



Making the connection Snohomish Public Utility District transforms its HR systems for tomorrow's workforce



Utilities organizations strive to offer more than their core service. They strive to offer predictability and reliability—to ensure that the water keeps flowing uninterrupted to customers, to ensure that the lights stay on, to ensure that technical challenges get resolved quickly and thoroughly.

To make that happen, utilities rely on a skilled corps of employees who bring a deep and diverse mix of experience to daily operations—from repair specialists in the field to planners and administrators in the back office. But keeping staff levels up is a looming challenge in some corners of the industry.

A look at the future

For Snohomish County Public Utility District (Snohomish PUD)—which serves 330,000 electric customers and 19,000 water customers in the state of Washington—the staffing challenge is one that has become very real. With 35 percent of its 1,100-person workforce eligible

for retirement within the next five years, recruiting and retaining workers has become a top priority. The challenge is especially great in Snohomish PUD's area of operations near Seattle, where employers such as Microsoft, Boeing, Amazon, Starbucks, Costco, and Nordstrom maintain their headquarters and compete for highly skilled workers.

To begin addressing the looming workforce challenge, Snohomish PUD in recent years began working with Deloitte to develop a plan—and to put in place cloud-based technology solutions for moving the organization forward.

The old methods

At the heart of the plan was an emphasis on building a modern work environment that could help elevate job satisfaction levels—an environment in which employees could access and manage job-related information intuitively and efficiently. Specifically, Snohomish PUD leaders wanted to move the organization toward a

more self-service model when it came to HR. For years, Snohomish PUD had relied on a mix of manual processes and three ERP systems, as well as an HR system for employee benefits and data—and that system was available to HR staff only.

Employee appraisals were done manually, and HR data was entered manually into the payroll system. Meanwhile, managers and employees had to contact HR staff if they needed to change personal data or get details on remaining employee vacation time. The approach was not only time-consuming and tedious for the frontline workers and managers; it also kept HR personnel from focusing on recruitment, talent development, and innovation.

What was needed was a single system of record. In working with Deloitte, Snohomish PUD determined that a set of technologies from SAP and SuccessFactors, an SAP company, would meet the need. “SAP® software has been implemented at thousands of utilities across the world, and we had every confidence that it would meet our needs,” said Benjamin Beberness, CIO of Snohomish PUD. “When we started looking at all the different modules for HR, we had to decide if we wanted to go with the on-premises capabilities or not. We knew SAP was going to be primarily investing in cloud technology in the future, so we were very comfortable making a decision to move forward with SuccessFactors®.”

“Right from the get-go, there was good chemistry and synergy between the team, our folks, and the Deloitte resources, who really understood HR business processes and quickly learned all of our business processes.”

– **Kristi Treckeme**
Employee Resources Director, Snohomish PUD

Putting together the new pieces

Launching the new HR functionality involved a “wave” approach—in which cloud-based tools and capabilities were rolled out in pieces to the workforce, to get employees accustomed to the changes. “Doing it this way gave employees and managers time to fully accept and embrace the changes,” said Kristi Treckeme, Employee Resources Director at Snohomish PUD. “And it didn’t take long. They liked that they could see their own data and make their own changes at home or wherever. Managers especially enjoyed that, for the first time, they could look at data for all their employees.”

Snohomish PUD’s HR transformation, which began in early 2014, involved three initial months of redesigning business processes with assistance from Deloitte to help ensure that the new technologies would support the organization as effectively as possible. The first wave of technology deployment took place in May 2014 and involved SAP® SuccessFactors Employee Central, SAP® SuccessFactors Learning, and integration with other HR-related applications.

From November 2014 to March 2015, a second wave delivered SAP® Jam™, the enterprise social collaboration software—as well as functionality for performance and goals management, compensation planning, succession management, career development, and other activities. In August 2015, a final wave of tools addressed recruitment management, marketing, onboarding, workforce planning analytics, and advanced reporting. And then, to tie everything together for an official go-live, Snohomish worked with Deloitte to integrate the new functionality into an on-premises SAP® ERP system.

Next steps have involved working with Deloitte to determine new ways to get value out of the new systems, areas for additional process improvements, and possible new functionality such as mobile. “We’re going to look at improving on what we’ve already built,” Beberness said.

The payoff

After a process and technology transformation that took roughly 15 months, Snohomish PUD is seeing results that leaders expect will support the organization’s workforce well into the future.

Ease of use. A streamlined cloud-based solution for all HR information needs—for HR staff, managers, and frontline employees—has given Snohomish PUD a system that’s

IMPACTS FROM TRANSFORMATION

- An intuitive cloud-based system that met the expectations of new workers as well as veteran employees who were using cloud solutions for the first time.
- A self-service approach to HR information, allowing employees to manage their information efficiently and devote more time to core job activities.
- A centralized solution for managing HR data—from pre-hiring to retirement—and for supporting reporting and compliance needs.

intuitive and accessible. And it works for both new workers, who expect modern tools for managing their employment-related information, and for longtime workers, who might be using job-related cloud tools for the first time.

Efficiency. The new integrated system for Snohomish PUD means that workers spend less time seeking and managing their information. The result: workers who can process HR-related information transactions on their own—and then get back to performing their core duties or finding new ways to deliver value to the organization.

Accuracy. A central HR solution gives Snohomish PUD a single, up-to-date source for its reporting and compliance needs—without information gaps or discrepancies that might have occurred with the old systems and manual processes. The new system also delivers a more thorough picture of HR-related information by capturing and managing data from the employee application process all the way through to retirement.

Why Deloitte

In selecting an organization to help guide them toward their vision of an integrated, self-service HR solution, SnoPUD leaders focused on finding an organization that could address technical issues as well as people-facing challenges. “We did demos and orals, and did personal interviews with some of the leads, making sure that there was some strength behind the paper, some reality behind the paper,” Benjamin Beberness said. “The key factor is we want to make sure the team that we work with is going to have our best interests and is one that we are going to be able to work well with.”

For Deloitte, once work commenced, the “reality behind the paper” involved providing critical support in process design, system configuration, data conversion, testing and documentation, training, and change management. Deloitte also provided staff who could function “more like one of our HR folks and help fill in the gaps of our own capabilities,” Beberness said. “That was actually something we weren’t necessarily thinking about up front. But as we worked into this, that’s something we determined we needed to get done.”

And chemistry was key, too, according to Treckeme, the Employee Resources Director. “Right from the get-go, there was good chemistry and synergy between the team, our folks, and the Deloitte resources, who really understood HR business processes and quickly learned all of our business processes,” Treckeme said.

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