



Hiring for Success:

Choosing the Right HRIT Consulting Firm

By France Lampron

Many companies use HRIT consulting firms to design and develop applications to cut costs, promote transaction accuracy and affect a company's bottom line. From employee self-service to automated compensation planning, working with an HRIT consulting firm can provide the additional knowledge and experience to implement best practice applications at a lower cost than if the company were to develop the project in-house.

... the two most important things to look for are the hardest to quantify – commitment and attitude.

But cost containment and best practice results only happen with a solid partnership and a well-executed plan. To get a great plan and a strong

partner you need open dialogue with the consulting firm about your company's requirements. Picking the right partner is key to the relationship. Look for a partner who will provide technical and functional leadership and is committed to doing the best possible job for your company.

Through interviews with firms and their references you can choose the right partner. While this article discusses the many issues that need to be addressed by an HRIT firm, the two

most important things to look for are the hardest to quantify — commitment and attitude. You need to have confidence that the firm you have chosen is

committed to the success of your company, not just the project for which they have been engaged. How can you determine this from a few meetings, reference calls and a proposal? Here are some helpful clues.

WHAT IS THE HRIT FIRM'S COMMITMENT TO YOUR COMPANY'S SUCCESS?

See if they offer a solution before they understand your company's problem. If they "jump to the solution," this is a sign that they are more concerned about their own reputation and winning the contract than offering your company the right counsel to make the project a success. This is key because once you have engaged a firm; you can't create commitment and attitude that wasn't there at the start. When you talk to the firm's references, ask them how committed the firm was to the success of the project. For example, did they go the extra mile for the company?

DO THEY LISTEN?

This is a question about work style. Does the firm offer suggestions and new ways of looking at technology and functional/business issues or do they just “yes” you constantly? One of the best reasons to use an HRIT consulting firm is their experience with other companies. A good firm knows what will work, what won’t and where the hidden disasters lie from the initial development to the technical and human rollout of a system. If they don’t offer suggestions and, instead, expect you to completely drive the work, you are not getting enough from the firm. You need to trust that your consulting firm will disagree with you if your idea is not good for the project or your company.

DOES THE FIRM HAVE AN ESTABLISHED METHODOLOGY?

How will the firm approach your company’s project? The better firms have an “easy to understand” process that has been successful on both small and large projects. Ask the firm for stories about how solutions were developed and implemented. Was the solution developed with the customer? How? Who managed the project? Also, ask a question or two regarding hypothetical office politics. When talking to references ask about the process of working with the firm, for example, ask them if they can describe the firm’s methodology. Did the firm’s process add or streamline work for the internal staff of their company?

DOES THE FIRM UNDERSTAND THE PROJECT? IS IT STAFFED CORRECTLY?

Though this sounds like a fairly straightforward question, beware of an HRIT firm that presents a large team for a small project. This is a case of the firm not listening to the needs of your company. Also, it’s important to spend some time with the proposed team liaison before choosing a firm. It’s a good idea to work with this person throughout the proposal period to see if your personal styles are complimentary. This is key because the liaison will be your contact for the length of the project and this person is responsible for the success of the project. During the proposal time period, consider the liaison’s questions, responsiveness and personality. Will

you be comfortable disagreeing with this person? Working out problems? Will you enjoy working with this person?

CAN THE ORGANIZATION WORK WITH BOTH HR AND IT?

It is very important that the firm you hire speaks the language of HR and the language of IT. In planning HRIT projects, it’s a mistake to circumvent either group, in fact, it will set the project up for failure. Hold at least one group meeting with the consulting firm presenting to HR and IT. Observe how the firm facilitates the meeting. Do they understand the questions and comments from HR and IT? What’s the feedback after the meeting from HR and IT regarding the firm?

WILL YOUR COMPANY BE INDEPENDENT AT THE END OF THE PROJECT?

The proposal presented by the consulting firm should contain a plan for documentation, training and a period of transition time after the completion of the project. If this is a subject you must bring up, beware. This is red flag. If this is the case, make sure to ask references if the consulting firm left them heavily dependent at the end of the project. Without a well-planned knowledge transfer your company risks running over budget for additional consulting time.

HOW LONG WILL THE CONTRACT LAST?

Be wary if a firm wants to sign a contract for a project that lasts more than six months. It’s hard to keep a team together for that length of time and your corporate commitment is likely to wane. Contract with a firm for a manageable project, or at a minimum, break a large project into phases. If a firm overcommits time-wise, they are more apt to miss project deadlines.

A FEW FINAL NOTES

What’s the breadth of the firm’s consulting experience? Ask references about the success of the firm’s solutions at their company. Ask references if they would hire this firm for a project that put their company’s business on the line. Remember, if you have a high-risk, high-visibility project, you want a team that has handled a large, high-risk project.

In the end, it is about partnering for success and in the beginning, it’s about choosing a partner who is most likely to succeed.

About the Author

France Lampron is president and founder of Nuvosoft Inc., an HR software company that provides products, consulting and support to its enterprise customers. Lampron has more than 17 years of experience designing and implementing HR systems. She holds a master’s degree in Computer Science from the University of Massachusetts and a bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering from McGill University.