do in the new job.

"That's when you start to identify people who are doing a fantastic job," he says.

Carol Usher, a human resources assistant at Prairie Mines & Royalty Ltd. in Edmonton, appreciates how customizable the system is.

"You can fine-tune it to where your company's goals and steps are and what you want to stress," she says.

The mining company considers safety a top priority and Ms. Usher notes that the software helps bring that message to every employee, from their hiring to job performance reviews.

"You can set it in your default settings. You can make that across the board no matter what person is being rated."

How enCompassing Visions works

GETTING PRIORITIES STRAIGHT
A company-wide survey focusing on priorities helps identify any disconnect between what management believe is important and what employees think are top priorities.

DEFINING THE JOB
A questionnaire identifies competencies required for specific jobs and then – in seconds – generates a description, posting and interview questions.

MEASURING PERFORMANCE
The system uses information from a job description to evaluate employees objectively against the required criteria.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT
The software uses the performance appraisals to automatically identify weaknesses and creates an individualized or group training plan in seconds.

FINDING A REPLACEMENT
Management looking to fill an open position can examine the entire database of employees through a set of filtering criteria, such as location and technical skills, and based on their performance reviews calculate how well they would perform in the new job.

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