The Role of the Client–side Project Manager in HR Tech Transformation.

The bridge between an organisation's aspirations for digital transformation and the tangible outcomes of HR technology projects.

Introduction.

In our experience with HR technology transformation, the role of the client-side project manager is the driving force for success.

These projects are not just about implementing new software but about strategic organisational outcomes like access to actionable insights, improving efficiency and elevating employee experiences.

The stakes are high. Missteps in these projects can affect a company's credibility and perceptions among executives, managers, and employees. But get it right and you'll not only enhance productivity and employee experience but equip the organisation with a consumer-grade experience that gives you a competitive advantage.

In this article, we'll explore the client-side PM's role in driving success, the typical challenges they face, and the skills they need to overcome them.

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The Indispensable Client-Side PM.

A client-side PM is essentially the bridge between an organisation's aspirations for digital transformation and the tangible outcomes of HR technology projects.

Their role is multifaceted, involving meticulous planning, stakeholder management, and an unwavering focus on the project's strategic objectives. A strong Project Manager with experience in HR transformation projects will be one of your most invaluable resources.

They should have the gravitas to engage with senior stakeholders in your organisation and have the relevant people technology experience.

Engaging your PM when you've identified your preferred vendor is highly recommended.

Let's delve into the core responsibilities that underscore their indispensability.

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01 Project Scoping and Planning.

Investing time and resources upfront in your HR transformation project planning is crucial. This includes creating the overarching vision, clarifying your future state aspirations, and articulating your guiding principles and business priorities.

This early planning should involve collaboration with diverse stakeholders across the business to get their input and buy-in.

It involves being clear on and setting the parameters for what and who is in scope for the transformation. Things like:

- Is this an opportunity to look more broadly at digital transformation across your people processes and systems?

- Should payroll be included?
- Perhaps your rostering, time and attendance challenges and requirements can be brought into the project scope?
- Does it make sense to try and unify all your workforce functions into one platform?

These questions and considerations must be addressed in the early scoping and planning stages and documented in a detailed plan.

A skilled PM sets precise boundaries and objectives from the outset and gains consensus to the plan from the project sponsor, project team and ideally the SteerCo accountable for the program.

02 Coordinating with Project Stakeholders.

A proficient client-side PM can effectively coordinate with a diverse range of stakeholders. This includes scheduling meetings, assigning tasks, and ensuring all parties are aligned with the project's goals.

Without effective stakeholder coordination, conflicting priorities can emerge, leading to delays and dissatisfaction.

This includes keeping a tight watch on the deliverables of your implementation partner and holding them accountable to their tasks and timelines.

A client-side PM navigates these challenges by fostering strong collaboration with both their team and the vendor's team, maintaining clear and regular lines of communication.

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> *Probably the most important and time-consuming role as a client-side PM is what we call 'herding the cats'! It's getting all the internal stakeholders on the bus, knowing their role, reminding them of their role, and keeping them engaged and on track throughout the project*

**Neil Ritchie,
Senior Consultant and Project
Manager, Pinpoint HRM.**

03 Managing Timelines and Budgets.

A client-side PM's role is to keep the project on track and ensure it's completed within the agreed-upon timeframe and budget.

This involves what we call 'working the plan'. Having a detailed, costed project plan allows you to monitor progress daily, weekly, and monthly and make necessary adjustments in response to deviations.

However, unexpected twists and turns are inevitable in cloud HR projects, affecting aspects like scope, effort and resources.

These challenges and changes constantly threaten project timelines and budgets. The critical factor is how the client-side Project Manager handles these changes.

The key is being proactive, offering a clear rationale for deviations, and managing stakeholder expectations. This prevents escalations that could disrupt the project and undermine executives' confidence in its direction and success potential.

04 Ensuring Quality Control.

Quality control is critical in HR technology projects, where the margin for error is slim. The PM is responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the project meet the established standards and specifications. This might involve regularly reviewing project deliverables and promptly addressing any quality issues.

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Neil provides some first hand experience on this:

For example, if a requirements document incorrectly defined a critical business need this needs to be identified prior to any build or configuration commencing. Having key deliverables signed off by the project team at key project stage gates will ensure no surprises!

Neil Ritchie,
Senior Consultant and Project Manager, Pinpoint HRM.

05 Communicating with Stakeholders.

Regular and effective communication keeps stakeholders informed and engaged from the beginning to the end of your project.

Typical communication channels include weekly status reports, meetings with project team members, updates to the SteerCo, and using the intranet, Slack, or other internal collaboration channels to update the broader business on the project's progress and its benefits to employees.

A client-side PM must excel in tailoring their communication to different stakeholders' needs and preferences, ensuring everyone remains aligned with the project's progress and objectives.

Typical Client-Side Challenges and Pitfalls.

Client-side PMs face many challenges, from conflicting chains of command and resource constraints to navigating the complexities of managing cross-functional teams and motivating the workforce behind the project.

Each can derail an HR technology project if not managed adeptly.

Understanding these challenges and ensuring you engage a PM who can weave their way around them is vital for any HR leader looking to steer their project to success.

Authority and Resource Constraints

In many organisations, project teams are formed from existing staff members who continue to juggle their BAU roles alongside project tasks. This dual focus can dilute their attention and commitment, presenting a significant challenge for PMs. An effective strategy to counteract this issue is establishing clear priorities and negotiating dedicated project time for critical team members.

Moreover, leveraging the authority of senior stakeholders to secure necessary resources early on in the program helps underscore the project's importance to the organisation's objectives.

As Neil notes again:

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But this needs to be more than lip service, the senior stakeholders must be willing to support the project manager when resourcing conflicts arise.

**Neil Ritchie,
Senior Consultant and Project
Manager, Pinpoint HRM.**

Cross-Functional Coordination

The diversity of expertise and functions within a project team is both a strength and a challenge.

Effective communication and collaboration are the linchpins of smooth project execution. Creating a shared vision and fostering an environment of mutual respect is critical.

For instance, implementing cross-functional workshops can help bridge knowledge gaps and align team members towards common goals.

Workforce Motivation

Keeping the project team motivated for the duration of the program, especially when members are balancing project tasks with their regular responsibilities, is crucial.

Recognising and addressing each team member's unique motivations can enhance engagement and productivity. Regular acknowledgment of contributions and milestones reached can foster a sense of achievement and belonging among team members. *Celebrate the wins along the way!*

Implementing Strategies for Success.

The complexity and scope of HR technology projects require a proactive approach to mitigate risks and enhance project outcomes.

Proactive Risk Identification

Conducting a thorough risk assessment at the outset of a project enables the client-side project manager to anticipate potential challenges and strategise effectively. This essential step can uncover risks associated with budget underestimations, vendor delays, technology integration, or regulatory changes. Planning for these scenarios prepares the PM to handle unforeseen hurdles.

Also holding regular review sessions to reassess risks and adapt strategies is crucial for maintaining the project's resilience as it progresses.

Comprehensive Resource Planning

Developing a detailed resource plan underpins the success of any project, ensuring it is adequately resourced in terms of budget, skills, and timeframes.

This involves not only securing financial investment but also aligning the right team members with the project's needs, ensuring they have the capacity to contribute effectively.

Engaging external experts or reallocating internal resources may be necessary to address any gaps in skills or capacity, further strengthening the project team.

Effective Change Management

Implementing new HR technology often necessitates significant modifications to existing processes and workflows. An effective project manager must develop and implement a comprehensive change management strategy that addresses potential resistance and ensures a smooth transition to new systems. This strategy should include robust training, support, and clear communication to ease the transition and enhance adoption rates.

For example, involving end-users early in the project can provide valuable insights and foster a sense of ownership, further mitigating resistance and promoting successful adoption.

Essential Skills for Client-Side PMs.

To navigate the intricacies of HR tech projects successfully, client-side PMs must possess a unique blend of skills:

Effective Communication:
The ability to articulate project goals, progress, and challenges to a diverse audience is crucial. Mastery in conveying complex information clearly and concisely to various stakeholders, ensuring alignment and commitment.

Change Management:
The PM should be an agent of change, capable of navigating and leading the organisation through the transformation process. Not just managing but championing change, equipped to guide the organisation through transitions with minimal disruption.

Technical & Domain Expertise:
A deep understanding of HR technology systems and their applications within. A solid understanding of HR technologies enables the PM to make informed decisions and communicate effectively with technical teams.

Risk Management:
The ability to anticipate, identify, and mitigate risks, ensuring the project stays on track and within scope.

Resource Management:
Skilful allocation and optimisation of both human and financial resources to achieve project goals efficiently.

Delegation and Teamwork:
The capacity to delegate effectively, empowering team members while fostering a collaborative project environment.

Adaptability:
Flexibility to respond to new challenges, changes in project scope, or shifts in organisational priorities with agility and resilience.

Winding Up.

Integrating new HR technology is a complex journey filled with potential pitfalls. By understanding the critical role of the PM, embracing strategies to overcome obstacles, and ensuring the PM is equipped with the necessary skills, HR leaders can significantly enhance the success rates of their HR technology projects. This not only leads to smoother project execution but also maximises the return on investment in HR technology, driving organisational efficiency and fostering a more engaged, productive workforce.

In summary, the client-side project manager is not merely a facilitator but the driving force behind successfully delivering HR technology projects. Their strategic insight, leadership, and unwavering focus on project goals are invaluable assets for any organisation embarking on the path of HR digital transformation.

Need help with your HR tech project or looking to get more from your current solution? **Contact our HR tech experts today.**

Start your HR tech journey with Pinpoint today.

Known as 'The HR Tech Project Specialists', Pinpoint HRM has been assisting clients in designing and delivering people technology projects for 20 years, from vendor evaluation and project readiness to implementation and beyond go-live.

Our passionate team of 80+ HR tech experts work with clients across the full lifecycle of HR transformation and cover all the market-leading HR, Payroll, and Workforce Management software systems.

With experience delivering more than 650 people technology projects, we know there's more to success than just the tech!

Learn more

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