NICE®

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:
- 100% employee satisfaction
- Low 0.3% rule violation rate (anticipated 1%) due to thorough training and simplicity of the Vacation Bidding feature of WFM
- 100 administrative hours saved annually
- Almost half of annual PTO hours planned in advance
- Consistent service levels

On The NICE Solution

"Expanding the NICE WFM solution gave employees a more comprehensive, engaging and rewarding experience, all while delivering positive business outcomes."

- Brian Schaeppi, Senior 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 54 degree programs and 51 certificate programs. Over 37,200 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 1,575 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 290 front and back office operations department employees. The annual contact volume for the school is over 583,100.

The Challenge

Capella University uses NICE Workforce Management (WFM) to support employee scheduling, real-time adherence, reporting, forecasting and paid time off (PTO) planning for its front and back office employees. For time-off planning and allocation, the university's operations department leadership designed a process using NICE WFM that includes structured vacation bidding rounds, with clearly defined rules. This method was seen to be efficient, precise and equitable, saving the university an estimated total of 400 administrative hours per year over manual PTO management.

As of early 2017, about 75% of Capella University's operations department employees used the NICE WFM-supported vacation bidding feature. The goal for 2017 was to reach 100% adoption for scheduling PTO for 2018.

The Admissions team, accounting for over 20% of the WFM-supported staff, had not agreed to use the vacation bidding feature for their annual vacation planning process. Despite efforts to transition the team to the new system, they preferred to continue using what they were comfortable with – spreadsheets. Yet, such manual recording and tracking has obvious drawbacks and inefficiencies, such as little structure or guidance, a time-consuming approval process, and last-minute scheduling frustration. The result is inconsistent or non-existent vacation planning in the front and back offices.

In addition, Admissions team members' time off was not easily coordinated with other operations teams, which increased the risk of key workflows becoming vulnerable to service lapses. In addition to the administrative difficulties, there was also the problem of the Admissions representatives being less engaged. What the Admissions team needed was active participation in PTO planning, direct engagement with WFM in real-time, and effective planning of PTO throughout the entire year.

The Solution

The managers of Capella University's operations department initially chose NICE Workforce Management because it enabled them to create an efficient, formal, and equitable vacation planning process. For both employees and administrators, vacation bidding was the preferred solution as it also results in an overall time savings and early process engagement.

As Brian Schaeppi, Senior Planning and Reporting Analyst at Capella University, said, "I was convinced that NICE WFM vacation bidding was the key to improving the Admissions team's PTO planning experience."

With NICE WFM supporting vacation bidding, employees were communicating early, considering their PTO needs for the next year, and planning accordingly. Therefore, it was imperative for everyone to get the Admissions team on board. It was a matter of minimizing confusion and frustration, and improving the results for employees and management.

Gaining Admission

The Admission team leadership needed to be persuaded, which was achieved through several focused discussions with Capella University workforce management personnel outlining the following benefits of the WFM-based time-off bidding process.

- Increased job satisfaction and retention by providing employees with a positive PTO planning experience, including greater engagement with: real-time availability options; immediate results; improved transparency; and a fair chance at high-demand vacation days.
- The team's planning system would complement Capella's PTO policy, as well as being scalable for a large functional area.
- It is administratively more efficient and operationally less confusing than an Excel-based solution and randomization, including establishment of seniority as a metric for prioritization.
- Planning for an entire calendar year, not just premium days, ensures a better distribution of PTO and therefore improves forecasting.
- Clearly defined rules and consequences, with the capability to track violations.
- Decreased volume of frivolous waitlist requests.

The discussions took place several months prior to initiation of the bidding for 2018 vacation days, to allow for the considerable change management effort required. Capella University workforce management personnel then met with Admissions department employees and discussed how the change would impact them individually.

The goal was to proactively make sure every representative was aware of the change, knew exactly what to expect, and knew whom to contact with questions or concerns. This key information was followed up with a series of email reminders leading up to the vacation bidding launch. Once vacation bidding launched, WFM personnel made themselves 100% available to fully support the Admissions team throughout the process, doing everything they possibly could to deliver an exceptional experience.

'The Experience was Great.'

Admissions team feedback after experiencing the vacation bidding process for the first time was reflected in an employee's comment, "The experience was great." In fact, 100% of surveyed participants preferred WFM vacation bidding over their previous method.

The comparison with historical data indicated unambiguous objective success, as well.

- 47% of all PTO hours for 2018 were planned after three rounds of bidding (Previously: 17%)
- Waitlisted hours totaled 4% (Previously: 11%)
- 44 total waitlist requests (Previously:133)
- 0.3% rule violation rate (anticipated 1%) due to thorough training and simplicity of the Vacation Bidding feature of WFM
- An estimated time savings of 100 administrative hours annually over previous years.

Going Beyond 100%

Expanding the NICE WFM Vacation Bidding solution to the Admissions staff gave them a more comprehensive, engaging, and rewarding experience – and helped the university reach its goal of 100% adoption.

That accomplishment also delivered the positive business outcomes Capella University is looking for. Taking the "lessons learned" forward, the university intends to continually improve employee engagement and proactive PTO planning.