

Hiring Your Next HRIS

Why Selecting and Implementing a
New Platform Should Mirror How
You Hire & Train an Employee

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Executive Summary

Organizations often approach the selection of a human resource information system as a technology purchase. In reality, an HRIS behaves far more like a long-term employee who works across human resources, payroll, finance, and leadership. The success or failure of an HRIS “hire” depends not only on its features and price, but also on fit, capability alignment, onboarding, and ongoing development.

This whitepaper outlines a practical, people-centered framework for evaluating, selecting, and implementing a new HRIS by applying the same rigor used when hiring and training a high-impact team member. When organization leaders shift their mindset from buying software to hiring a system, they make more sustainable decisions, reduce implementation risk, and unlock greater long-term value.

Reframing HRIS Selection as a Hiring Decision

When adding a new team member, hiring managers rarely select the candidate with the most credentials or the highest salary requirements when a more junior candidate can meet all the role's job description.

The same principle should apply when onboarding a new HRIS. Without a defined scope for their HRIS, organizations risk deciding based on prestige, reacting to feature demonstrations, or overspending on capability they do not truly need. Before reviewing vendors, scheduling demos, or comparing pricing models, organizations should consider creating an HRIS "job description."

A well-articulated HRIS description anchors the evaluation process in strategy rather than sales. Start with the essential responsibilities, strip away salesy vendor language, and focus on operational reality.

At minimum, most organizations require their HRIS to carry out the following tasks:

- Process payroll accurately and compliantly
- Support timekeeping and tax reporting
- Provide reliable reporting and audit readiness
- Enable employee and manager self-service
- Facilitate benefits administration and retirement integrations
- Maintain secure employee records
- Support workflows from hire to retire

Beyond these baseline responsibilities, organizations should also consider:

- Are we multi-jurisdiction?
- Do we require complex accrual structures or labor allocations?
- Do we anticipate growth, acquisition, or structural change?
- Do we require advanced analytics or standard operational reporting?

Just as a job description distinguishes between required and preferred qualifications, your HRIS job description should distinguish between mission-critical functionality and aspirational features. Clarity here prevents overbuying or underinvesting.

An HRIS is a dynamic tool, behaving as a long-term employee — or as several employees when embedded across the organizational structure. It shows up every day. It works with every employee and provides easy ways that allow them to manage their work experience. It streamlines benefit workflows and the ineffective tasks that steal so much of our employees' time. It should move alongside the organization as it changes and prepare for growth. When it underperforms, the cost is felt immediately in payroll errors, compliance risk, inefficiency, and frustration.

The most effective organizations reframe HRIS selection around a simple but powerful idea:



If this system were a person, would you hire it — and could you successfully onboard it?

Seen this way, selecting an HRIS is less like buying equipment and more like making a strategic hire. Organizations rarely fail at HRIS selection because they lack options. They fail because they approach the decision as a procurement exercise rather than a people decision.

Think of HRIS selection as a hiring funnel, not a feature checklist.

Hiring Stage	HRIS Equivalent	Key Question
Applicant pool	Market scan of platforms	Who is even worth considering?
Resume screen	Capability + cost review	Who meets the baseline requirements?
Interviews	Demos + stakeholder sessions	Who fits how we actually work?
Reference checks	Peer + client references	Who performs well in the real world?
Offer decision	Pricing + value evaluation	Who delivers the best ROI?
Onboarding	Implementation + training	Who will succeed after day one?

The Applicant Pool: Screening for Fit, Not Prestige

Most HRIS evaluations begin with a wide pool of “applicants.” At this stage, organizations often encounter three broad categories of systems:

Overqualified Candidates

Some platforms are designed for very large, highly complex enterprises. They bring deep functionality, robust configurability, and significant scalability — but they also come with the following drawbacks:

- High licensing and implementation costs
- Significant internal resource requirements
- Long timelines to value
- More complexity than necessary for mid-sized or moderately complex organizations

Much like hiring someone with a doctorate for a role that truly requires a bachelor’s degree, these systems may be impressive but misaligned. Overqualification can introduce unnecessary cost, administrative burden, and frustration without delivering proportional value.

Underqualified Candidates

At the other end of the spectrum are systems built primarily to serve small, simple organizations. They may offer short-term wins at that cloud the decision-making process: fast setup times, the appearance of easy functionality, and a modest upfront cost. Although these traits may be accurate, they often struggle in the following areas:

- Complex payroll and tax scenarios
- Multi-department or multi-location reporting
- Integrations with financial systems, retirement providers, or benefits platforms
- Workflow automation beyond basic needs

Like a candidate without the required experience, an underpowered HRIS may perform well initially but become limiting as organizational complexity increases.

Right-Fit Candidates

After screening for baseline requirements, a smaller group of systems typically emerges with the following qualities:

- Appropriate scale and capability
- Proven experience supporting similar organizations
- Balanced cost and complexity
- Flexibility without overengineering

These are the candidates worth interviewing.



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The Interview Process: Evaluating Real-World Performance

In hiring, resumes tell only part of the story. Interviews reveal how a candidate thinks, communicates, and culturally fits with the team.

HRIS demos and discovery sessions should serve the same purpose. Demos are interviews. And just like interviews, they should test real work, not rehearsed answers. Today, many vendors can offer test environments, allowing teams to test some of the features for a short period.

At this stage, organizations should assess how each finalist performs against the HRIS job description, including the following:

- Self-service capabilities for employees and managers
- Ease of use and intuitive design
- Payroll, timekeeping, and tax accuracy
- Reporting and compliance support
- Integration with financial systems, retirement providers, and benefits enrollment
- Mobile accessibility
- End-to-end workflows from hire to retire

Equally important is how the system aligns with organizational culture and operating style. A technically capable system that clashes with day-to-day operations can undermine adoption and satisfaction.

Reference Checks: Learning from Others' Experiences

Strong hiring teams never skip reference checks.

The same discipline should apply to HRIS selection. References provide insight into the following factors:

- Implementation experience and challenges
- Vendor responsiveness and support quality
- System reliability over time
- How well the platform delivers on promised functionality
- What it's like to "work with" the system after it is implemented (known as the go-live)

Although you are not speaking with references about a human candidate, the process is often even more straightforward and data rich. Leaders of peer organizations are typically willing to share candid, operational insights about their experience with a platform. Reference conversations can quickly illuminate what implementation actually looked like, how responsive the vendor has been, the quality of post-go-live support, and how the system performs under real-world conditions over time.

Just as importantly, these discussions help identify any gaps between what was promised during the sales process and what users have actually experienced. Because these systems operate in measurable, repeatable ways, references provide practical, experience-based intelligence that is often easier to validate than subjective impressions in a traditional hiring process.

Rarely is a finalist perfect. The goal is not to find a flawless system. Rather, it is to find one that is qualified, capable, and aligned with what matters most to the organization.

Making the Offer: Balancing Value, Fit, and Cost

When choosing between two qualified HRIS candidates, the decision often comes down to value, not just price.

Key considerations mirror those of a human hiring decision:

- Which candidate will add the most value over time?
- Which best fits the team's culture and workflows?
- Which supports today's needs while accommodating reasonable future growth?
- What is the total cost, including implementation, training, and ongoing support?

Just as compensation must align with role requirements and budget, HRIS pricing should reflect the level of capability truly needed, not nice-to-have features that may never be used. It's also important to remember some of these features can be added down the road, when the organization may be better suited to exploit them.



Final Thought: Hire for the Job You Have

The most successful HRIS selections are not driven by brand recognition or feature checklists alone.

Instead, they are grounded in a clear understanding of what the organization needs today given the complexity of its operations. There is thought and consideration into the workplace culture, values, and their people — balancing it all with the appropriate level of investment.

The organizations that get HRIS selection right ask a different question than everyone else:



"If this system were an employee, would we rehire it in three years?"

By approaching HRIS selection and implementation the same way you hire and train an employee, organizations make more intentional, realistic, and sustainable decisions resulting in better adoption, stronger outcomes, and a system that grows with them rather than ahead of them.



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