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RESEARCH NOTE FIVE WAYS KRONOS IS MAKING LABOR MANAGEMENT EASIER

THE BOTTOM LINE

User adoption has always been a challenge to maximizing returns from labor management applications. In its latest developments, Kronos offers thoughtful advances in usability and a reason for existing customers to consider an upgrade.

In its recent evaluation of Kronos's latest version of its Workforce Central application, Nucleus found Kronos had made investments in user interface design and mobile accessibility that should deliver greater user adoption and more effective payroll management.

COACHING WITHIN THE APPLICATION

For areas like scheduling, remembering the steps and criteria for building an appropriate schedule are as important as knowing how to use the application. Kronos has built workflow into the application that automatically filters employees' time off requests, overtime status, skills, and other factors into the scheduling process, reducing the number of manual steps a manager needs to take to build a schedule without errors. Using the scheduling wizard, managers can walk through the steps and then "flip" the screen to the traditional schedule view (like they might shuffle files on their iPod) to view results and make any adjustments needed. Benefits Nucleus identified from this approach include less training time for the application, less time to build a schedule, and less likelihood of mistakes or scheduling problems.

USERS CAN CONFIGURE THEIR APP THE WAY THEY WANT

Kronos has recognized that different types of managers want to view time and labor information in different ways. Within Workforce Timekeeper, individual users can drag and reposition different screens and workspaces, such as overtime alerts, the way they want to see them. Within the scheduling and other functions of the application, they can drag and drop fields rather than having to manually rekey their information to reposition them. Likely benefits are greater usability, less time spent searching for needed information or functionality, and less stress at payroll time.

USERS CAN OPT-IN TO MORE COMPLEXITY

Payroll environments can be complex, but that doesn't mean all managers have to know it. Kronos has designed its user interface so that users can see basic information, or opt-in to view more complicated functionality and options

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(somewhat like doing a simple Google search, or deciding to execute an advanced Google search with more fields and parameters). It's an elegant answer to the 80-20 rule (80 percent of the people will use only 20 percent of the functionality) that also supports the most complex needs of some managers dealing with multiple sets of pay rules, employee groups, job codes, and workflows.

USERS CAN PULL IN OUTSIDE WEB CONTENT

Within the Kronos user interface is an option to include a panel for outside Web content. Nucleus can see some areas where this could be helpful (such as having ready access to weather or traffic updates when scheduling some types of jobs) but it could also be a distraction (such as having a Facebook or twitter feed constantly interrupting managers when they're working on payroll). We expect Kronos or Kronos administrators will want to put some guidelines around this feature to ensure it drives a more productive work environment.

MOBILE ACCESS

Software vendors have been providing mobile access to applications since the 1990s, but most of them have been either dumbed-down read-only versions of the big screen or so complicated few users could be bothered to learn to use them effectively. This is changing, as more and more users become accustomed to using their phone for more than just conversation, and vendors invest in getting the form factors right. Kronos is taking some interesting steps here as well:

- Kronos is delivering mobile applications through consumer app stores. Of course, a lot of vendors are delivering mobile applications through the iTunes store and other outlets today, but Kronos is offering an application for both employees and managers – so employees can clock in using their mobile phone instead of the traditional time clock. This has some productivity and accuracy benefits and, particularly with a younger workforce that grew up texting, is likely to drive more effective adoption.
- Kronos has the form factor right. Recognizing that different users manipulate their mobile phones in different ways, Kronos has designed user apps for the iPhone, Blackberry, and Droid that mirror the way the phones' other applications work. For example, users punching in on iPhones will find a spinner to enter information. On the Blackberry, they'll use their roller ball.

CONCLUSION

A lot of vendors have made investments in increasing the usability of their applications, from in-application training to reducing clicks to complete a task to taking tips from the consumer Web. With its latest investments, Kronos has taken five steps in the right direction to drive greater usability, likely greater payroll accuracy, and less stress for managers at payroll approval time. As more Kronos customers adopt the managed service model, Kronos also has the opportunity to try application usage monitoring (like Sage does with Sage Advisor) to go even further in improving usability. Given the breadth and repeatability of time and attendance applications, and the challenges with user adoption, other vendors not taking these kinds of usability steps will be challenged more by Kronos moving forward.