

Building Data Standard Specifications

Kim Bartkus: 0:05

Have you ever wondered what it takes to develop data standards and who the people are that build those specifications? It's probably not something that keeps you up at night, but there's a lot that goes on behind the scenes. This is Kim Bartkus with the HR Open Standards Consortium. Today, I'm joined by Amanda Carr, who's a Product Manager at iCIMS. She's going to share her experience with the HR Open methodology. Amanda has been in the HR technology field since 1999 and has been an advocate for HR Open since 2007. She's an expert in HR integrations and is currently focusing on standardizing and enhancing the integrations between iCIMS and HCM systems. We hope by the end of this episode you can see how adopting and influencing standards could bring value to your company. Amanda, thank you for being here today.

Amanda Carr: 0:48

Well thank you Kim. I'm certainly glad to be here and particularly glad to be talking about the value and HR Open Standards.

Kim Bartkus: 0:55

We're gonna go ahead and get started, I have a few questions starting with you telling us how you got started in HR technology.

Amanda Carr: 1:01

Sure, absolutely. Kim, as you, as you noted in the intro, I've been in the industry since 1999 quite a while now. I really got focused specifically on the integration side of the world for HR systems around 2006. At that point, I was very new to the integrations world. While I had worked with the HR systems in a variety of ways, both in the ATS's and any complementary systems like background checks and assessments and the like, I wasn't really all that familiar with the workings of the integrations between the ATS and those complementary systems, and that's where I really got involved in working with HR Open Standards. I was on this quest to find information, how can I figure out how to do this? There's got to be an organization out there that has the focus that I'm looking for on enabling integrations to be more seamless and in a more standardized fashion. That's where I came upon HR Open Standards, so I got involved very rapidly and figured out this was one, the right organization for me to be a member of and two, it was easy for me to see how the work between the workgroups and schemas that were developed, and the community involved in HR Open Standards would really add to and benefit the work that we were doing as an organization to build out our framework and our HR system integrations. So that's kind of how I got into it, like I said, it was pretty easy for me to tell once I got into it that it really brought a lot of value to what I was doing. It also allowed me to join in and reach out to folks who are doing this on a daily basis, who had done this, who had experienced this, and instead of me having to reinvent the wheel, I had an opportunity to learn from their experiences, see how they did it, help understand best practices and guidance and really take advantage of that so that I could take that back to my organization and the projects that we were working on and apply that directly to that work.

Kim Bartkus: 3:18

Do you recall one of the first times we met, you were involved in the background screening industry and I was pretty unfamiliar with that area. You and I sat down together and you explained to me how the process worked between the systems, it was really a great experience. Do you remember that conversation?

Amanda Carr: 5:18

I do remember that and actually thanks for bringing that up because it was very good for me as well, what it did was allow me to take the learnings that I had, being part of HR Open Standards and the community and being involved in the workgroups. At that time, our initial focus was how do we get the ATS talking in a more seamless manner and really improve the process for our clients to be able to order background checks and assessments. Again, I was new to it, I didn't understand but participating in those workgroups and having an understanding, and really getting an understanding from all the different aspects instead of me just looking at being very siloed, like here's my ATS and here's the information. The group allowed me to look at whether it was a CRA or whether it was in a screening vendor or an assessment vendor and have a real greater understanding of the nuances and the things that were important to them. When we built that integration, I was able to take that into account, so I came into it with a much more holistic approach. Now the reality was that I had sort of picked these up as part of this process but being able to sit down with you and talk through it with you and show it sort of validated what I was doing. It was like, oh, I actually picked something up and I'm remembering it and I can actually apply it into a real world situation. I remember that conversation because it did help to take me to that next level, to really help validate everything that I had learned and put it into into practice by being able to talk through that with you. So I appreciate the opportunity and thanks for bringing that back because it was a great memory for me as well.

Kim Bartkus: 5:19

It's one of those things that makes you realize it's a team effort, the networking and the opportunity to learn from each other..At the time, I didn't have any experience or very little experience in the screening industry and by you sitting down with me, drawing that diagram on a piece of paper and showing how the transactions worked between the CRA and an applicant tracking system, that was really valuable to me. I think that's one of the things our members really appreciate, that one-on-one or the opportunity to share the knowledge with other people.

Amanda Carr: 5:47

A great thing that you bring up is that that feeling of community and helping each other. We all can very easily get get locked into our silos. I'm focused solely on the ATS but there is a bigger world out there in those interactions and knowing how you interact with the different systems and their particular needs really helps you to build a more holistic approach to this.

Kim Bartkus: 6:08

Thanks, Amanda. I really appreciate you sharing that experience. You've had some many different roles at HR Open, you've been a board member and you've participated in numerous projects. Can you share why you got involved and why you keep coming back? Which, by the way, we love!

Amanda Carr: 6:22

Yeah, absolutely. So, you know, when I started out, like I said, our first projects were focused on the screening and assessments. So the first step was getting involved in those workgroups. It was sort of a natural progression for me, though. Once I got involved in the workgroups and I saw the community spirit, and the willingness to work with each other - that two heads are better than one mentality. I really wanted to continue to explore how I could help to influence and provide value through HR Open, so that's where I looked participating even further. Whether it was leading a workgroup or starting a new workgroup like we did with the referrals workgroup, or joining and participating as a member of the board of directors, I really was just looking for opportunities to get the word out. How can I help to say, here's the value in HR Open, here's how you can get involved, here's how it brings value to yourself as an individual. I've certainly experienced that as an individual and the knowledge base I've been able to build up, but also taking that back and applying it to your organization. So I think a variety of things and the variety of the roles that I've had have allowed me to do that. I will say that I, like many people you know, have had a variety of positions over the years, particularly as I have been involved in in HR Open Standards, I've certainly moved on in my career and taking on new positions with new organizations. It's typically one of the things I look at first, are we already members of HR Open? And if we're not, let me sort of bring that into the organization. How can we get involved? How can we really embrace the work that HR Open is doing to benefit our organization? So generally, you know, I've kind of looked at it and tried to figure out how to get the support that I needed organizationally to be able to become members. So while I've been sort of in and out from the Consortium as a member, it's usually in a period of time in which I'm going into a new organization and then bringing that new organization up to speed on hey, here's the value, let's get involved, let's move this forward and really help to take our integrations to the next level.

Kim Bartkus: 8:49

One of the roles you took on during your career was to lead the employee referrals project. Using that as an example, can you walk us through those steps that were followed to develop the standards?

Amanda Carr: 8:59

Sure, absolutely. That was an interesting project. I was with a with a small organization that was, really a start up and the idea behind it was, how do we make it easier for companies to utilize their best source of hiring, which is word of mouth. This is co workers, people you've worked with before, friends that you know, people that have the skills that would be a good fit for your organization. So that was sort of the goal of the company that I worked for is automating that process and really trying to streamline and bring value to organizations with

their referral systems. But what I found as I got into that, is that there really wasn't any standards associated with it.

Based on my experience with HR Open, I reached out to you and the team and was able to get the support of the community to get a project actually on the books. So and there's really sort of multiple steps associated with these types of projects. And once you get your sponsors and figure out who are the participants and the roles identified in these workgroups, you really then get into more of the development side of the world. You've got the proposal all set, now you know why you're doing it. Now let's really look at that development and that involves a variety of things. Beyond sort of determining who the team leads are and who the team players are, you want to actually look at how do we build a concise specification that will allow for ease of implementation and integration for HR systems.

So part and parcel to that is this methodology that HR Open has in place, which really allows you to take it step by step and build upon the previous step that you completed. First step is okay, well, what is it? What is the purpose of it? How do you want to do this? What are we ensuring that we get out there? And what value are we looking to bring to that? So that was part of the referral overview in the referral specifications that we wanted to be able to provide. So first was figuring out the scope of what it is and then really laying it down further and saying, okay, now what? Well we want to create a use case. So what are the use cases associated with it? Who are the actors associated with it? What are the actions that we want to define as part of this use case as it pertains to these actors?

Then we need to look at what is involved in that. Big thing for us is being able to determine the standard terminology. I think where this comes into play is that each industry or each HR system within the industry, has their own particular set of terminology. I may say it is an employee but somebody may call it a candidate and some may call it an applicant. All of it depends on where that person is in that process and how they're interacting with that particular HR system.

One of the key elements of coming up with, and working on these projects and defining these schemas and determining these schemas is really let's have some common terminology. But, you know, if I say employee, it should be the same thing to everybody across the board. So we're going to make sure that we're all using the same terminology because, like I said, there's so many variances and how it's used by each system, which is natural. But in order to really make these effective and to make these projects effective, you wanna focus it and you want to keep it focused on how it is being used in relation to this particular process and project. From that you basically get into more detail associated with actually creating the schemas.

So you want to do the diagrams associated that show the interactions and where are the exchanges of data? Followed by putting together schemas. We've got folks on the workgroups where that's what they do, they work on the schemas. As they create the schemas they edit the schemas and that's all based on the feedback that you're getting from every side. So you're not just seeing it from one perspective you're seeing it from, okay, I am the system who is the

initiator of this employee referral, or I am the system, who is who is accepting it. Everybody has their own needs, so those are all taken into account as part of the methodology that is associated with developing the schemas.

Once we develop the schemas, they go through a standard process of methodology to be approved by the Board and then put out for vote by the member community of HR Open Standards and eventually get published as standards. I know that was sort of a long winded explanation of that, but I think it's important to understand. I think it's important to understand that there is a well defined methodology that really builds on the next step. It's an appropriate next step. It's like, OK, well, let's figure out what it is, what's our goal? Now let's figure out what are the use cases and the actors and the terminology, and build upon each one to be able to find and develop that final solution.

Kim Bartkus: 14:50

Exactly. You had mentioned at the beginning that you were working for this start up, this employee referrals startup. Just kind of wanted to bring out to the group that you guys were not members of the time but we are open to any kind of project. So you guys said, here's something we need. You approached us, and we were able to get that project started and we leave that open to the whole industry. That's how we've worked for over 20 years, is that HR Open doesn't define it. It's the industry that says here's the need we're trying to teach to solve and so I think that's been really, really helpful. In your case, any company can come in and say we have this problem, we want solve it using standards. So why do you think this methodology works?

Amanda Carr: 15:32

Like I said, I think it really is, a matter of, it's It's a very logical process. You know, when you go through the fact that HR Open is a volunteer organization. Everybody has a lot on their plate, we all have our day jobs, so being able to make the best use of everyone's time as participants in the work groups, it's really important to have that methodology in place to keep everybody on pace, to know where they're going. What are we doing next? How do we need to define this? There's not necessarily a timeframe on on this thing; it doesn't say, okay, you have two weeks to do this. Part of the process gives you the flexibility, but it keeps you moving, you know what the next step is and how to continue to move forward. So it gives you the flexibility to work around people schedules, keep everybody on the same page as to where you're going, and what the what the final outcome is. And quite honestly, we all could use that in our day to day life, time is precious so the time that we do have with with the work group members, it's really important for us to be able to continue to make progress.

Kim Bartkus: 16:39

Great. Well, you had mentioned earlier, your doing the business part of it, here are the use cases that we're trying to solve, the terminology. But then you also have the schema. You're talking about different types of skills. Can you explain a little bit about what typical skills you would see in a workgroup?

Amanda Carr: 16:56

Yeah. You know, I think that's the interesting thing is that he you really see a broad and varied group of individuals. Anyone who is a user of a system, an integration expert, they could be a developer, they could come from the business side of the world. I think you find a very varied group of individuals that are all bringing in different aspects to the work group. As part of that forming of the workgroup though, that's where we do look to sort of take the individuals who are involved in the process and and so a pair them up to the appropriate role. You wouldn't necessarily want someone to be your your schema editor if they've never done that before. You want to make sure that this is a positive experience for everyone. You're looking for somebody more technical from that perspective. Your workgroup leaders can certainly be somebody who doesn't necessarily have that hard core development. I think everybody is embraced regardless of your skill level, regardless of your experience in the industry, everyone has something to bring to the table.

Kim Bartkus: 18:09

I would agree and you'd mentioned about not having an experienced person. We've had that before where someone isn't, they may be a schema editor, but the process that we have is a little new to them. It's works really well because you're going to have people that have been in other projects and so they can help those along that are new to the process.

Amanda Carr: 18:28

Yep, absolutely, goes to that community effort on things, everybody wanted to help out..

Kim Bartkus: 18:34

It is, and I think that's what's great about it, is you're going to see people from different skills, different possible industries, and also different companies that maybe competitors. When we're on the phone you don't see that competition, it's everyone working towards a common goal.

Amanda Carr: 18:51

Yeah, absolutely. I've definitely seen that, I've been in in workgroups with what would be considered competitors of ours but there's none of that that comes into play here. The truth matter is that nobody is looking for anything proprietary out of it. It's one of things, obviously, when you're trying to get the company you're working for involved in an organization like HR Open. There's always a concern that there will be sharing of any proprietary information and that's just not the case. It's sort of the specific company you work for, a little bit goes out of the window and you're really talking in general terms and a broader view off the problem you're trying to solve as a whole. It's definitely one of the areas that I always stress when I'm looking to get my organization involved with HR Open is that, hey, it's the sharing of ideas and concepts and being thought leaders in the industry; it's not about specifically how we're doing it. It's how we as a community are looking to solve it as a whole.

Kim Bartkus: 19:56

One of the questions I'd like to ask our guests is what is your biggest challenge in integrations?

Amanda Carr: 20:01

You know, I would probably say biggest challenge is that you really you have to build in flexibility and extensibility, and I think biggest challenge is getting on organization to to adopt that mindset. I think there is quite often a mindset of, this is how we do it, this is how we we've always done it, and this is how we will always do it. That to me, is the biggest challenge, is trying to get over that mindset and to understand, hey, look, by adopting these standards, one, they continue to grow with us as the industry changes these change.

Great example is when I first started out our focus was simply on on XML and now we've moved onto JSON. So keeping up with the industry, the industry trends. For us, getting over that mind set of, invented here, this is how we're always gonna work. You have to really lay out those benefits of this type of approach that allows us to really tap into the schema and utilize the pieces that work best for us in a standardized fashion. The ramp up period of getting on HR Open Standards really is much quicker than trying to build all this stuff on your own. Between all of the documentation, all of the implementation considerations, and best practices, and guidance that are provided as part of these projects, it helps you to overcome that invented here and look to embrace something that allows you to extend and to be flexible so that you can move forward and continue to grow. That's probably my biggest challenges is that and really embracing the schemas.

Kim Bartkus: 21:46

Thanks, Amanda. I have one last question, do you have any final thoughts on your involvement in the Consortium?

Amanda Carr: 21:51

I actually just want to thank the members that I've worked with at HR Open Standards. I think it has been a phenomenal experience for me, it has been one that has really allowed me to grow personally and professionally. I have a feeling of pride in the work that's being done, the sense of community that we have, and really the way that regardless of what part of the industry you're working in it's really all coming together and helping towards a common goal. That sense of community that the work that we do has really added value. So like I said, if anything I would say is, I would say thank you to everyone that I've worked with, it's been a pleasure. I'm looking forward to many more years working with the Consortium and and highly encourage anyone, if there's an interest, to check us out, see what we can do.

Kim Bartkus: 22:43

Amanda thank you so much for sharing your thoughts on the standards process. I've really enjoyed our conversation. I've loved working with you, and I look forward to working with you on some upcoming projects. We hope our audience has enjoyed their time today. There are more resources available on our website and you can follow us through social media @hropenstandards. Thanks so much.