



Whitepaper

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new era for  
HICM users

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*Human is Capital!*

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# Technology and user productivity:

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## a step forward or backward?

“...What may have been an enormous advance for some users constitutes a big step backwards for others...”

In 1994 Nicholas Negroponte (chairman of MIT's Media Laboratory) surprised everybody with his "J'accuse" against Fax machines.

"I truly believe that the fax machine has been a serious blemish on the computer landscape and a serious step backward for communication and technology evolution". Everyone was startled, and responded:

"What do you mean? The advent of the fax has been extremely positive."

And for millions of users it really was perceived as an impressive step forward, a real revolution for companies and users. Nobody asked whether there was something better and more efficient, simply they noticed that technology made their day by day tasks easier and faster. Nobody even knew that fax technology was imposed on us by a Japanese legacy (Kanji, and iconic "alphabets") and that fax technology has lasted so long because it was such a blessing to the phone companies. The result has been the slower development of, and a tough competitor for e-mail technology.

Now, of course, we all know that Negroponte was right. E-mail was the right tool, and nowadays nobody could work on a daily basis with fax alone.

The reach of the Fax was extensive, it was accepted as a standard by companies all over the world; it was easy to use and accessible to everybody. But it was a dramatic step backwards in terms of productivity, a rich user experience and cost.

Thus we can see that technology can be both a step forward and backward, depending not only on how it really helps us to evolve, but also on different perceptions. This means that what may have been an enormous advance for some constitutes a big step backwards for others.

We can see something similar – bearing in mind the obvious differences – happening with the day to day work of back office application users.

**E-mail was the right tool,  
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fax alone**



# From the 70's until today:

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## The Users Mambo Effect

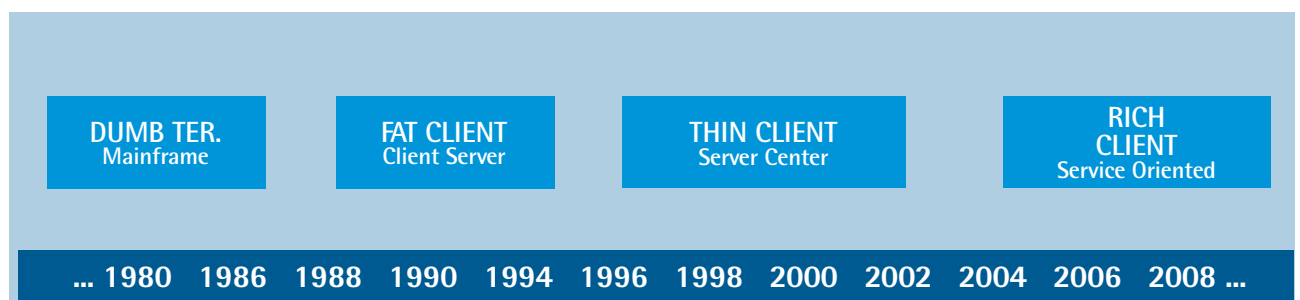
### “...It's based on a combination of backward and forward steps...”

The Mambo dance is amusing because it's based on a combination of backward and forward steps. Just as with the fax, application users have become accustomed to dancing the Mambo in recent decades (well, they don't realize they are dancing until a new trend comes along). Of course things were slightly different in the past, and end user technology has somewhat improved work tasks, but at the same time standards have been created that have slowed the technological evolution process and done a disservice to users.

In the 70's, 3270 type terminals dominated the user interface market. These terminals had absolutely no client logic and simply provided a visualization of a remotely executed process, typically a mainframe or a host. This type of technology dominated the market for nearly two decades, and was mainly characterized by a centralized administration and standard protocols for remote terminals. The VT100, VT220, etc. standards are just a few examples of this type of protocol, protocols that still exist today in UNIX environments, found on typical connection screens such as telnets, etc.

With the technological evolution of the 80's, PCs began to be a viable alternative to these terminals. These new client work stations delivered a level of functionality that had not been exploited up until then: the capacity for local operations with a Client/Server model. The terminal was no longer just a basic protocol interpreter; it also allowed the execution of much higher level tasks in situ, dramatically increasing the quality of iteration offered to the end user. Not all this was advantageous however, as this local functionality required the execution of local software, along with all the issues that this implies: installation, management, in short an application life cycle that had not been necessary up until then.

Up until that point the management process had been centralized in one host, where all the applications maintenance took place. Now there were a potentially huge number of client work stations that needed to be administered and controlled.



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“For some years now the deficiencies of the HTML model have been recognized...”

In some cases this problem could be extremely complicated, and demand led to the development of technologies that allow for the centralized management of applications installed on client work stations across an entire organization.

The 90's saw the arrival of the World Wide Web. The main characteristic of this new concept was the use of an extremely basic, light language known as HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language).

This language allows for text formatted with graphics, tables, text fonts, etc. to be defined according to a standard and to be seen by millions of users connected to the Internet. This environment, known as the light client, is very similar to that of the terminals described above.

Following the Mambo logic, once again we have a centralized model where a host provides business logic functionality and information via html pages that are sent to a client, simply presenting the user with information and a very basic level of interaction, and providing weak professional user experience.

Obviously the quality and client visualization experience is qualitatively far superior to that provided by the 3270 type terminals.

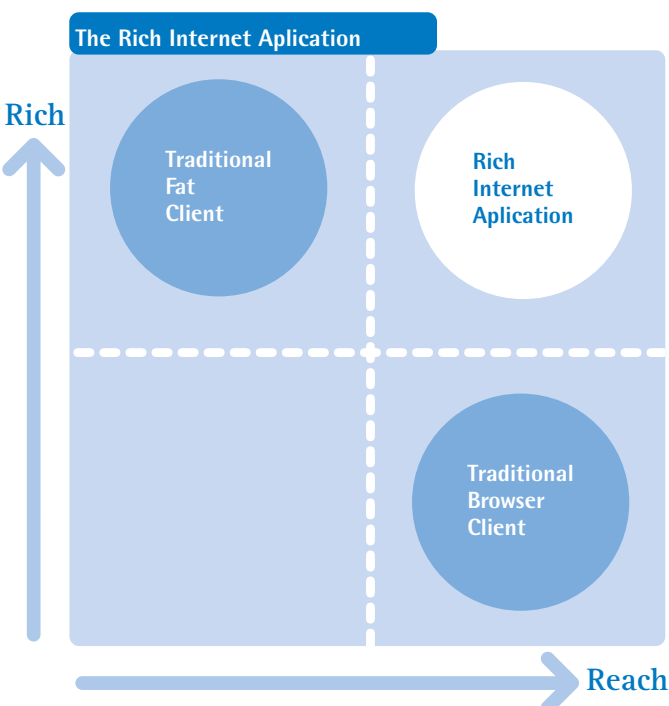
Technologies such as JavaScript, ActiveX, Flash, and Dynamic HTML (DHTML) allow the client to carry out certain types of logical operations such as the validation of information introduced by the user, and to improve levels of interaction with the user. However, the more complex and interactive html pages tend to be slow, as a greater amount of data or code has to be downloaded.

In conclusion, with light client HTML solutions we lose a level of interaction and client interface efficiency previously provided by the Client / Server applications outlined above, but at the same time distributed installation and administration problems disappear.

For some years now the deficiencies of the HTML model have been recognized, and attempts have been made to resolve these. The clearest limitation of this model is the reduced capacity for end user interaction.

Despite the fact that it has evolved over the time that it has been around, the quality level of the user interface is light-years away from that which could be offered by the Client/Server model: an interface resulting from a combination of advanced coding with visual languages such as Visual Basic, Java, etc., and a basic and extremely light standard. Obviously the level of interaction with local PC resources is also very limited.

Also, and to make matters worse, each user interaction with the interface (each click) implies a transaction with the host and the resulting impact of the application response time, which has repercussions for the cost of the infrastructure necessary to provide the service (bandwidth).



# The e-xtended Companies and new HR challenges

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## The traditional approach is not valid anymore.

Companies are moving towards a wall-less community, they are becoming virtual. The company is more a network of scattered interconnected People, rather than a closed stable group of Employees. The concept of employee is becoming rather fuzzy.

Employees  
Retirees  
Applicants  
Part time  
workers

Bus.Partners  
Consultants  
Providers

## The Dominant Business Organization may not be a permanent corporation but rather an elastic Network !



Harvard Business Review

## Four new challenges have become evident over recent years in the HICM Universe:

1. - The user/application relationship and the result that this relationship has in terms of capacity, intelligence, productivity and efficiency.
2. -The decentralization and extension of Human Resources management, in administrative, cost and efficiency terms for employees and in more strategic terms for Line Managers.
3. - Top Management and Human Resources professionals decision making tools for people management and organization.
4. - Human Resources Outsourcing: especially for non-strategic and lower value aspects of the Company, such as salaries management and administration, in various forms: BPO, ASP, etc..

# The "trade-off dilemma" and the evolution

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Once again, the crucial point is that a technology had been created that had enormous advantages in terms of reach, ease of use and accessibility and low installation costs, whilst user productivity and functional wealth was lost.



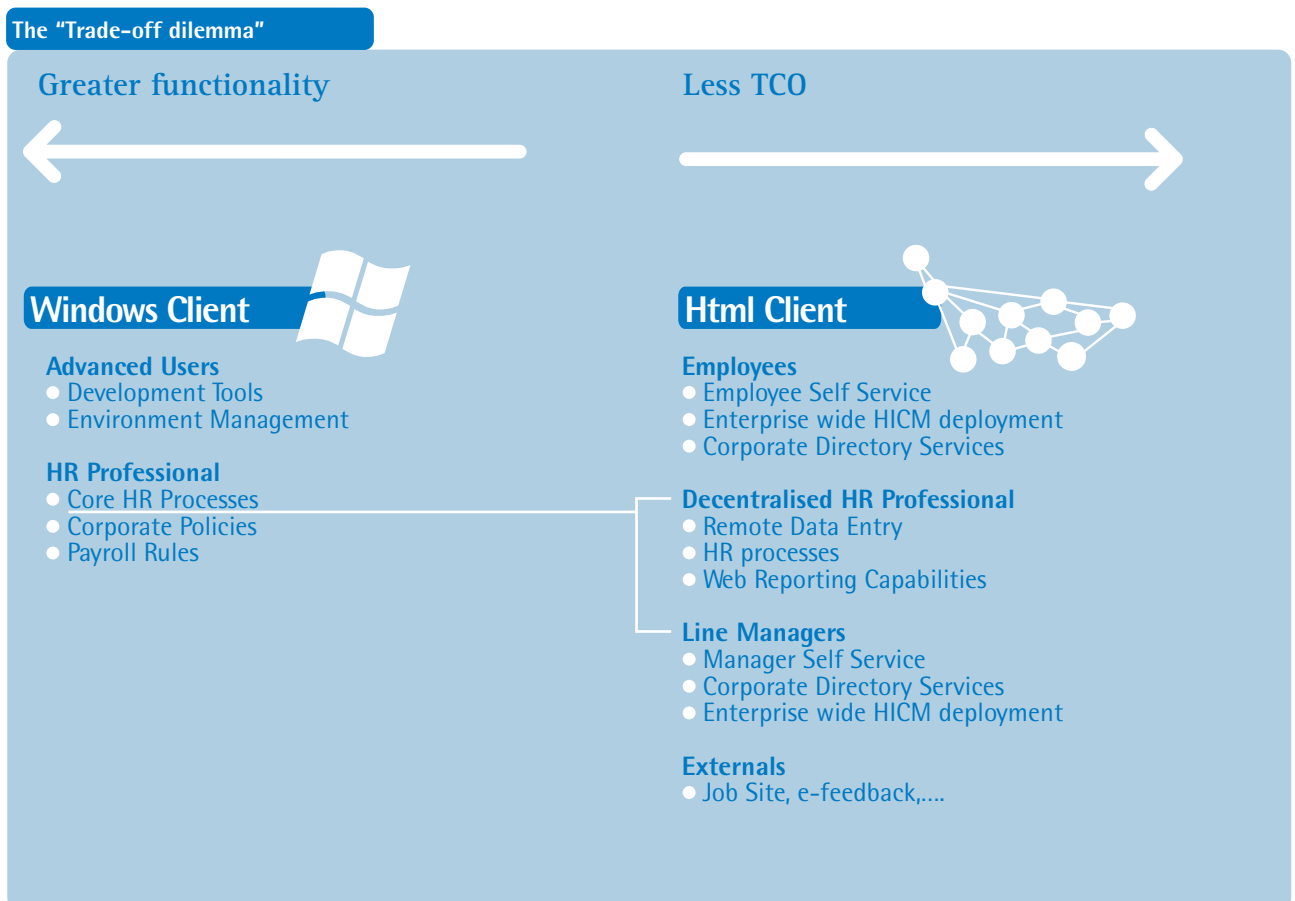
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This is the classic Trade-off dilemma that somehow has to be paid for by the application users: do you want more reach, decentralization, greater simplicity, a reduction in installation costs and updates? Ok, but in return you will have less functionality, little independence, limited intelligence, higher communication costs...

It was clear that it was necessary to come up with a solution that made the best of both worlds: that of the heavy client from the client / server world, and that of the HTML type light client.

# The "trade-off dilemma" and the evolution

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“On the other hand, line directors and decentralized Human Resources professionals increasingly require more local functionality and intelligence: access to reports, statistics, queries, graphics... in order to make appropriate decisions”

# The "trade-off dilemma" and the evolution

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**“Productivity and Funcional Richness should translate to intelligence and data for effective decision making, decentralization, integration with desktop applications and offline work”**

And above all, it was clear that it would never be possible to sacrifice productivity and functionality in the interests of greater simplicity of use, ease of communication or, going even further, in the interests of a technological paradigm imposed by some provider or company department.

On the other hand, line directors and decentralized Human Resources professionals increasingly require more local functionality and intelligence: access to reports, statistics, queries, graphics... in order to make appropriate decisions with all the necessary information.

Today there is an important trend in Human Resources to centralize information whilst decentralizing processes, including the most complex ones. This trend is particularly strong in multi-company Holdings and multi or international companies.

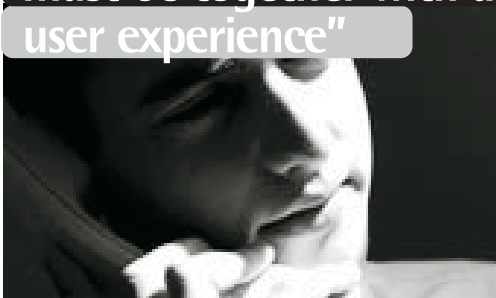
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Another trend is to involve managers. Many of these managers are mobile, and it is exactly when they are mobile that they can make the most of the opportunity to carry out administrative Human Resources tasks (pre-evaluations, salary review budgets etc...). This is the need to work off-line, and the answer to this is RIA technology.

Thanks to this new technology the "trade-off dilemma" changes.

In particular, decentralized Human Resources Professionals once again have a powerful application and Managers have access to more sophisticated functionality. The off-line and mobility factors also come into play.

**“Productivity and Funcionality must be together with a better user experience”**



# ...and the fitness to purpose model

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## Responding correctly with the right tool

An HICM solution has many players: Human Resources and IT Directors and users, Managing Directors and Line Managers, Employees, and everyone with an external relationship to the company (Collaborators, Applicants, Clients, Retirees...). Each with their own specific, different needs. There is no "one size fits all", as many Technology (rather than Solution) providers have proposed. In others words, there is, but always with the high trade-off. Responding correctly with the right tool for the job is the real challenge.

It is one thing to provide valid instruments for amateurs, or to cover basic needs, but it is an entirely different thing to provide specific solutions for professionals from a particular sector that require the maximum functionality and design to achieve their aims.

## HTML for professional and non-professional users

It is surprising, then, that software design sometimes moves in the opposite direction to the logical design evolution of objects or tools. In the case of Human Resources applications, one tool has been imposed upon the user for different tasks and professional purposes. The 'one HTML interface for all' is an example of forcing professional users to move within the same sphere and range of possibilities. The Client-Server model did the same but in the other direction.

At Meta4 we have always had in mind the different realities and impacts of any given solution, and we have offered every client the best tool to achieve company objectives.

We always analyze the complexity of the end users' panorama, and that's why we are describing this as a universe: to better respond to the needs of the inhabitants of each planet.

# But what about HICM users?

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## Who are they and what do they need?

### The Meta4 architecture has always adapted to market and user needs

To have a realistic, complete view of different users with often opposed points of views and objectives, we have to imagine that each of them comes from a different planet. An HICM solution must provide the best response for each of them.

PeopleNet has been developed not just with the Human Resources or IT professionals in mind, but also other users (managers and employees, applicants, ...). This is the reason why Meta4 is so easy and intuitive to use.

In the Human Resources Universe there are many different users with specific needs:

Of course we also know what are the main concerns of HR Managers today :

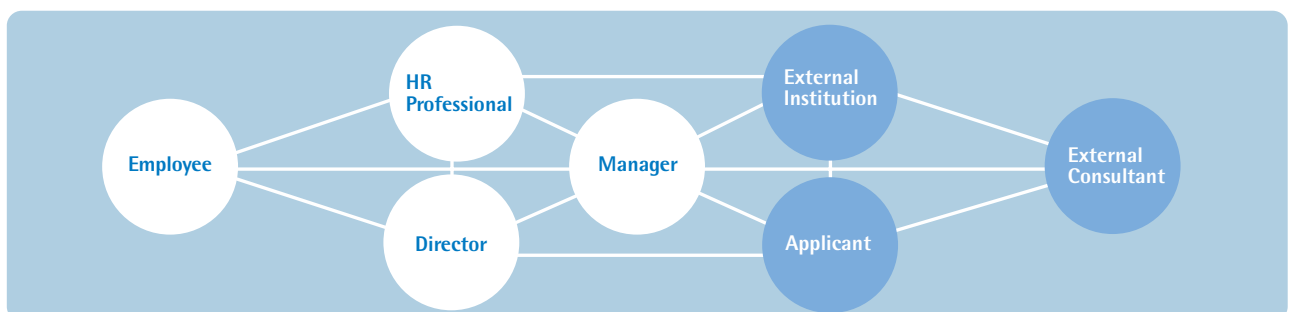
- Productivity, Efficiency, Costs
- Decentralization
- Demonstrate HR role for creating real efficient organizations
- Demonstrate HR costs are valuable and impact on bottom-line
- People assessment and staff retention
- Outsourcing administrative tasks

With this complete vision of the planets and new Hr Manager concerns we have build an original and unique vision and the best HICM solution for each of them.

The Meta4 architecture has always adapted to market and user needs, changing over time according to a coherent, centralized model, not just technological trends, to provide solution to real market demands.

Client Server 2 tier (1994), Client Server multi-tier, also called Net centric architecture (1998), HTML portals in 2000, Rich Web in 2005.

- CS 2 tier was very efficient for salary management.
- CS multi-tier for enriching the product with Human Resources functionality to distribute numerous transactions throughout the company. Also ideal for meeting performance objectives in office systems relationships.
- HTML for occasional new users, employees and managers.
- Rich Web to monitor our clients' efforts to decentralize heavy processes.



# Meta4 vision: innovation always means a step forward

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## Meta4 wants to avoid the Mambo effect for its clients wherever possible...

Meta4 wants to avoid the Mambo effect for its clients wherever possible – it isn't always possible – because its own status as Best of Breed provider in HICM and, above all, its philosophy of providing solutions rather than technology, has meant that it focuses more on the resolution of functional and production issues, rather than religiously following technological trends.

As a result Meta4's obsession is and always will be to make sure that the technology is so powerful and well designed that it does not take center stage, making sure that this position is occupied by people, productivity, the different needs of application users (Human Resources, IT, Employees, managers, outside world...), and the results at the end of the day.

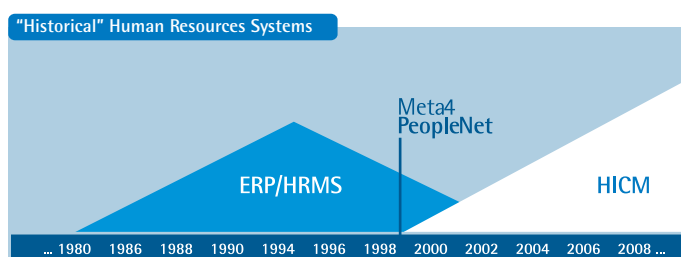
Meta4's vision when PeopleNet was born in 1999/2000 was conceived and projected completely differently to the vision of the ERP systems of 10-15 years earlier.

With PeopleNet a new personnel management paradigm was born, based on two completely innovative and cutting edge concepts:

- People-Centric, i.e. the first solution based on (and oriented to) people. It was conceived to manage Human Capital and not administrative processes as in the case of the ERP's created for managing material assets, and later employees, rather than people.
- People & Knowledge: people, talent, abilities and knowledge combined and managed in order to improve company productivity, beyond the comfort zone of personnel administration.

Meta4 has also avoided technological leaps into the void for its clients, as well as version changes with their associated ruptures or discontinuities. It has always offered evolution and adaptation to its clients' specific reality. Providers have often imposed sudden leaps and ruptures on the market, obliging clients to make radical transformations and great investments. Meta4 has obviously evolved its technologies and versions, but its policy of continuity and version maintenance has been extremely coherent and client oriented.

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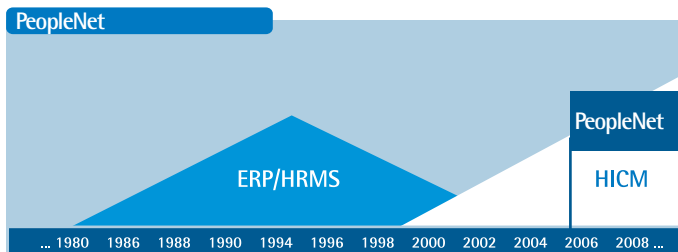
# New responses to new challenges:

## PeopleNet

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### PeopleNet therefore represents a new era in Organizations' Human and Intellectual Capital Management.

To this environment of changing trends and new challenges comes PeopleNet, to provide an appropriate response to these two challenges via what we call a New User Experience, for a new, more productive and efficient way of working. Just as the first PeopleNet was in 2000, this is a real innovation and a big step forward for the sector.



PeopleNet therefore represents a new era in Organizations' Human and Intellectual Capital Management:

- It offers a new user experience that noticeably increases productivity at all levels.
- It possesses the most powerful and innovative technology: Rich Web (RIA).
- It permits a new way of working and operating characterized by ubiquitous work – mobility – without the need for a connection. Off-line working.
- It helps Company Directors and Managers to intuitively and intelligently produce information, and therefore to make decisions.
- It empowers the effective decentralization of Human Resources activities to decentralized Human Resources Managers and Professionals.
- It offers the best embedded functionality and services to provide these users with greater intelligence and agility.
- It is the best – and only really specialized – technology platform for Human Resources Outsourcing.

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[www.meta4.com](http://www.meta4.com)

