A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MEASURING THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN THE HUMAN RESOURCE FUNCTION: UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OR UNFULFILLED PROMISES?

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ABSTRACT
There is a growing concern with the impact of new information technology on operational and strategic decisions in the functional areas of the business firm. The corporate human resource function is an area that has undergone a dramatic increase in computer support. Unfortunately, Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) bring with them problems endemic to system design as well as new issues to resolve. This paper extends a theoretical rationale from which to examine these problems and a framework from which to examine the impact of HRIS on the Human Resource Function.

INTRODUCTION
There is a growing concern with the impact of new information technology on operational and strategic decisions in the functional areas of the business firm. The corporate human resource function is an area that has undergone a dramatic increase in the use of computer-based information systems (CIS). The proliferation of computers into the human resource area is a relatively new phenomenon that is typically, and not surprisingly referred to as Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS). In 1980, 60% of a large sample of Fortune 500 companies used computers in Human Resource (HR) related activities (Mathys and La Van, 1982). Four years later, 90% of the companies had some form of computerized support (Mathys, La Van and Mogal, 1984). By the year 2000, nearly all major corporations are expected to have an established HRIS along with management and technical staff to support these systems (Zientara, 1983).

According to De Sanctis (1986), the HRIS of today offers support for what is typically thought of as the hierarchy of managerial activities, ranging from traditional routine reporting to unstructured decision-making. Typical functions include benefits administration and compensation, EEO and affirmative action reporting, and general employee information (Murdick and Schuster, 1983; De Sanctis, 1986; Louis, 1988). Spurred by the availability of low cost micro-technology applications (Walker, 1982) as well as extensive mainframe and mini support, (Wardin and Pagano, 1987), applications using HRIS have grown at a surprising rate. Estimates indicate that the types of data resident in the systems have tripled (Walker, 1982). Further, it is suggested that the needs of HR professionals have changed from requests for standard reports (EEO head counts, recurring reports on benefits, salary information requests) to forecasting HR requirements, analyzing historical information and trends, as well as projecting manpower planning to support the company's strategic goals.

Given such rapid growth, it is not surprising that severe problems in conceptualization, execution, as well as implementation of these systems are beginning to occur. The purpose of this paper is to: First, define the problems associated with unsuccessful use of HRIS. Second, provide a theoretical rationale from which to examine the problems. Third, offer a conceptual framework from which to examine the impact of HRIS on the Human Resource Function.

Previous information system literature points to a number of diverse outcomes of successful implementation of information technology. A subset of which include, user satisfaction, the extent to which the technology is used and other positive attitudes, as well as financial gains to the organization (Kling 1980; Attewell and Rule 1984; Turban 1986). Unfortunately this body of research has been characterized as presenting "disparate and seemingly conflicting conclusions" (Attewell and Rule, 1984 p. 1190). Hence, the effects of computing on organizations is extremely complicated at best. Examining impact in a
particular functional area presents the researcher with additional "confounding" concerns. Therefore it is unclear which variables will be important in determining "success" in the HR function. And more to the point of this paper, which specific variables are unique to the HR function in determining "successful" use of the technology.

THE PROBLEM

Previous research suggests that there are significant issues to be addressed in the design, development and implementation of HRIS. In a study of 50 major corporations Baird and Meshoulam, (1988) found that resources like HRIS are wasted because they do not meet the business needs of the company. Furthermore, very little concern is paid to the appropriate structure and coordination of the technology across functional departments.

"Centralized human resource information systems are developed around a corporate data base and mainframe computer when what is needed is a decentralized flexible system giving managers the information they need to recruit and train people" (Baird and Meshoulam, 1988 p. 3).

De Sanctis's (1986) research points to other concerns. Specifically there appears to be a poor relationship between the MIS group and the human resource area. A growing number of HRIS are developed and maintained within the personnel department with the understanding that the MIS group is often asked to maintain and support the systems. Unfortunately, the MIS group and the HR group do not always agree on the objectives of a personnel information system (De Sanctis, 1986). Additional survey based research indicates that as many as 82% of the respondents characterized the relationship between the two as poor (Tomecki, Yoon and Stephenson, 1976; Towers, Perrin, Forster and Crosby, 1980). In addition, Towers (1980) found that HR managers did not view data processing as a valuable resource.

Another significant issue is a general lack of planning in regard to HRIS (De Sanctis, 1986; Baird and Meshoulam, 1988; Louis, 1988; Leote, 1988). Piecemeal attempts at automating occur, resulting in skeleton records being added to an existing payroll system as an afterthought (Leote, 1988). Application development is often disjointed (De Sanctis, 1986) with little planning of implementation or systematic development and improvement of the system (Ceriello, 1982). Ceriello (1982) equates the lack of planning with "a rush to automate without even having an idea of what they will do with the information the system will generate" (p.764).

Leote (1988) sees the lack of planning and subsequent "patchwork" approach to design as a major deterrent to providing quality information.

"Instead of a single, basic personnel data base, updated in a timely and efficient manner and responsive to all requests, the HRIS now includes several somewhat different data bases. Each involves a duplication of effort, lost productivity among users and varying levels of uniformity of data definitions or actual data." (p. 66)

Unfortunately, HRIS users seem to have fallen prey to keeping pace with the technology, regardless of their original information processing needs. HRIS is often characterized by a lack of overall integration and an uneven ability to function as a decision support system. A possible reason may be that HRIS has become technology driven, rather than functionally driven. Choices made to implement new systems have not always been made with the central mission of the personnel system in mind (Leote, 1988).

One final problem, the implication of which is not clear, is that HRIS may not at this time be supporting the strategic goals of the organization (De Sanctis, 1986). Louis' (1988) research was largely focused on the extent to which organizations use information technology to support HR planning. The results suggested that automated support for strategic HR management is rare. Specifically, more than one half of the respondent companies had no computer support for strategic HR activities. Yet, De Sanctis (1986) reminds us that top managements' satisfaction with HRIS may be closely linked to the extent that the human resource plan integrated with the corporate strategic plan. If we find that HRIS need to support strategic issues in order to be effective, the lack of integration will be a significant problem.

While it is clear that many of the previously stated problems facing HRIS are all too familiar to the MIS practitioner and scholar, it is also clear that new issues may face the functional area. While poor planning and ill defined business needs are endemic to system design, there are additional concerns for effective implementation of HRIS:

* A positive interface with the corporate MIS department to support HRIS.
* The ability of HRM to meet the needs of a much more diverse user community
* The severe limitations of the skill base
* The lack of clarity regarding the best location for the HRIS
*The poor definition of HRIS responsibilities (DeSanctis, 1986)*

Any conceptual framework should take these additional concerns into account. Unfortunately there is very little previous research on HRIS effectiveness, and what is available lacks empirical validation and theoretical grounding.

**PREVIOUS RESEARCH - HRIS EFFECTIVENESS**

There is a paucity of research examining the effectiveness of information systems within the human resource function. As DeSanctis (1986) points out, satisfaction with the system and subsequent impact on personnel-related decision-making is not clear. In a survey of 238 personnel executives, Mayer (1971) found that 32% of the respondents did not perceive any improvement in the quality of the service they received with information systems in-house. Whereas in 1978, Wolfe found that there were fewer decision errors and an increase in the perceived status of the HR area. Additional survey-based research related HRIS "success" to the dollar amount of the initial investment in the system (Tomesk and Lazarus, 1973(a); Tomeski and Lazarus(b); Tomeski, Yoon, Stephenson, 1976) and the total number of employees in the firm (Mayer, 1971; Wolfe, 1978). The single experimental field study available (Willems, 1971) compared employee attitudes in two plants of a large manufacturing firm. Results indicated that the implementation of the system had a positive effect on employee perceptions of job satisfaction, job recognition and advancement opportunities. The study was, however, without theoretical grounding and a number of the measures used lacked reliability and validity. In another study, DeSanctis (1986) asked respondents to note their perceptions of the extent to which "top management values HRIS" and the extent to which "their personnel division collectively values the HRIS." A perceived satisfaction was related to the total number of HRIS responsibilities and user involvement during system development. Top management's satisfaction with HRIS was related to three factors: length of time spent on HRIS development, total number of applications comprising the HRIS, and whether or not the human resource plan was integrated with the corporate strategic plan. As DeSanctis (1986) admits, these measures may be biased in the positive direction, since HRIS professionals supplied the ratings.

As is obvious from the review, there has been no systematic measure of impact. Nor has there been any theoretical rationale for the study of effectiveness. This fact, combined with the previously documented notion of uncontrolled growth in the area suggests a number of complex research questions. The first of which is - what is the most appropriate way to study the impact of the technology in this particular functional area? What issues are unique to HR and how will these issues be reflected in a measure of impact? One approach involves relating HR effectiveness to potentially relevant outcomes of successful implementation. The most severe problem is - what is an effective HR department and how can we accurately measure effectiveness? While different in orientation and focus, two different theoretical rationales are offered as promising ways to determine HR effectiveness. They are: The Human Resource Strategic Mix and the Multiple Constituency Approach to Defining the Activities and Effectiveness of the Human Resource Department. Selected from a significant number of alternative conceptual rationales, both suggest specific implications for the study of impact. If used together, they provide a rational way to study the effects of competing within the HR function.

**THEORETICAL RATIONALE - HUMAN RESOURCE STRATEGIC MATRIX**

The dominant theoretical approach to the study of HR effectiveness is based on the strategic human resource management model. Scott (1971), Tosi (1969), Lawler (1968), Scott, Lawler, and Meshoulam's (1988) work provide an excellent example of the importance of the notion of strategy to effective Human Resource Management (HRM).

In a study of 1987, Baird and Meshoulam (1988) built a model for developing and implementing HRM strategies. The basic premise of which is that if HRM is to be effective there must be both an external and internal fit to the organization. Specifically, the department must respond and grow with the organization to maintain an external fit (Scott, 1971), while the internal components of HRM programs, systems, and practices must support each other to maintain an internal fit. A brief explanation of the model follows.

The External Fit

Previous research suggests that organizations develop in predictable stages (Scott, 1971; Salton, 1968; McQuire, 1963). Building on previous research, Baird and Meshoulam (1988) suggest a five stage model of organization development: initiation, functional growth, controlled growth, functional integration, and strategic integration. The requirements of the organization are significantly different at each stage. The goal of HRM is to adopt to these differing perspectives as the organization becomes increasingly complex and moves through each stage (Baird and Meshoulam, 1987; 1988).

The Internal Fit

Building upon previous research (Meshoulam, 1985; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967;
Lorsch and Morse, 1974; Watersman et al., 1980) Baird and Meshoulam (1987; 1988) then identify six internal strategic components of HRM: management awareness, management of the human resource function, portfolio of programs, information technology, personnel skills, and awareness of the internal and external environment. Fit is achieved when these internal strategic components are aligned with the five stages of organization development. The strategic theory of HRM growth suggests that in order to be effective the components must be aligned with each other. If strategic components are not in the same stage HRM will be ineffective. If the strategic components are not at or near the same stage, HRM will be ineffective.

The stages of development are combined with the strategic components to create the Human Resource Strategic Matrix (figure 1).

A major premise of the matrix is that the stages occur in sequential order. In order to be effective, one stage must build upon the other. In depth case analyses from four organizations provide support for the stage model. The authors found that if there is a lack of fit between strategic components and these stages of development the following occurs:

* Information is collected and not analyzed
* Surveys and environmental scans are conducted, but not used
* Data purchase computer-based tools to help with career planning, performance appraisal, and succession planning which typically sit on the shelf because managers do not have the appropriate skills to use them (Meshoulam and Baird, 1987)

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MEASURING IMPACT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Implications for measuring the impact of the technology can be built upon the matrix. As was previously stated, there is some agreement as to a number of the major problems with HRIS — a lack of planning, lack of overall integration, and poor

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**Figure 1**

**The Human Resource Strategic Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE I: INITIATION</th>
<th>STAGE II: FUNCTIONAL GROWTH</th>
<th>STAGE III: CONTROLLED GROWTH</th>
<th>STAGE IV: FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION</th>
<th>STAGE V: STRATEGIC INTEGRATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPONENTS</strong></td>
<td>Aware of function's broad role</td>
<td>Aware of function's breadth but not committed</td>
<td>Aware; often frustrated at fragmentation</td>
<td>Cooperative and involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager Awareness</td>
<td>Aware of function's broad role</td>
<td>Aware of function's breadth but not committed</td>
<td>Aware; often frustrated at fragmentation</td>
<td>Cooperative and involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of the Personnel Function</td>
<td>Loose, informal; often none</td>
<td>Personal manager; program orientation; manager; coordination among subfunctions</td>
<td>Personnel executive; business orientation; control, measurements, goals</td>
<td>Function orientation; department goals; planning; long-range direction, line/staff relations; collaborative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio of Programs</td>
<td>Basic salary and benefits administration; basic record-keeping; recruitment hiring</td>
<td>Many new programs added responding to business needs in comp. benefits, training, etc.; revamping basic programs</td>
<td>Management control programs; budgets, ROI, portfolio re-evaluated in measurable and analytical terms; advanced compensation</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary programs; focus on department goals and direction; productivity; change management; succession planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Manual employee public; record-keeping</td>
<td>Automated salary and benefits; Advance record-keeping</td>
<td>Automated personnel work; mainly profiles, EEO, tracking; basic metrics</td>
<td>Utilizes computer for protection; planning; analysis, and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel Skills</td>
<td>Administrative routine and housekeeping</td>
<td>Functional specialists</td>
<td>Increased professionalism in function and managerial skills</td>
<td>Integrating activities; skills in systems planning, and analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Internal and External Environment</td>
<td>Not aware of environmental &amp; corporate culture but do not incorporate them into function’s activities</td>
<td>Aware of risks and opportunities in environment; add information to programs</td>
<td>Aware of; react and incorporate into planning process; environmental changes identified</td>
<td>Systematically search for tempos, trends, and trends in the environment has on organization; take on a role in making &amp; shaping decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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linkage to the strategic goals of the organization. If we examine the impact of the technology from the Human Resource Strategy Matrix perspective, we may begin to address these problems. Further, we can operationalize measures of impact at each stage of development. Figure 2 provides the groundwork for evaluation.

In Figure 2 information technology is placed within the stage model. Five categories, identified as important issues are suggested to affect the use of the technology: characteristics of the technology, types of human resource data collected, the nature of the data base environment, access method, information use. If we extend the matrix to include implications for the effective use of information technology, effectiveness is again measured by a notion of "fit".

For example, if a particular functional area (or organization) is in the INITIATION Phase, then their information processing skills may include: record keeping of basic human resource data which can be manually accessed to maintain employee information. Whereas, if a particular functional area is in stage IV - FULL PARTNERSHIP their information processing needs are dramatically different. They may need planning and analysis of data to be used for strategic planning. If the components are not at or near the same stage, HRIS will be ineffective.

The notion of laying the appropriate groundwork clearly is not new to those of us who design information systems, it may however be new to individuals designing and implementing HRIS. If the fundamental groundwork is not in place for these systems (or functional departments) move through the stages, their information processing needs will also progress to include strategic concerns. The staged approach also addresses the problem of lack of planning. It is reasonable to assume that introducing the technology in stages will help to lay the foundation for future needs.

Complex information systems are not necessary to solve basic information processing needs. A measure of impact must include measuring the fit between basic needs (as defined by the stages of the organization) and the characteristics of the technology chosen to meet those needs.

adapted from Baird and Meshoulam

adapted from Baird and Meshoulam
THEORETICAL RATIONALE — A MULTIPLE CONSTITUENCY APPROACH

Tsui (1987) extends an alternative conceptual approach to the study of HRM effectiveness. As was evident from Baird and Meshoulam's (1988) matrix, the concept of strategic HRM focuses on organization wide human resource concerns, addressing issues relating to the firm's business goals both short-term and long-term. Tsui (1987) argues that strategic HRM may not be as appropriate for functions at the operational level. Given that at this time HRIS seem to have their greatest impact on the operational levels (De Sanctis, 1986; Louis, 1988) different constituencies may likewise prove important to the study of HRIS effectiveness.

The multiple constituency approach (Tsui 1987) is based on the assumption that management at different hierarchical levels in the organization encounter different types of strategic options (Porter, 1980; Schendel and Hofer, 1979). The rationale is designed to specifically address effectiveness at the operating level of the company. According to Tsui (1987) operating managers or executives have short term horizons, whose performance is based on annual and even quarterly performance. Hence, the human resource issues are significantly different from those confronting managers at business and corporate levels. Accordingly, human resource activities differ depending upon the level of the organization in which the human resource function is located.

In the operating unit, the HR department is established to serve the interests of the particular constituencies (managers, employees, operating line executives). A number of different constituencies may have very different orientations.

For example, as Tsui (1987) points out, interests of line executives may incorporate the business requirements whereas the needs of managers and employees are often related to operational and personal requirements that arise on a day to day basis. A third constituency comes from the human resource strategies designed by the corporate HR function. Obviously, activities important at the operating level differ depending upon the perspectives of the constituencies.

In order for the HR department to be effective significant constituencies' (stakeholders') needs must be met and satisfied. The conceptual approach when operationalized is designed to answer two basic questions:

1. What activities are desired of the operating level HR department from the perspectives of its' most critical constituencies?
2. What criteria does each constituency emphasize in assessing its' effectiveness?

Results from three empirical studies indicate support for the approach. Tsui (1987) found that: constituencies in the operating level had a strong preference for administrative service activities, whereas, constituencies at the corporate level tended to emphasize the strategic activities. Differences in perspectives were greater between constituencies at different organizational levels than between constituencies at similar organizational locations.

Effectiveness is only achieved when constituencies are accurately defined and criteria for effectiveness is shared with the HR department.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MEASURING IMPACT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Information Technology

The conceptual rationale extended by Tsui (1987) provides implications for measuring the impact of HRIS. Implementing a multiple constituency approach, the researcher asks, two additional questions:

1. To what extent has the HRIS been developed and implemented to support the HR department in meeting the goals of the most critical constituencies?
2. To what extent is the constituencies' criteria for effectiveness reflected by the HR department's implementation and subsequent use of the technology? The results from Tsui's (1987) first study suggest way to measure impact. Implementing the delphi method (Sackmann, 1979), Tsui (1987) identified eight constituencies from the "typical" organization. Thirty-five individuals representing these eight constituencies participated in the study. The goal of which was to identify the most important activities performed by HRM.

To determine the impact of Information Technology, we should attempt to measure the extent to which the technology supports these activities. Table 1 provides a list of the most important activities. Impact is a measure of fit between the constituencies, activities and type and extent of computer-based support available to meet these needs.

Table 1. Seventeen most important Human Resource Department
1. Provide advice and counsel to management on individual employee problem identification and solution (e.g., deal with adverse of difficult personnel situations such as absenteeism).
2. Communicate to management the philosophy, legal implications, and strategy relating to employee relations.
3. Provide advice and counsel to management on employee relations problems.
4. Ensure consistent and equitable treatment of all employees.
5. Administer grievance procedure according to policy (e.g., identify and analyze problems, review deviations and exceptions, resolve problems).
6. Provide advice and counsel to management on staffing policy and related problems.
7. Coordinate the hiring procedure (e.g., establish starting salaries, send offer letters, follow up to obtain acceptance, administer medical examinations).
8. Communicate compensation/benefits programs to management (e.g., interpret/explain compensation policies and procedures, inform management of legal implications of compensation practices).
9. Process enrollments and communicate benefit programs to employees.
10. Resolve benefits administration problems.
11. Process benefits claims (e.g., health, workers' compensation, pension, unusual or unique claims).
12. Assist management in resolving salary problems involving individual employees (e.g., salary equity issues).
13. Maintain employee and organization files (e.g., keep files orderly and systematic).
15. Communicate sexual harassment policy and other communications of general EEO philosophy and objectives.
17. Keep up with HR programs developed at the corporate or central personnel departments.

Table 2. Twelve most meaningful criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of the Human Resource department

Subjective criteria:

1. Level of cooperation from personnel department
2. Line managers' opinion of personnel department effectiveness
3. Degree to which the department is open and available to all employees to deal with problems or explain company policies
4. Employees; trust and confidence in the personnel department
5. Quickness and effectiveness of responses to each question brought to the personnel department
6. Rating of quality of service provided by the personnel department to other departments
7. Rating of quality of information and advice provided to top management
8. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction of clients — managers and employees

Objective criteria:

9. Degree to which the department has a strategy to support local management
10. Affirmative action goal attainment
11. Average time taken to fill requisitions
12. Efficiency — personnel department budget/population served

In an attempt to answer question 42—
To what extent is the constituencies criteria for effectiveness reflected by the HR departments' implementation and use of the technology? — data should be collected concerning items (5, 7, 11, and 12) which clearly relate to effective use of Information Technology. Again, if there is a match, then effective use of the technology is more likely to occur.

This particular conceptual approach may provide insight into two of the previously stated problems: HRIS ineffectiveness:
1. More accurate defining of information processing needs
2. Meeting the needs of a large number of diverse constituencies.

It is reasonable to assume that if critical HR activities can be elicited from the major stakeholders and criteria for effectiveness is established then defining information processing needs should be a more natural
outgrowth of the process. Further, what better way to address the needs of multiple constituencies than to base the design of the HRIS on the premise that the system should attempt to include the needs of as many diverging stakeholders as possible. Or if this is not practically feasible, to determine and prioritize the information processing needs of the most significant constituencies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO MEASURE THE IMPACT OF HRIS

Figure 3 is a suggested framework to measure impact. The previously discussed theoretical rationales offer approaches to examining the impact of the technology in the HR function. Specific outcome variables are included in the model.

OUTCOME VARIABLES

As was previously suggested related outcome variables for studying the effectiveness of the technology are not known, making it difficult to predict a priori. From the limited research on effectiveness, and built on previous research in the area, a number of outcome variables are suggested.

INCREASED JOB SATISFACTION
(recognition, advancement opportunities)

Based on Wilken's (1971) findings, increased job satisfaction may occur. Although there are conflicting results in the literature (Kling 1978; Kramer, 1982) a number of studies support the relationship between effects of technology and increased job satisfaction (Gilliano, 1982; Bell, 1983; Maford, 1967).

INCREASED STATUS

Based on Wolfe's (1978) research there may be an increase in perceived status. Again, while there is previous research to support the relationship (Bjorn - Pederson, 1977; Kramer and Damsgar, 1982) the results are conflicting (Rico, 1962, Robey 1977).

ORGANIZATIONAL INVESTMENT

DeSaniti (1986) and Tomeski (1973) suggest that the greater the amount of organizational investment in the system, the greater the perceived value of the system.

SYSTEM INFLUENCE

DeSaniti (1986) also found that the greater the system's influence the greater the perceived value.

USER INVOLVEMENT

DeSaniti (1986) as well as a number of other researchers (Maford 1979; Turbin 1988) suggest that increased user involvement influences the perceived value of the system.

Figure 3: A Theoretical Framework

- Impact of HRIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOME VARIABLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased Job Satisfaction (recognition, advancement opportunities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Organizational Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater System Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased User Involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AGENDA FOR RESEARCH

The author is currently involved in a program of research designed to test the value of the theoretical framework. The primary research question suggests that:

1. Greater levels of HR effectiveness will be related to greater levels of:
   - Job satisfaction
   - Increased status
   - Greater organizational influence
   - Increased user involvement

Measures of effectiveness are operationalized at both the strategic and operational level. Secondary research questions include:

1. To what extent do HRIS support the strategic goals of the company?
2. To what extent do HRIS support the operational goals of the company?
3. To what extent do HRIS meet the needs of multiple constituencies?

Answers to these types of questions only begin to address the possible relationships between HR effectiveness and HRIS. We are repeatedly reminded that research on the "effects of computing" in organizations is exploratory at best (Attewell and Rule, 1984). This is particularly important to remember when attempting to study impact in a relatively new functional area. The first step is to determine "what particular cause - effect relations prevail in specific contexts" (Attewell and Rule, 1984, p. 1190).

This program of research suggests an initial step towards better understanding in increasingly important context - the impact of technology in Human Resource Management.

CONCLUSION

As the the Human Resource function continues to grow in strength and responsibility, HR managers must continue to generate ideas for improving the management of people, shaping corporate values and defining the corporate culture. The challenge for the future will be to answer increasingly difficult questions such as:

- How can productivity and quality be dramatically increased?
- How can increasing complexity and dynamic change be managed?
- How should organization be structured to eliminate waste and improve performance?

The question that this program of research attempts to answer is to what extent IT effects HRM's ability to meet these challenges.

REFERENCES


