

Q&A with Amrinder Arora, CEO of BizMerlin providing a Cloud-based Human Capital Management Solution using the power of AI to enable Organizations to better Acquire, Onboard and Manage Talent



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CEOCFO: Mr. Arora, what is the concept behind BizMerlin?

Mr. Arora: The concept behind BizMerlin is that a top notch Human Capital Management (HCM) solution, which is a core component of any organization, should be available to any organization, of any size. You commonly hear the phrase, "Our people are our most valuable asset", and similar phrases. In reality, this includes a lot of things. For example, making sure that you can acquire the best people that are a good fit for your organization. Making sure that you can

manage them, you can retain them, you can onboard them so they can provide the most value to you together. Ensuring that you have an HCM system in place that allows you to do all of that - that is the very core concept of BizMerlin.

"With BizMerlin, I have been able to import and onboard my four hundred employees, all my projects from JIRA have been imported here, my sales accounts from Salesforce have already being imported here, it is already connected to QuickBooks and ADP, my job positions are going out to Indeed, what else do I need?"- Amrinder Arora

CEOCFO: What do you understand about getting the results, about really implementing caring about your people that perhaps other Human Capital Management companies do not quite understand?

Mr. Arora: A massive change came about, maybe less than ten years ago, when we started saying that every organization, every company, whether you are in pharmacy, retail or transportation, is an Artificial Intelligence company. Not in terms of a buzzword or a fad, rather it simply represents the idea that every system is now EXPECTED to be SMARTER. This is exactly the core distinction of Human Capital Management system that BizMerlin provides, which many other organizations simply have not yet picked up on. The legacy HCM systems predated this shift, and have almost no AI component to them. You can record a piece of information, and you can get that information out, but there is not real intelligence to it. Now, with the new advent of organizations such as BizMerlin, HCM is powered using AI as is expected from any modern system. That is the key distinguishing factor of BizMerlin.

CEOCFO: Would you give us a couple of examples of where that comes into play on a daily basis for a company?

Mr. Arora: AI becomes much more actionable when it is heavily contextualized to what we do. For example, Amazon was able to sell us many more items because they were able to predict which other items go with the item we just bought.

They never claimed it was AI or artificial or intelligence. Rather, they just contextualized to what made sense for the user at that moment.

A very similar thing is happening in HCM today. In BizMerlin, rather than using any buzzwords like AI, what you find is tiny AI driven recommendations that help you make decisions like hiring people, setting goals, etc., and to determine what exactly is happening with your workforce and strategically where the shift is. You may have hired people who belong to a certain set of profiles, but the system can observe that the majority of the work is coming for a different set of profiles. Thereby, the system guides you to make strategic changes (such as starting training programs) that helps the organization move strategically from one profile to another.

When you are hiring people, your HCM system (using the power of the AI behind it), can already predict whether the person will be a good fit, or how many people you should even hire going by how many of the new projects out there are in your sales pipeline, how many of the people are close to their retirement age, how many of the people may be lost due to retention and attrition factors. All of that is one holistic workforce picture for the company.

All of these insights are backed by AI, but they are heavily contextualized in terms of what the executive can actually do, in terms of decisions that the executives can make in that moment. That is one of the many, many places where AI comes into a picture in a very clear and actionable way when people are trying to run an organization.

CEOCFO: *Do many of your clients take advantage of the full range of what you offer?*

Mr. Arora: What we find is that in HR, if an organization is using a system which is working semi reasonable well for them, there is going to be a certain risk aversion to not change that while they try something else. New customers will almost always start by saying, “BizMerlin offers me these eight things. These three things I have somewhere and they are working okay. These two things are not working okay and these three things we simply do not have.” They are definitely going to start out with the three things they do not have. Shortly thereafter, they start looking at the two items that were not working so well in their existing system, but they had. Then they try to do a migration. That brings them to a bigger decision point; what should they do with the items that are working okay in another system. We will typically work with the customers to see what the best decision is for them. Of course, they will have the added advantage if they coalesce towards one platform. However, at the same time they think that, “This is working fine here,” and other than having a second system it is not really that big of a deal. Therefore, almost every customer will grow their modules and the feature that they use with us, but whether every customer will reach that stage where they are using all, probably just depends on the customer and seeing what is best for them and what else they have in their ecosystem.

CEOCFO: *How are you able to stay updated with regulatory issues? How do you stay fully informed, so that your clients are fully informed or pointing in the right direction for what they need to do?*

Mr. Arora: That is a beautiful question! That is because that is really one of the things that we offer to our customers; that they can really rest easy. That is because when they start using the system, it is not just an empty shell, rather, it has a lot of the preloaded contents, so that they can hit the ground running in terms of the regulatory framework, in terms of the meaningful defaults, in terms of templates.

So, when the customers are looking at BizMerlin, they are looking at a system that is pretty much self-sufficient. They can always tweak it. They can always change it. However, at the same time there is a good default baseline for them to build upon. The way that we do it internally is simply by recognizing that there is a different regulatory framework the environments are changing. Different states have different environments and different countries have different environments. We have a significant amount of subject matter expertise in house, and also a large advisory board that we leverage to ensure that our system is evolving as those frameworks and environments change themselves and that we are familiar with the environments of different states as well as of different regions and countries.

Also, while talking about compliance, we are heavily invested in being compliant, and we are SOC compliant. We find it surprising that many of the HR companies do not even have SOC (Service Organization Control) compliance, which is quite surprising to us. We are always advising our customers to go with a SOC compliant organization, such as BizMerlin.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach potential clients? How do you jump off the page so that people understand quickly that you have got something better at BizMerlin?*

Mr. Arora: This is a real transformation that has happened in the industry, led by other stalwarts such as JIRA, which is a product from Atlassian that did this similar transformation in project management. BizMerlin in sort of for HR and HCM what JIRA is for project management. (Incidentally, BizMerlin also has very, very nice integration with JIRA and the systems work very well together.) What we found is that JIRA basically did just have a better product. Ultimately, the

product has to speak for itself and has to run for itself. Gone are the days where the customers are wowed by you going out and meeting them in person, etc. While they are happy with all of those things in certain scenarios, but mostly, while they are trying to make their purchasing decision, they are primarily looking at how good the product is and if it can start adding value right away.

That means the core strength of product is your number one factor that determines your success. We have really focused just on that, which is to have a clear product. Once you have a clear product you can have a clear website that articulates what it is. There are videos to help them look at it. There are white papers so they can understand how it works. There are testimonials from other customers on how they use it. After that, the proof is in the pudding when we say to them, "Here are two weeks, and there are no strings attached". You can try it out. There is no need to enter a credit card. Try it out. Import your data so you can do a migration and see if the system adds value to you. If the system adds value to you, you really do not care about anything else that you see on our website, which is all good and comforting aspects, for example, if you see that BizMerlin won "Top 50" awards from the USA today. Primarily the customer is making the decision based on the fact that the, "The software works for me."

We want each of our customers to feel exactly like that; that by using BizMerlin they can be the HR HCM super heroes. When we make that happen for one customer that is how we succeed. They come in, they start their trials and they say, "Yes, this makes sense, this is beautiful, I do not need to do anything else." Yes, they may check out our website, they may check out any of our testimonials, but they are primarily looking that product and saying, "Yes, this is awesome, this is exactly what I needed and I am glad I found it."

They can always talk to us. Our support is one of our biggest vantage points. They can always write to us from within the application using the chat box. They can simply start writing in the chat box, "This is what I am trying to do, I am trying to integrate with JIRA and this is what I am trying to do, can you help me with this thing," and the person will help them with that. Many times, that is the very first connection point we have with them. All up to that point has been something that was a very impersonal connection, because they simply looked at the software. However, now when they have a very specific question that is when they are interested in talking to a human and saying, "This is what I am trying to do, can you help me with that," and we help them with that. That is our single most dominant way of acquiring new customers. It sounds extremely simple, but I think the point is that if the product is strong enough it can speak for itself, that customers are confident enough, and they are well supported, they can go through this process and make their purchasing decision.

CEOCFO: As far as the BizMerlin workplace, was it a deliberate strategy to be diverse, to be a champion of women, to be a place where people want to work? How did the culture develop?

Mr. Arora: That is interesting! As much as we would like to, it was not a conscious choice to try to win any specific award. Rather, we just wanted to create a workplace where everybody could do the best work possible. That is really what we were going after. This came out as a wonderful icing on the cake! We are very, very happy and very pleased to have received those awards. Our focus has really been on making sure that the workplace itself is productive for people from different mindsets. When we talk about diversity we are really trying to think about diversity from everybody who thinks differently, irrespective of whether it is any categorization that we can think about, whether it is along the ethnic lines or along the gender lines or anything like that. Everybody has a point of view. Ultimately, we are talking about Human Capital Management. Therefore, if we only have one viewpoint, it will only work for those organizations that have people of that viewpoint. Rather, we want to have everyone together, so they can be the HCM Platform for everyone and we do need every viewpoint to make the software better. Sometimes it manifests in the smallest, smallest things. For example, what kind of example language you are using in your knowledge based articles, what kind of label you are using on that particular screen. Does the screen convey this or does the screen convey that? It is all of those things. When we take into account every single viewpoint that we can get, we often come to a better decision than any of us could have come to by themselves. That is what we believe is the strength of our product, the strength of our company and we are very happy that this is a great place for women to work and for diversity as well. We could not be pleased more to have received those awards.

CEOCFO: What has changed over time? What have you learned from your customers?

Mr. Arora: First of all, we came into this organization from a slightly different background; not so much just from the HR focus, but also from the AI and the machine learning and the big data focus. That is what many of our management team members have prior work experience in, including myself. That was one thing. We came into it with a certain mindset. However, over time what we learned was that customers have their own prioritization of what is important to them today and what is important to them tomorrow.

Another critical item that we have learnt along the way is that our speed to deliver is almost always going to exceed the customers' speed to consume. That is because their speed to consume is really being determined by their organizational factors as opposed to being determined by our ability to produce. What I mean by that specifically is, for example, let us say that one of the customers starts by using the People module in the application and now they have very complete and beautiful employee records and they launched Goal Management and Performance Reviews in BizMerlin. We could say to them, "You launched Goal Management and Performance Reviews, how about the Competency Matrix?" However, the customer simply may not be interested in launching the Competency Matrix today, because they are trying to build the organization culture of using this 360-degree feedback. Just because we have the competency matrix ready that means nothing; because ultimately from their perspective they need to have the people who are going to talk to the entire organization, roll it out department by department, write the internal memos on how they are going to be using the system even if they use our pre-built training decks and all of that. Therefore, their ability to roll it out and the different aspects of it are going to be determined by their own organizational factors. We are an enabler, but ultimately, we do not control the time and the clock for implementations and roll outs. The customer does.

CEOCFO: *What is next for BizMerlin?*

Mr. Arora: We could not be more excited about the year 2018! We are just so happy with what we have been able to achieve in 2017! The biggest thanks go to our team and their customers who have done a wonderful job together. The team has built many, many new features in 2017, which have already been adopted by many of the customers. The customers are always giving us newer and newer ideas, whether they are integrating with more platforms such as ADP, JIRA and Salesforce; all of those things. What we find now is that we are really at a spot where we are just looking at how the growth is just accelerating significantly. What we find is that the customer is very happy to see us as a core building block of their software ecosystem. They may have a CRM over there, an HCM over here, an accounting system over here, and they are ecstatic that all of these systems have come to a point that they all talk to each other and these things work together in harmony. That was one of the problems that they had with the older systems. It was that every integration was a significant challenge. Now we have new customers who, during their trial phase, they can connect us to their Salesforce, their ADP and their JIRA, and they are saying, "Everything is here, I do not need to go anywhere else. My trial ends and I am converting to a paid customer now, because with BizMerlin, I have been able to import and onboard my four hundred employees, all my projects from JIRA have been imported here, my sales accounts from Salesforce have already being imported here, it is already connected to QuickBooks and ADP, my job positions are going out to Indeed, what else do I need?" That is really what excites is the most about 2018! That is now where the customers are telling the other perspective customers, "Use BizMerlin, your ecosystem is complete, it looks beautiful." We are just excited about the future in 2018 and I think it is probably anybody's imagination what 2019 will bring! We just could not be any more excited about our coming year!

