

TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS CASE STUDY



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The College of New Jersey

Migrating Finance and HCM to Oracle Cloud: ERP Implementation at The College of New Jersey

THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

The College of New Jersey is a public university in Ewing, New Jersey, established in 1855. TCNJ is organized into seven schools and offers over fifty liberal arts and professional programs, including a notable seven-year combined Bachelor of Science/Doctor of Medicine program. TCNJ serves about 7,550 students and maintains the fifth highest four-year graduation rate among all public colleges and universities. The institution prioritizes

undergraduate research, mentored internships, and field experiences; community and globally engaged learning; and leadership development.

INITIAL CHALLENGES FOR TCNJ AND CHOOSING NEW SOLUTIONS

In late 2015, TCNJ's Oracle PeopleSoft Financial Management product was due for new hardware and a significant upgrade to keep pace with the institution's needs. The PeopleSoft system had been in place for



about 20 years, and Sharon Blanton, Vice President and Chief Information Officer of TCNJ, soon realized the overhaul would be comparable to implementing a new system. She took the opportunity to survey the enterprise resource planning (ERP) options available on the market. After some initial research, Blanton and her team calculated the return on investment for the latest version of Oracle PeopleSoft, along with the Workday Cloud Platform and Oracle ERP Cloud. The TCNJ team decided that Oracle ERP Cloud offered the features they wanted at the best price point, with a modern system designed to last for years to come. After choosing Oracle ERP Cloud, TCNJ began the implementation of Oracle Financials Cloud and Oracle Taleo Recruiting Cloud Service suites first. The financials solution is scheduled to go live July 2019 followed by Taleo in January 2020.

Initially starting down an implementation path with another vendor, TCNJ soon found the implementation design and

pace to be incompatible. The accelerated and targeted rollout was too aggressive for an institution working to understand the product and modernize their business processes throughout the implementation. Blanton and her team continued for six months before deciding to halt the project mid-year in 2017. At that point, TCNJ was able to begin fresh with Oracle HCM Cloud and a new implementation partner, Huron. Oracle HCM Cloud is now slated to go live in January 2020, as Huron has helped drive the implementation forward in a supportive way that is also responsive to TCNJ staff's demanding daily work schedules.

The institution rounded out its initial Oracle selections by adding Oracle Planning and Budgeting Cloud and Oracle Project Portfolio Management. The implementation of the combined Oracle cloud suites is slated to span just over two years. TCNJ has also recently updated its Oracle PeopleSoft Student product, which, according to Blanton, fulfills their current needs. They plan to use PeopleSoft Student for the next few years.

BEST PRACTICES FOR CHOOSING A VENDOR AND PRODUCT

Blanton says essential to their success is the fact that the TCNJ team had implemented smaller cloud projects before they took on the Oracle ERP Cloud implementation. The previous experience helped them prepare for the evolving IT roles and process management changes that accompany a cloud project, such as the emphasis on configuration over customization.



Blanton cautions institutions to be extra careful during the product evaluation phase of the procurement process for any cloud product, because it can be easy to misunderstand which features are core to the solution toolset and which are add-on modules to be purchased separately. Diligence during product evaluation ensures that all the expected functionality is included in the budget. She also encourages institutions to ask about details specific to the vendor culture, such as the cadence of product updates and the way product support will operate. Blanton stresses that, “when buying a product, an institution is also buying into the ecosystem and methodology of the vendor.”

Because Oracle is such a large company, the TCNJ team initially relied on their Oracle sales team to connect them with the right Oracle contacts. Once the institution signed their contract with Oracle, they were assigned an Implementation Success Manager. After implementation, their primary contact will become their Customer Success Manager. According to Blanton, these contacts were all vital resources throughout the project. She emphasizes the importance of providing regular updates to the Oracle contacts and including them in meetings. Constant communication helped the university understand Oracle’s workflow and how TCNJ could fit their processes within that structure. When the TCNJ team raised concerns, their Oracle Success Manager often could provide them with internal Oracle resources that were previously invisible to the institution.

BEST PRACTICES FOR CHOOSING AN IMPLEMENTATION PARTNER

Blanton found the process of choosing an implementation partner to be more challenging than selecting the solution. After their issues with the first financials product implementation partner, TCNJ was deliberate in ensuring their new partner could adapt to the pace of the institution and factor in the necessary time to improve business processes. It was vital that their new partner have an awareness and understanding of the nuances of higher education institutions, such as fluctuations in their annual schedule and blackout dates during specific months.

TCNJ chose Huron because of the company’s successful track record implementing cloud solutions in similar institutions. The college first hired Huron to help them through a smaller chart of accounts project. Seeing Huron was a good fit, TCNJ felt comfortable diving into the Oracle ERP Cloud implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

TCNJ’s Oracle ERP Cloud implementation required the TCNJ team to adopt a different mindset than their previous approaches with older ERP systems. Blanton says the key to change management is frequent and consistent communication to define the new roles within the IT department and throughout the university. The cloud project relied on configuration rather than the design-oriented, development-heavy





methods of TCNJ's past implementations. Instead of having developers customize the software to fit existing processes, TCNJ staff had to analyze business processes and figure out how to fit them into the existing technology and framework of the Oracle ERP Cloud platform. Moving to the cloud transformed the underlying technology across all financial, administrative, and research functions of the college. A key benefit for TCNJ is that this new cloud infrastructure has provided an opportunity to unify previously siloed departmental projects and platforms.

According to Blanton, hiring backfill staff several months prior to starting the project would have allowed the project to move much more quickly. It has been difficult for some of the experts in particular areas to dedicate the necessary time to the implementation project alongside their other day-to-day responsibilities. Had the resources been available, hiring staff members to fill in functional areas would have enabled the core team to better focus on outside priorities without slowing the project.

Blanton notes that hiring backfill staff after the project has begun is not ideal, because the core team has to take extra time to train them. With the limited resources available, Blanton has been able to backfill the TCNJ staff in smaller, task-oriented areas, which has offered relief to the more seasoned functional teams. She stresses that it is easy to underestimate the amount of work the implementation will require—not just for IT staff, but for functional teams as well.

SUCCESS FACTORS FROM ORACLE'S PERSPECTIVE

According to Oracle, Blanton made a point to include as many university stakeholders as possible, which has been a key to the successful implementation. Oracle worked with her in a consultative way, to help with the challenge of moving from the institution's on-premises PeopleSoft platform to Oracle ERP Cloud, and to help with vocalizing and preparing the institution for the corresponding changes in business processes.





Oracle found it essential to ask probing questions that would help both the company and institution know what to expect out of the project. For example, Blanton educated Oracle on some of TCNJ's process-related details to help Oracle provide the best guidance and most accurate roadmap possible. Oracle also oriented the college to the wide array of self-service tools available to them.

TCNJ SEES BENEFITS

TCNJ sees benefits in the increased transparency of departmental workflows and the user independence that Oracle's self-service cloud platform enables. With PeopleSoft, TCNJ had created many side processes and custom applications to fill in gaps; however, with no real view into those systems and data, it was difficult to manage and improve workflows. With the new cloud system in place, users will be

able to log in and easily find the data they need at any given time. TCNJ is also looking forward to deprovisioning some of the older software and servers they have used to prop up the gaps in PeopleSoft, as this will create resources they can shift elsewhere. Further, for TCNJ faculty specifically, the new cloud system will offer access to more data and better reporting tools, enabling more detailed and accurate planning.

REFERENCES

As part of this research, Tambellini briefed with Sharon Blanton, Vice President and Chief Information Officer of The College of New Jersey, and Chris Wandling, Cloud Applications Sales Manager at Oracle. Those briefings helped inform this case study. Information in this study was also gathered from www.tcnj.edu and www.usnews.com/best-colleges/college-of-new-jersey-2642. The podcast episode of one of the interviews that informed this case study can be found at www.thetambellinigroup.com/moving-finance-and-hr-to-oracle-cloud-with-sharon-blanton/.

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The purpose of this report is to provide higher education institutions with information about the objectives, solutions, and outcomes related to the utilization of technology in colleges and universities across the U.S.

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