

Human Resource Information System Adoption in Organizations



White Paper
September 2019

The arrival of Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) in recent years has radically changed the human resources (HR) landscape in organizations. Today's prime HR challenges are digital transformation of the HR function and enhancement of the employee experience.

One question immediately comes to mind: do employees willingly adopt these systems?

This White Paper attempts to reply to this question by presenting a dozen personal testimonials by HR and HRIS managers working in different business sectors. These are enriched by Shortways interviews with a panel of fifty HR and HRIS decision-makers.

This report, which is the fruit of a collaboration between Shortways and four Masters degree students at the ITESCIA i-Management School, is written for HR and HRIS professionals like you who are asking themselves this same question.

Our study includes several personal accounts - by Maéva, Ali, Julien and others - of HRIS appropriation in their respective companies. They report the difficulties encountered and the steps taken to drive acceptance of the new system.

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We would also like to thank the HRIS managers and project leaders who accepted to be interviewed or who contributed to our study entitled "Broad Survey of HRIS Adoption" for their time and for expressing their personal viewpoints.

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Definition of adoption and its challenges

What do we mean by adoption?

The word "adopt" derives from the Latin "adoptare" meaning "choose." So adoption is synonymous with "choosing something", in our case an HRIS for regular use. However, we note some variations in the definition of adoption among the professionals we interviewed for this report.

For example, Guillaume Piot at Altays sees HRIS adoption as *"A happy marriage between the IT tool and everything around it", adding that "Adoption appears a very psychological thing to me: every user must fully understand why the company changed its system."*

Maéva, former HRIS Manager in a large distribution group, offers a complementary viewpoint. For her, adoption concerns end-users first and foremost, underlining that *"It's the user who must accept the HRIS. In our large group, I regarded users as my customers whom I had to convince to endorse the HRIS tool."*

Finally, Gwendoline Dumant, CGS & HRIS Manager at Bergerat Monnoyeur, makes a clear distinction between adoption and appropriation: *"I think we need to differentiate two things. First, adoption which means getting users used to the new system through training and pedagogy. Then this hopefully leads to appropriation, or acceptance, which is the final stage of adoption."*

We see that several definitions of adoption are possible, perhaps corresponding to different levels of maturity. The organization must define its target level. Everyone is nonetheless in agreement as to the importance of end-users in the adoption process. We could define adoption generically as the ability of users to

appropriate and employ the HRIS tool chosen by the company.

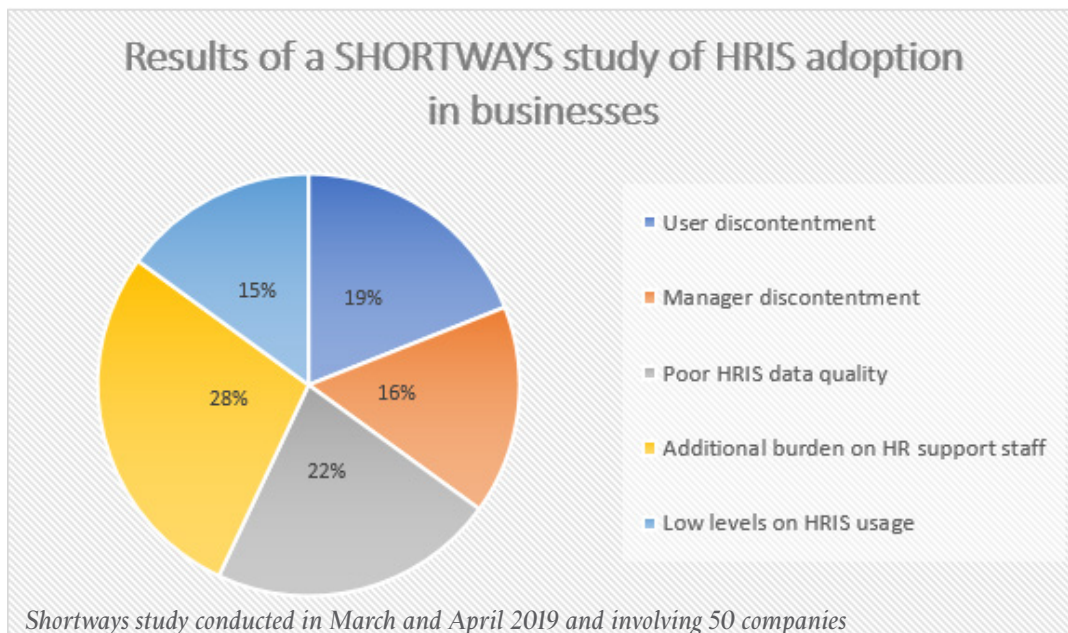


HRIS adoption challenges

Let's take a look at the challenges of HRIS adoption in businesses many of whom report only partial uptake of their tool, or even refusal. The panel of firms we questioned report adoption rates between 60% and 70%. Could be better!

Why is wide adoption of the HRIS important?

Shortways' investigations reveal the negative impacts of poor adoption. These are shown in the pie chart below:



Additional burden on HR support staff

Of the firms interviewed, 28% says that the main adverse effect of poor adoption is a heavier workload for the HR support team. If the tool is not well appropriated in-house, HR managers are bombarded with questions and calls for assistance from staff getting to grips with the system. Ali Mhenni, at Française des Jeux (FDJ), recalls that *"When we deployed the tool at FDJ, we paid particular attention to its adoption by end-users. Our primary goal was to ensure that people could use the tool autonomously in order not to take up our time needed for other activities."*

unreliable data if people fail to appropriate the tool or do not use it regularly.

Poor HRIS data quality

Among our interviewees, 22% believe that mediocre HRIS data impact personnel management. For example, data that are not up-to-date can result in erroneous reporting or incorrect social results. Céline Ropartz, Change Manager at Engie, points out: *"Data quality and management are the first thing that users notice. If data are incorrect, the system loses its credibility."* To attenuate this risk, HRIS systems increasingly allow staff to update the database themselves, checking and modifying their personal data, which avoids the errors seen all too often in organizations. There is a serious risk of

Manager discontentment

Manager discontentment was mentioned by 16% of our interviewees. A tool that is not appropriated will not be used, and managers are first in line to suffer the consequences. A HRIS is intended to save time for people, allowing them to register vacation requests and get answers to questions, for example. But it will not save time for employees or HR staff if it is not used, which will be irritating for the managers designated to provide support. Ali Mhenni at FDJ remembers: *"When we first introduced the HRIS, it was not at all well received. It was used very little and supervisors had to spend lots of time explaining the processes used to reserve vacations, declare working hours, report sick leave, and so on. Instead of making these tasks simpler, the HRIS seemed to make everything complicated."*

Low levels of HRIS usage

Reluctant usage of the HRIS, reported by 15% of our interviewees, is another impact of poor HRIS adoption. Patricia Le Mero at Intermarché explains: *"The meetings and workshops we organized for our different activities to involve users in the change right from the start were not enough to assure willing uptake of the system. If it cannot be configured to match users' requirements, they are quickly discouraged and stick to their existing tools."* Further, low usage obviously means a very poor return on investment in the HRIS whose usefulness will then be called into question.

It is up to each organization to define "good adoption", for poor HRIS adoption can impact operations. The first people to suffer the consequences will be the HR Department and managers.

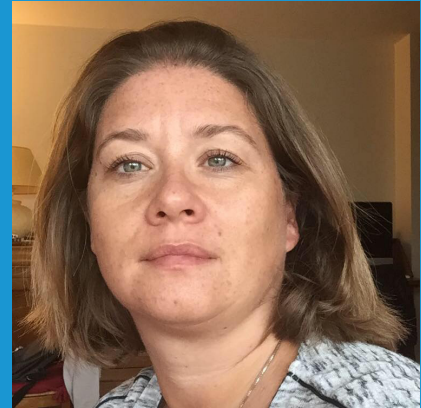
It is not always easy to ensure HRIS appropriation in an organization. In the second part of this study we will examine some of numerous reasons.



An expert speaks



Stéphanie PAOLOZZI,
Payroll and HRIS Manager at Bouygues Telecom



Stéphanie, please tell us about your career to date.

I am Stéphanie Paolozzi, in charge of pay and our HR information system. I started my professional career at Bouygues SA in the early 2000s working on activities including social reporting and preparation of social audits. I soon moved to Bouygues Telecom where I had similar responsibilities, including workforce management and social reporting. Two years later, I joined the pay unit where I supervised payroll expenditures and reviewed remunerations.

What were the context and challenges of your HRIS project?

With the emergence of new information systems, we felt the need find a tool more modern than Excel to follow-up pay reviews. We first solicited feedback from employees with the aim of making the best choice and ensuring a good user experience. In terms of return on investment, we noticed that with the new system staff interviews are managed more efficiently and data is recorded automatically.

In fact, this dematerialization took place a few years ago and the replacement tools were starting to feel their age and failing to meet our evolving needs; there were many shortcomings, notably in terms of usability. So we switched to SAP, choosing a range of modules to adapt to our needs, including performance management and payroll management.

How would you define this question of HRIS adoption? What does this mean to you?

I would say that the HRIS is well adopted once the end-users hardly ever call the support service! When the HRIS is operational and well configured to match our requirements over time, the staff find it easy to use to manage their activities.

An expert speaks



What are the internal and external obstacles and difficulties in your organization with regard to HRIS adoption?

When changing an information system that affects staff, managers and human resources, the end-users must be involved upstream of the project. It is essential to get their feedback on their existing tools especially in terms of dysfunctionalities. The aim is to understand their usages, needs and sources of discontentment in order to get started on the right foot. The earlier this feedback is taken on board, the more willingly the system will be supported by the operational staff.

What steps did you take to facilitate adoption?

During implementation of our "SAP SuccessFactors" system, we used targeted communication over a variety of channels to reach 7,000 users. In particular, we trained all our social partners and invited managers to plenary meetings to present the functionalities. Several tools were mobilized to be as demonstrative as possible, such as online help, tutorials and presentation videos.

What do you think are the key factors for success?

One important factor is to tune the timing of the project and launch to allow time for good communication. It is essential not to neglect the period of explanation, presentation and teasing to ensure that end-users appropriate the system immediately and efficiently. The communication should be timely so that when the tool comes on line its users are already informed and have seen demonstrations. This makes for faster uptake. Another key factor is to explain specific elements of use of the tool. Support is tailored to allow users to find exactly the information they need. People want things to make sense and to know why the new tool was chosen. The ultimate goal is to enable all staff to become autonomous.

Thank you Stéphanie for sharing your experience and insights.

Factors holding back HRIS adoption

It is vital to identify the barriers to HRIS adoption that are often encountered. The statements of our professional contacts reveal recurrent problems that hinder user adoption, notably resistance to change and usability issues and lack of user-friendliness. Other common issues are inadequate access to the system due to the specificities of certain types of activity, and complicated governance.

Resistance to change

Ali Mhenni, HRIS Manager at FDJ, tells us that *"The main obstacle to HRIS adoption is getting staff used to change."* All new information systems strongly affect their future users and induce apprehension that leads to resistance.

The participants in our study reveal the most common causes of resistance:

- failure to grasp the benefits of the new system,
- refusal to adhere to the project,
- unsuitable change management approach or conduct,
- absence of a permanent culture of change.

When implementing a new information system, never forget that staff have become used to the old one.

Guillaume Piot, HRIS Development and Marketing Manager at Altays, says *"Personnel resistance to change was the biggest obstacle to adoption in every project in which I have been involved. People had all kinds of doubts about the benefits and impacts of a new HRIS because we failed to properly explain the value it can bring. Our pedagogy was found wanting."*

Gwendoline Dumant, CGS & HRIS Manager at Bergerat Monnoyeur, adds *"Getting a tool adopted is tricky since it requires savvy change management with end-users."*



Non-intuitive usability and absence of personalization

Usability issues in an HRIS can seriously hinder uptake. User-friendliness can be defined as the adaptation of a work environment (software tools, hardware, etc.) to users' needs. A tool that fails to do so is unlikely to be accepted effectively, as Eric Carpentier, HR Manager at Grand Vision, confirms: *"You can have the best tool in the world, but if it's not convivial and easy to use then people won't accept it"*. Patricia Le Mero, HR Manager at Intermarché Group adds a complementary remark about personalization: *"If the software cannot be configured to match their requirements, users will quickly become discouraged and stick to their existing tool."*

Inadequate IS accessibility

Lack of accessibility to information systems is another problem, especially in sectors where most users are on the move or work away from the office, such as transport and retail/distribution companies. Due to the nature of their work, some employees do not enjoy access to the HRIS, which makes adoption difficult, even impossible. Julien Krawec, HRIS Manager at the RATP public transport company, observes: *"Our population is composed mainly of metro and bus drivers who cannot access our information systems because, for security reasons, they don't have the necessary equipment such as a cellphone or laptop PC. We have put terminals in a number of RATP offices, but these offer very limited functionalities. Would personal equipment used for professional purposes be a solution for staff denied direct access to the information systems?"*

Complex governance

A new HRIS must take into account the enterprise environment and culture - but not upset its organization. Poor project governance, which can seriously handicap its acceptance, is often the result of:

- lack of involvement and commitment by top management,
- lack of strong transversality needed to break down silos,
- absence or under-representation of managers in the project implementation, despite their pivotal role in HRIS operations.

Strong involvement of the executive team is essential, since a new HRIS is highly structuring for the organization and induces many changes. The project must be compatible with the strategic roadmap, which can engender additional difficulties. Maéva, former HRIS Manager in a large distribution group, recalls that *"The biggest problem is to be aligned with the company's strategy - especially when you are part of a group. Things can get very complicated when there are lots of affiliate entities."*

HRIS transversality can also be a challenge, since the project necessarily involves several departments whose individual needs must be known. There are many reasons why a given service might decline to adhere to the project. The difficulty lies in identifying which players will support it completely.

Another issue in HRIS projects is the representation of managers who find themselves on the front line, coping with additional tasks and striving to provide support for employees.

Julien Krawec, HRIS Manager at the RATP, observes: *"HRIS projects are increasingly transversal; they no longer concern just the human resources people, but other managers and their staff as well. There is a serious issue of governance and decision-making. Who defends the managers' objectives during the implementation? Who are their spokespeople? At the moment I am working on a transversal digitization project involving several departments.*

Concerning arbitration: who arbitrates between the needs of managers and staff? Can the HR Department legitimately decide alone when the project concerns several departments?"

The factors hindering HRIS adoption include those common to all information systems, such as governance, usability and personalization.

In the case of an HRIS there may be additional obstacles relating to the very nature of the system, in other words the management of human capital. Unlike other IT systems, an HRIS touches everyone: employees, managers and even people who do not normally have much to do with IT systems.

Despite these challenges, it is pleasing to see how many companies successfully install an HRIS and see it accepted by the users.



An expert speaks



Céline ROPARTZ,
Group HRIS Change Manager at Engie



How would you define this issue of HRIS adoption? What does it mean to you?

I would say that, above all, the idea is to do whatever is necessary to enable people to use these tools to support their career development. I am of course referring to a "talent development" information system, not one used for payroll or administration. And for the HR function it must be a means of working faster and better, and of having access to centralized, better integrated information to enhance relations and interactions with employees.

What do you think are the main obstacles and difficulties, whether internal or exterior to your organization?

The first challenge is data quality and management. After all, this is the first thing every user will notice. Data reliability is vital for user acceptance; the HR tool loses its credibility if the data are not good. Of course, there is some reticence to use a tool in a process that is essentially human. What I mean is that people put their heart and passion into their work, they have personal aspirations and so on, so when they are faced with a new IT tool they want it to be reliable, as reliable as a financial system. They are convinced that there is only one possible response and one way of doing things. It is therefore difficult to reconcile the two, and this can lead to people rejecting the system.

What systems have you used to drive adoption?

We were convinced that adoption must be promoted by people working close to the end-users and who know them. So we chose a strategy based on a methodology and deliverables that we explained to the local teams in our entities and business units to enable them to understand them and then adapt and apply them to their users. We also provided a communication system relating to the tool and training videos to help people get started. We observed that all this generated substantial work that was too much for some of the business units, and some felt that they lacked the feeling necessary for this task.

So the level of support was not uniform across the group. On the other hand, we saw some very interesting local initiatives.

Another observation is that most staff do not use our tool every day; some processes are used only once a year. In the first year, when such a process comes to an end, the users understand more or less how the system works. But ten or eleven months later when they need it again, they have forgotten, and to make matters worse the system may have evolved. Therefore to reassure users and local support teams, little inclined to make the same learning effort as in the first year, we decided to integrate a Digital Assistant in the tool (we chose Shortways). We were convinced that a help system providing tooltip reminders would be most efficient if it were accessed directly by users just when they need them - in other words, when using the system.

How do you measure adoption and how often?

During actual deployments we are very present in the field, so we get quick and practical feedback. We also have regular discussions on many subjects with our contacts in the business units. And we get valuable feedback through the support people. For performance assessments we conduct polls and then examine reported difficulties and improvement suggestions. Last year we questioned all the users, but to avoid bothering them again we interviewed a smaller panel this year.

What do you think are the key factors for success?

Easy usability of the tool is vital: systems that are more or less intuitive, "appealing" and pleasant to use tend to be perceived as easy. The data must be correct, of course, because if they are not people will lose confidence in the tool and may even reject it. Nominate a "local expert" so that people know who to turn to if they get stuck; provide easy access to online help or information when needed. Having accessible help in the tool is a great solution, especially when the tool does not appear intuitive and the local expert is not around. It's important that users feel reassured and not alone - even if in reality they do not read the help texts very much. To drive adoption it is also important that people understand the sense of the process and that all communication about the system is perfectly consistent and simultaneous with the communication about the process. The two must be linked.

What are your next steps for HRIS adoption?

We maintain a dynamic posture of continuous evolution. Every year we conduct surveys to try to see how we can evolve the tool and user support. Obviously there are also workshops on data quality. We constantly ask ourselves whether or not the processes implemented in the IT tool are in phase with the group policies and with end-user expectations. As the project progresses we increasingly take user remarks into account in our decisions. For example, before making significant changes to a process we attach great importance to getting the changes approved by a panel of users as representative as possible; we don't want decisions being made only by "experts". We need to be sure that what we want to create and configure is well understood by end-users and that we can adapt the support system.

Do you have any new ideas or new ways of driving adoption?

At present it is difficult to assess the efficacy of our approach. Yet we are convinced that it is necessary to have a varied choice of solutions ranging from very detailed process sheets to online help. And of course videos and face-to-face meetings. There is no universal solution because people are all different, not to mention the challenges of working in several languages and countries with different population types and cultures. We have to be adaptive while maintaining our ability to produce and maintain all these deliverables. No revolution is expected today, at least not on the modules that have been in use for several years. We continue in the same spirit for the new modules we are adding. For example we have a "Learning" module that provides online training within the tool. We are even looking at the possibility of using the tool to deliver training programs.

Thank you Céline for sharing this interesting experience.

Key factors for successful HRIS adoption

Successful HRIS adoption is part of a global project that must be prepared ahead of the actual launch. Two types of key success factors must be taken into account: human and technological.

Human and organizational success factors

Executive management involvement

Ali Mhenni, HRIS Manager at FDJ, tells us that *"It is necessary to involve top executives in the process of HRIS adoption since these people drive the project."* Top managers have a vital role to play in the success of a project, since their involvement has a dual impact. At the early design stage, they must adapt the project needs and goals to bring them into line with the enterprise roadmap. Later, they can spur staff to change their working habits and thereby facilitate uptake of the HRIS. Executive involvement can take the form of steering or management committees, or it can be even more "hands-on". Engie, for example, produced and distributed widely within the company a video in which a manager presents strong arguments in favor of the group HRIS as part of the global transformation of his business unit.

Change management starting at an early stage

Effective change management is indispensable to deal with the "natural" resistance of users. Yet it is not just a question of good communication; it must operate close to the personnel with a network of key users and deliver timely support and training.



Frequent communication taking many forms

Many forms of digital communication can be used such as newsletters and targeted publications, but the most effective form remains the information meeting! In an HR project affecting all employees it is also important to involve personnel representatives. For example, one company in Marseille successfully introduced an HRIS by organizing information meetings attended by all the players, including project managers, management representatives, and project and IT teams. The communication must start as early as possible. Patricia Le Mero agrees: *"I think it is essential to communicate much earlier than usual and to make presentations to stimulate the enthusiasm of the personnel."*

Key users: ambassadors of change close to the personnel

Key users are people who participate in every stage of the project, from the definition of needs to user training. They represent their specific activities, describe their processes and the responsibilities of players in each process. Working close to the personnel, they are the preferred liaison between future end-users and project managers. This has been demonstrated at Engie, for example, where the utility of processes must be understood by all. HRIS Change Manager, Céline Ropartz, affirms that it is necessary to *"nominate local contacts so that people know who to turn to if they have a problem and to provide very easy access to online help, and so on; users must feel reassured."*

Anticipate user training

Training enables users to master their new working tool. Ideally it should be prepared and dispensed throughout the entire organization ahead of the launch. We observe that when training is anticipated at an early stage, the new system is more readily welcomed.

Success factors relating to the tool itself

Importance of user-friendliness

"To facilitate the HRIS adoption, the tool must be so simple that training is hardly necessary!" quips Eric Carpentier, HRIS Manager at Grand Vision. Usability can be priority criterion: 28% of the companies we questioned say that ease of use was what finally guided their choice of an HRIS solution.

Matching functionalities to user needs

Users will get to grips faster with a new system that satisfies their needs and adapts to their existing processes perfectly, or at least closely. They feel comfortable and more inclined to accept the tool, quickly losing the urge to return to the old one. *"Our users want simplicity; they don't want a system that fails to meet their expectations,"* remarks Patricia Le Mero, in charge of the HRIS service at Intermarché. Nevertheless, some of our other contacts see an alternative approach: they believe that the way to ensure willing HRIS adoption is to go for a standard turnkey solution, such as SaaS mode packages which moreover bring other seductive benefits such as absence of maintenance, regular automatic upgrades, and ease of use.



The downside of SaaS is that the solutions do not always match user needs, since they impose their own data model and processes; users are expected to adapt to the software. To palliate this shortcoming, some publishers' platforms now come with modules allowing customized developments: the so-called Platform as a Service, or "PaaS". Moreover, the regular upgrading of SaaS solutions can be perceived as a drawback, since they obligate managers to provide additional support, or at the very least to inform users of the new releases.

Data quality

An employee opening the HRIS will immediately quit if the personal data shown on his employee file are wrong! Data reliability is essential for adoption. For Céline Ropartz at Engie: *"Data must be correct otherwise people will inevitably lose confidence in the system and even abandon it."* There is a potential risk of creating a vicious circle if this is not addressed right from the start: poor data... loss of user confidence... the system is discredited...

Close monitoring of KPIs

Modern HRIS systems increasingly come with key performance indicator (KPI) functions. Julien Krawec at RATP remarks: *"These business KPIs spur the HR department to check that the tools are being used."* These indicators provide a view of the activity generated by the system: supervisors can see the global usage and even that of individual modules. This information can help guide improvements that will hopefully boost usage. Indeed, several companies say they are incorporating KPIs in their tools to get a clearer view of their usage.

Create a «feedback culture» on the HRIS

Feedback has always been useful to enrich the evaluations of managers and their staff, and this now applies to HRIS tools as well. Once the solution is up and running, encouraging users to give their impressions and report usage difficulties is a good way of identifying potential improvements. This is confirmed by Julien Krawec at the RATP: *"Feedback is one way of measuring adoption by employees. It can highlight improvements that will make all users more satisfied and willing to adopt the new tool rapidly."*

Feedback also makes staff more «involved» in the project: they are more committed when they see that their problems are heard and understood. HRIS Change Manager Céline Ropartz says that for this reason there are regular discussions with the contacts in Engie business units and that the user support team receives lots of feedback from users.

Conclusion

An HRIS is special in that it impacts everyone in the organization. Data quality directly influences HRIS adoption, and there is a risk of seeing a vicious rejection circle if this is not well managed from the start. Resistance to adoption can also cause organizational problems, with HR managers and staff on the front line coping with exploding demand for user support.

HRIS governance can have significant impact on HRIS adoption as well, so the senior management must be involved and managers must accept new roles in HRIS projects.

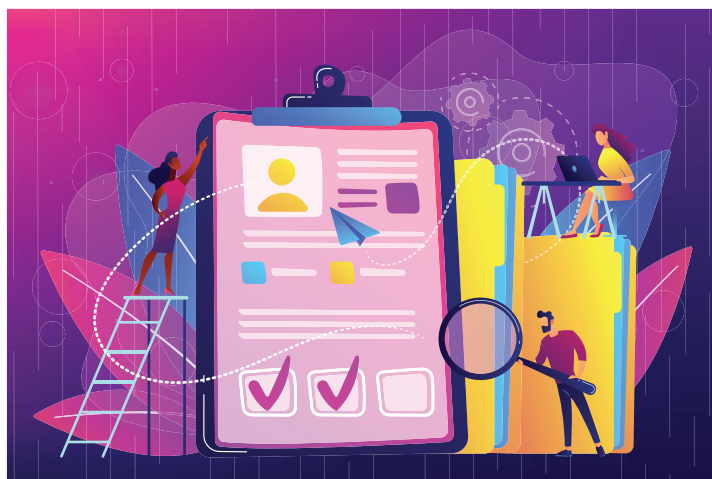
In our increasingly digital world, HRIS accessibility is important. Even if most employees working outside or in a warehouse or a transport platform carry a cellphone, this device is not always provided by the employer. What does HRIS adoption signify in this case?

Regarding end-users, while good change management remains indispensable, the deployment of SaaS applications requires careful reflection about more regular - and even industrialized - support. We should remember that an SaaS application imposes a model, so the system will be more willingly accepted if it closely matches users' needs.

The key factors driving uptake prove to be governance involving top and middle managers, good data quality, a friendly, easy-to-use solution, and good change management applied at the earliest stage possible. User uptake targets must be defined and then monitored via indicators.

Innovative solutions can also be envisaged. For example, the Engie company has integrated a "wizard" in its HRIS system to assist users, in particular people who use the tool only occasionally, such as during the annual campaign of appraisal interviews.

Thanks to this digital assistant developed by Shortways, Engie has seen a significant drop in its demand for user support, and the completion rate of interviews is on target. Two indicators among others that reflect enthusiastic appropriation by users of the system!



About Shortways Digital Assistant

Shortways is a Digital Assistant that allows organizations to digitize end-user support and training by embedding content in business applications. Designed for large organizations, Shortways solutions save time and ensure the effective support required to ensure employee adoption of digital solutions.

Every organization today faces the challenge of digital transformation. Their employees are expected to master new tools, yet they don't have the time to get fully acquainted with all the new business processes supported by new software tools.

The Shortways assistant is designed to support people getting to grips with new software, guiding them step by step or displaying tooltip messages and contextual FAQs.

Shortways Digital Assistant allows organizations to digitize their end-user training and support and reduce the number of calls to the IT support service by a factor of ten!





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