Human Resource Planning Support Systems

The description of United Airlines’ short-range Station Manpower Planning System, which was presented in Chapter 5, provides an indication of the importance of having appropriate computer systems to support such efforts. Although the United system’s forecasting range is on the short-term end of the spectrum, its computerized system has an obviously important financial impact in cost savings. While some human resources forecasting approaches are qualitative rather than quantitative and therefore require minimal computer support, many others require sophisticated software. As indicated in Chapter 5, becuase3 organizations’ human resources are utilized more frequently today as sources of competitive advantage; human resource planning inputs will become more critical in the strategy formulation process. As a result, both human resource executives and other senior managers will need timely information on the future availability of critical human resources. Similarly, they will need timely information on the staffing requirements of a particular strategic alternative. Interestingly, even in the most traditional are of human resources- labor relations- computerized systems are already being used in union contract negotiations to provide on-the-spot cost evaluations of proposals and counterproposals.

Fortunately, a number of computer software packages are available for strategic human resource applications. For example, specialized software can be obtained for succession planning, human resource forecasting, and modeling human resource flows. In managing the software acquisition and implementation process, there are several factors to be considered. One suggestion is that the information technology (IT) and any other support groups. Because of the greater decentralization of human resource planning in many organizations, users’ perceptions of their user friendliness and usefulness of software should be even more critical. As line managers take on more responsibilities for succession planning, human resource planning, and forecasting, there will be increased need for systems they can use without great difficulty. Along this line, efforts to educate line managers on use of these software packages should enhance the ultimate success of the company’s human resource planning and forecasting efforts. While adequate representation from these groups is critical, the evaluation team should be small enough to perform its task in a timely manner. A second suggestion is that the evaluation team should develop a set of initial screening procedures for use in narrowing down the list of packages to a smaller set for in-depth evaluation. Potential screening procedures include checking the software’s functionality against a requirements list, checking with human resource contacts in other companies using the software, viewing vendor presentations, and obtaining recommendations from industry associations.

A third suggestion pertains to the in-depth examination phase. The assessment in this phase should assign highest priority to the mandatory requirements. Beyond whether the software performs the requires functions, other components of this phase include an assessment of the technical compatibility of the software with the organization’s other software systems; the software’s functionality or types of operations it performs; the adequacy of documentation; ease of enhancing the software as future requirements and business conditions change; ease of maintenance; the level of training that will needed for users; and an assessment of the vendor’s staying power and the likelihood of satisfactory service in the future. More detailed checklists of factors for software evaluation are available in practitioner literature.

Although there is growing availability of human resource planning software, managers should remember that user dissatisfaction is still a problem with various software packages. Such dissatisfaction often results because the complexity of software has been underestimated and insufficient resources have been allocated to its implementation.