

Lessons From a University Health System's Cloud Journey

The University of Kansas Health System (TUKHS) embarked on a journey to implement a cloud-based Workday enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution. Over the course of two years, TUKHS successfully completed a full-suite implementation with Huron as its adviser. Going beyond the goals of being on time and on budget, TUKHS streamlined operations and increased savings. How did the leaders at TUKHS approach this full-suite implementation, and what lessons did they learn along the way?

CHALLENGE

For The University of Kansas Health System (TUKHS), an academic medical center encompassing facilities in Kansas City, Great Bend, Hays, Larned and Topeka, Kansas, nothing is more critical than ensuring access to quality care for patients. The enterprise systems supporting this care needed to reflect that.

The legacy enterprise business management suite that TUKHS had been using for more than 20 years was outdated — with backups and updates all needing to be done on-premises. Processes were manual and many were still paper-based. Additionally, having acquired rural clinics and hospitals over the years, TUKHS could not gain any economies of scale and integration, due to differing ERP systems. With its main legacy system sunseting, TUKHS wanted to take the opportunity to evolve and streamline operations into one new system.

APPROACH

It was a multistep process. The first part was an assessment-readiness phase, determining a new system's exact needs and requirements. When it came time to select a vendor and an implementation adviser, Tammy Shepherd, the ERP program director at TUKHS, knew that the team needed a solid collaborator to help them implement the solution.

“To use an analogy, we were using a rotary dial landline phone, and we were getting the newest model of iPhone. What we needed was a partner with immense healthcare knowledge who could help us with change management. We didn't want to just keep doing things the way they used to be; we wanted a fresh start with new automated processes.”

TAMMY SHEPHERD, ERP PROGRAM DIRECTOR TUKHS

TUKHS engaged with Huron for the initial readiness phase. Due to the strong relationships cultivated between the teams, TUKHS retained its relationship with Huron throughout the entire process, working with the consultancy to select Workday as the cloud ERP vendor and implementing the full solution.

Many organizations decide to implement a single system first and then build out the full suite one module at a time. Knowing they would have to implement the system across multiple campuses and hospitals, the TUKHS leaders didn't want to go back and forth with the integrations. They decided to do a full-suite Workday implementation all at once, encompassing human resources, payroll, finance, supply chain and budgeting. Over the 18-month project, TUKHS went through different stages, determining success through various measures and engaging effective change management practices to ensure a smooth return to operations.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Throughout the process, TUKHS and Huron engaged in intentional knowledge transfers to ensure that TUKHS was set up for success and knew what to expect once the implementation was complete. This knowledge transfer involved an assessment of the team's knowledge as well as additional education if areas were found lacking in the necessary information.

Despite the challenges of working amid a pandemic, the implementation was widely successful. By terminating the 18 legacy systems, TUKHS saved \$2.5 million annually. The team reduced more than 2,100 custom reports to 400 and removed all paper processes. Overall, TUKHS employees were now less siloed and had self-service access to Workday transactions and information. The team saw success in more qualitative ways, as well.

“Our number one goals were uninterrupted patient care and workers getting their paychecks. We could deal with everything else. Hospital operations continued, and everyone got paid — to me, that was success enough,” Shepherd said. “From an external perspective, though, Workday told us that we were the most successful full suite implementation of our size. That felt good to hear.”

When asked what wisdom she would pass on to another health system undergoing a similar implementation, Shepherd offered the following advice:

Choose your implementation partner wisely. If you're wanting change management as we did, then engage with a partner that has that expertise and can evolve operations with you. Make sure you've got strong governance across your functional team.

TUKHS gained operational efficiencies, engaged in consistent reporting, optimized staff skills, and improved collaboration through its Workday implementation. By using flexible technology that can be adapted for the future, TUKHS can continue to focus on its mission of providing outstanding service, patient care, and education to its community and beyond.



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