

Integrated Workflow Enabled Human Capital Management HR and Payroll System



Marnie Larson
CEO
StarGarden

CEOCFO: *Ms. Larson, would you tell us the focus of StarGarden?*

Ms. Larson: Our focus with StarGarden HCM 5.0, which just came out in early January of this year, is to provide a broader solution to the HR market. We have always focused on our integrated HR payroll product and it has been around for thirty years. We are now focusing on the extension of that functionality through a proprietary tool set that we have built called Foundation. Foundation gives us the ability to build task-driven workflows and automate business processes. What differentiates us in this area is that we built this tool set with the idea that we may need to talk to a lot of different systems in an organization and not just your HR system to get a particular job done. We have designed the technology so we can overlay the toolset onto other applications as well so you do not have to switch out other systems as often, you could just work off your task list and utilize the data from your other internal systems as required.

CEOCFO: *Why is now the time to expand the concept?*

Ms. Larson: I think there are a lot of companies and solutions in the HR space addressing a variety of issues. People have been buying different applications to suit different needs (recruitment, training, evaluation, etc.). The systems are not talking to each other and they are not getting a good perspective of the entire HR function, nor what is going on with productivity of their labor pool in general. We had been working on this tool set for a number of years creating this idea of community and a bigger collaborative environment and we thought that attaching that to our HCM product just made sense and the market was ready to look at things more holistically.

CEOCFO: *Are you ready now as people are more accustomed to technology, as people realize integration has been missing?*

Ms. Larson: I think that everyone has a lot of experience with systems now and they know there are systems out there that can solve problems. I think that when you do that and you go out and buy those bits and pieces, you get to a point where now the problem is that I do not have that big picture. There is a lot of talk online about interoperability and systems talking to each other and integration. I think people have gotten to that tipping point where they really need to understand everything that is going on and not just by business function or department.

CEOCFO: *Are you anticipating that your current clients will take advantage of your newer solutions?*

Ms. Larson: Yes we are. There seems to be a lot of interest from our client base. We are doing demos with our clients right now. I do think a good portion of them will take advantage of this new functionality. Some of the functionality was developed in partnership with some of our clients as our R&D tends to focus on what the market and what our clients need and where they are going next. Many clients have been involved in those discussions and some of the prototypes as well. We think the greater population of our clients are going to be excited for Release 5.0.

CEOCFO: *I understand you have worked with governments and education. Was the strategy to work with more of the challenging sectors deliberate or opportunistic?*

Ms. Larson: It was deliberate in the beginning. In the late eighties, we were originally a custom coding house so we had projects from different clients that led us down the path of HR and payroll applications. One government client wanted a position based HR product where everything you did in an organization really pivoted around what you did for the organization, the role you played. This position-based platform enabled us to work well in those complex environments. We got a great deal of uptake on that very quickly because there are many industries that have very elaborate contracts and have rules and regulations that they have to follow to the letter or else they get complaints and grievances, so it definitely was a need. We stayed largely in that space because of that.

CEOCFO: *Implementing a new system is never easy. What steps are you able to put in place to ease the transformation?*

Ms. Larson: With all of our years of experience with our integrated product, we have come up with a methodology to do that efficiently. We do not outsource any of our implementation, we do it all ourselves. We feel strongly that we are the ones that best understand our system and are best suited to work directly with the clients. The development of our workflow toolset gives the ability to approach implementation a bit differently. It will not be a requirement to replace all the systems in your organization that are lacking functionality. We can overlay our technology and pull the required information out of the other databases in the organization to extend the functionality that is missing. Employees work off an online task list and they do not have to log in and out of a multitude of systems to get the job done. We think this is a much more attractive option for organizations...that you do not have to rip out everything top to bottom when you feel that you need a change, that maybe we can just come in on the top and look at it from a task and automation perspective.

CEOCFO: *Is every implementation customized?*

Ms. Larson: Yes, every implementation experience is customized. We have clients that have a bigger team so they want to take on more. Some have smaller teams so we do more work. We do take our methodology and then re-configure it for different scenarios and clients. It does become a very personalized experience.

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CEOCFO: *What is the competitive landscape?*

Ms. Larson: There are many competitors in the industry and HCM is getting a fair bit of press these days. There are some very big players in the industry and I think everyone is trying to create an enterprise solution so that they can be everything for clients. Systems are growing both through traditional product development but also through mergers and acquisitions. Ultimately, it is about coming up with solutions for the problems that organizations have concerning the management of their people. We tend to go for the small to midsize business market. There are a lot of companies that size that need all the functionality of some of those larger players but they simply do not have the budget to do that. We think we are a cost effective way to get all of that functionality.

CEOCFO: *As you were developing HCM 5.0, what has changed in your process?*

Ms. Larson: I think the way that we approached the user interface changed over the development process. The underlying functionality is important of course but so is the user experience. Our R&D processes have changed to reflect that...we want to deliver the best experience we can to our clients.

CEOCFO: *Where does security come into play?*

Ms. Larson: One of the reasons that this tool set we have developed has taken longer than we anticipated is because whenever you look at any work done in an organization, there are two key components, authority and competency. You need to look at who has the skill to do the job but also who has the authority and permission to do the job. We spent a great amount of time working that model out so that you can define that authority and competency structure. When someone logs into his or her task list in the morning, only the tasks that he or she have the authority and the competency to do show up on their list. In that way, you are providing a secure working environment. You do not have to give everybody access to all of your systems, you simply drive the security through the task so that if I am not part of this task it does not show up for me. It simplifies it in that way. Security is always a big issue for organizations and if you can limit the number of people that have to go into different systems at different times then you are automatically creating a more secure environment.

CEOCFO: *Will you eventually be offering essentially one product or will you continue to offer some of your earlier services?*

Ms. Larson: We generally have sold our application as one integrated product. What we will be doing in the next year or so is piecing up some our modules and offering them as standalone applications to solve specific business problems.

CEOCFO: *Where were the biggest challenges in putting the technology together?*

Ms. Larson: At first when we thought about this years ago, we thought it would be a relatively straightforward concept to put in place. Workflow is not a new concept; workflow and automation tools have been around for a long time. I think what we found was how work actually flows in an organization is a lot more complicated than at first review. Getting your

resources defined and attached to the right authorities and competencies is part of it. But what happens when there is flexibility needed in the process? When somebody has to leave early during the day but certain tasks still need to be done? Or the organization comes up against a situation that has not occurred before? You need the ability to delegate tasks, both formally and informally, so that work can still flow when you are absent or when the process needs to change on the fly to meet a particular situation. When you ask someone to explain their job, you get a linear explanation of what happens but when you actually watch them and see how they work; the process is not linear at all. Workflow automation tools need to have flexibility built into them.

CEOCFO: *How do you help support your clients?*

Ms. Larson: Since we have that payroll component to our product, we have offered 24/7 support for decades. Clients can call us any time of the day or night. They will get a live person. We do not use an answering service. It is our people on the phone when they call. We have close partnerships with many of our clients. Many of them have been customers for ten or fifteen years. Having that partnership creates a personalized level of service. Our support team does a great job of helping clients.

CEOCFO: *Why choose StarGarden?*

Ms. Larson: When we looked at the market and researched the capabilities that our system has, we could not find a solution out there that has the breadth of functionality that ours does; the flexibility, or the workflow and automation tools, with the return on investment we offer. We have backed that all up with great service. I think it is a total package that you will not be able to find duplicated out there in the market.

CEOCFO: *If people were looking for a service like yours, what would they key in using an online search to find StarGarden?*

Ms. Larson: There are many searches that happen with the HCM tag on it, so integrated HCM is a good place to start. Workflow enabled HCM, those types of words together will bring more of a holistic feel to your search. Of course, we get many searches just on straight integrated HR, and integrated HR and payroll systems.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine



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