



CAPELLA UNIVERSITY

Customer Profile:

Online Education

Website:

www.capella.edu

Location:

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Business Need:

- Cost-effective scheduling
- Operational efficiency
- Employee engagement
- Service and capacity continuity

NICE Solutions:

- Workforce Management

The Impact:

- Increased employee satisfaction
- Streamlined scheduling
- 400 administrative hours saved
- Sufficient staff coverage
- Consistent service levels

On The NICE Solution

“Personal time off planning is now consistently equitable and satisfying for employees, while protecting the business from capacity and service lapses.”

- Brian Schaeppi, Planning & Reporting Analyst,
Capella University

About Capella University

Capella University is an online institution of higher education in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In operation for more than 20 years, the school offers 53 degree programs and 51 certificate programs. Over 37,800 students from all 50 US states and 54 other countries are enrolled in the university, 89 percent of them as part-time students. Nearly three quarters of the students are enrolled in advanced degree programs.

Capella University has about 1,500 faculty members, teaching over 1900 online courses. The instructors live across the entire US, on US military bases abroad, in US-held territories, and in six foreign countries. The school also employs over 1,300 non-faculty staff, including more than 250 front and back office operations department employees.

The Challenge

Employees in the operations department of Capella University relied on their own resources for time off planning, allocation and approvals. Time off was manually recorded and tracked using several different all-purpose programs, such as Excel, Word, Outlook, and the like. Daily allotments for allowable time off were not established ahead of time, with time off approved based mostly on supervisor discretion.

In those circumstances, employees did not have any visibility into their own scheduling options, such as which days were available for taking time off and which were not. At best, they were able to get information on their bi-weekly vacation time accruals and how many personal time off (PTO) hours they could carry over into the following year.

With no formal process for planning vacation time, nor any available applications designed for it, individuals were not motivated or encouraged to proactively manage their PTO balances. The result was inconsistent or non-existent vacation planning in front and back offices.

Typically, when employees became aware of the prospect of losing PTO to carryover limits, a flurry of time off requests were filed and approved without sufficient analysis. However, the attempt to accommodate as many requests as possible resulted in a negative impact on service levels. It also lowered the morale of those employees who found themselves in the office covering for coworkers who were out on last-minute PTO days.

In addition, time off was not coordinated among the different teams in the operations department, which increased the risk of multiple people with the same skillset being out of the office at the same time. This left key workflows vulnerable to coverage and service lapses.

All of these practices did little to remedy capacity issues and, in some cases, employees questioned whether the entire process was fair and equitable.



The Solution

The managers of the Capella University operations department examined how the NICE Workforce Management solution handles time off scheduling. They saw that, with NICE WFM, they would be able to create an efficient, formal, and fair vacation planning process.

The process designed by the operations department leadership using NICE WFM included structured vacation bidding rounds, with clearly defined rules. This method of time off allocation was seen to be efficient, precise and equitable. For both employees and administrators, vacation bidding results in an overall time savings.

A structured approach, with transparency and clarity, provides the incentive for employees to proactively manage their PTO. The result is fewer unexpected or overlapping absences, particularly at year's end, when employees scramble to use accumulated PTO before they lose it.

Service levels and business continuity are also well served by the NICE WFM solution, with employees grouped by skillset for schedule request management. This ensures that time off absences are balanced across front and back office functions, so operations continue seamlessly. With the granular pre-established time off allotment configuration function taking into account expected fluctuations in demand, Capella University can maintain proper staffing throughout the year.

Changing the Paradigm

As communication and transparency were lacking in the previous time off scheduling process, Capella University workforce management personnel took an open approach from the onboarding stage. They met with operations department team leaders individually to identify the benefits of NICE WFM time off management for their employees, the university, and themselves.

They then met with the employees to describe the high-level shift in approach, including the convenience and benefits of proactively managing their PTO balances. The management team also prepared resources and job aids designed to help employees navigate smoothly through the vacation bidding process using NICE WFM. Just before live implementation of the solution, each team was trained on how to use the WFM vacation bidding tool, for complete understanding of what to expect.

Fairness and Communication Get Better Results

Capella University management is able to consistently ensure satisfaction among its employees with the time off scheduling process, while protecting office operations from capacity and service lapses by adopting four new paradigms:

- Communication
- Transparency
- A procedural approach to bidding on vacation time
- A defined process for setting time off allotments

Time off bidding using NICE WFM saves the university an estimated total of 400 administrative hours per year over manual PTO management.

Communicating early engages employees and gives them the opportunity to consider their PTO needs for the next year and plan accordingly. Structured start and stop times for each bidding round, and a clear set of rules, minimizes confusion and improves the results for employees and management.

The benefits are apparent from the results of vacation time bidding managed using the NICE WFM solution. Within just three days, 61% of available PTO for the coming year is already planned and processed.

Within the same time frame, a time off lottery system was a little less than half as effective. The open calendar, manual method Capella University had been using resulted in just 14% of available PTO planned.

"Plan ahead, lead a structured and fair process, and encourage employees to plan PTO, and you will save time, money and headaches," suggests Brian Schaeppi, Planning & Reporting Analyst, Capella University.

Lessons Learned and Wider Adoption

After bidding concludes, workforce managers promptly communicate the results and look for "lessons learned" from the process. Their goal is to continually improve each year, to increase employee engagement and proactive PTO planning.

As of early 2017, about 75% of Capella University's operations department employees use the NICE WFM vacation bidding feature. The remaining 25% use various iterations of an open calendar approach, which offers little structure or guidance. Having seen the dramatic results, Capella University is now working towards increased utilization of the NICE WFM solution.

About NICE

NICE (NASDAQ: NICE) is the worldwide leading provider of enterprise software solutions that empower organizations to make smarter decisions based on advanced analytics of structured and unstructured data. NICE solutions help the world's largest organizations deliver better customer service, ensure compliance, combat fraud and safeguard citizens. Over 25,000 organizations in more than 150 countries, including over 80 of the Fortune 100 companies, are using NICE solutions. www.nice.com