Q&A with the Experts: Labor Tracking On and Off Campus in a Crisis

Adapting to change with the flexibility of technology

Today's panel features a distinguished group of experts talking about how they are managing through the COVID-19 crisis and perhaps how they might prepare differently for any future crisis situation.

Sometimes we think about workforce management in the easiest terms possible — clocking in and out, tracking time, and producing paychecks. Of course, this is all important, but during a crisis it is not enough.

Our panelists will explore key insights they have learned in response to the pandemic, including:

- How the **flexibility** of an automated system is needed to adapt to daily changes in rules and regulations
- How employee **accountability** is essential now that more staff are working remotely
- How **visibility** into labor data is a key component of managing a remote workforce

Jen Perkins, Higher Education Industry Consultant, UKG (Ultimate Kronos Group)

Jen Perkins has over 20 years of public sector experience. She's served as CIO of the City of Boston and Director at the System Office of Higher Education for the State of Massachusetts. Expertise: Strategic goals, measurements of success, and operational efficiencies.

Kacie Flynn

Executive Director

Humboldt State University Sponsored Programs Foundation

Shuana Thompson

Senior Director of Administrative Information Systems & Payroll

Pace University

Mandy Cole

Assistant Vice President, Operations Strategy

Kansas State University

Ken Thornton

HR System Administrator

Temple University

Q&A: Labor tracking on and off campus in a crisis.

Kacie Flynn, Executive Director, Humboldt State University Sponsored Programs Foundation

Kacie has been with HSU since August 2010. She focuses on building a strong and customer service-focused organization that enables HSU to develop processes and practices that enhance data tracking and management of awards.

Kacie, you have had the unique view of seeing how higher education has managed with and without an automated system.

Will you share some insights?

March was a challenging and interesting time in a lot of ways. One of the reasons we were able to pivot our operations from on campus to remote was that we had gone through the process of automating our payroll about a year ago. We had been on paper timesheets ever since we were established in 1952. Last year, we implemented UKG Ready™ (formerly Kronos Workforce Ready®), so we are now in a paperless timekeeping system.

Paperless timesheets

Having the benefit of a year to implement and figure out our paperless timekeeping system worked to our advantage. We have a level of comfort knowing that we don't have to physically interact with our customers and staff, whereas before, we were routing paper timesheets for signatures and chasing down paper forms. So, of all the things we had to troubleshoot and adjust in response to COVID-19, timesheets weren't one of them.

Adjustment to leave policies

The payroll legislative changes were a big challenge. Emergency leave and other benefits were changing from day to day. Implementing these new policies took us 1-2 days, ensuring our staff could use and understand them. We started tracking emergency paid leave for grants within days too. Our system clearly identifies emergency leave hours versus paid work, and that's something paper timesheets could not do effectively.

Staffing transition and mobile work sites

We were thankful to see that first payroll after March go smoothly. Currently, all employees are either remote or essential personnel on campus. However, with a geographically large campus, we've been managing remote staff for some time. We have employees in the summer doing fieldwork in remote areas and have processes in place to ensure they have access to computers to record time worked.

Next steps

While our timekeeping system is 100% remote, our onboarding/hiring process is paper-based, requiring personnel on-site. If a remote employee can be hired, get paid, and submit their time without having to walk on campus, then I can succeed in this type of environment. Prioritizing this type of technology ensures we can be flexible and adaptive in an emergency situation while making sure our employees are taken care of.

Q&A: Labor tracking on and off campus in a crisis.

Shuana Thompson, Senior Director of Administrative Information Systems & Payroll, Pace University

An exemplary professional with a knack for technology and an unequivocal love for how it transforms everyday activities, Shuana believes in commitment, high standards, and employee engagement. She's worked at the university for the past 17 years.

Shuana, you were at the epicenter for a bit — how did you manage through it?

Any takeaways? Any lessons learned?

We've been working on going paperless for a while, starting in 2002 with Kronos – now UKG. We transitioned from paper timesheets, which prepared us in this crisis to switch from working on campus to working remotely. Higher education is not an environment in which people typically work remotely, so it was an adjustment for folks in terms of their work habits but not from a timesheet perspective.

UKG Kronos Community

The UKG Kronos Community has been an extremely helpful resource. If we couldn't remember how to adjust the system and policies, we could look at articles, submit cases, and post questions — and almost immediately find answers. We learned how other universities use the system to ensure that folks are tracking COVID-19-related sick time versus regular sick time. We didn't miss a beat thanks to the Community.

New pay codes and accruals policy

We did a number of pay code and accrual bucket updates to accommodate all nonessential and essential staff and student workers. Student workers and hourly staff who were willing and able to work remotely could use the automated system normally. For those who were scheduled but unable to work, we set up pay codes to pay them based on their normal schedule. We also added emergency pay codes and policies.

Reporting for potential reimbursement

Because we were at the epicenter of the outbreak in March, it was extremely important for us to be able to track everything that was happening with our staff and student workers within the UKG system. We wanted to track and report on hours worked remotely or on-site, and emergency time taken. This means we are prepared if there is further federal reimbursement in the future.

It's so important for organizations to consider and invest in an automated system to make sure that their business is going to continue to grow.

Shuana Thompson

UKG

Q&A: Labor tracking on and off campus in a crisis.

Mandy Cole, Assistant Vice President, Operations Strategy, Kansas State University

As the founding director of the Administrative Support Center, Mandy has been responsible for the creation and implementation of shared services for accounting and HR at Kansas State. She previously served as an Associate Director in the Budget Office.

You also have a portion of your campus using UKG.

What have you seen? Any comparisons?

Traditionally, we've been very decentralized. Four years ago, we began an initiative to implement shared services across the institution. One of the initial tasks was implementing an electronic time and leave system that could interface with our central ERP system. This supports about one-fifth of the university faculty, staff, and student employees. The rest use either paper timesheets or a homegrown server-based system.

Flexibility to make quick changes

We saw some major differences in the level of flexibility between the automated part of campus (our group) and the paper-based group. It was quickly apparent that the heavy use of paper timesheets made for a difficult transition into the remote work world. Our staff were ready for remote work on day one. But having to rapidly make changes to time and leave policies was something the paper-based group was not prepared to do.

New discoveries

We discovered how inefficient our time and leave processes were. Paper time and leave policies were identified as one of the least efficient processes on campus, which was more evident during this time of crisis. Manually keying in data to the ERP was both inefficient and risked manual errors. The entire campus is now discussing the need for efficient and accurate time and leave, especially as we continue to work remotely.

Audit trail

We wanted to track the time spent on COVID-19-related work or earnings, plus add leave codes related to the Families First Act. With UKG, we did so within a day. We now have a single point of reference to show the hours that were worked and approved, increasing accuracy. The system is also recording overtime that has always been worked but has never been captured, which is critical and better prepares us for future audits.

Results

Our goal was to find efficiencies and improve accuracy, and we've certainly seen evidence of both. We are saving about two and a half full-time employees since using UKG, so we were able to add departments to our shared service center without additional staffing. We can also take on new responsibilities more easily due to our capacity. Plus, accurately tracking overtime ensures we're paying people fairly and in compliance.

UKG

Q&A: Labor tracking on and off campus in a crisis.

Ken Thornton, HR System Administrator, Temple University

Ken's experience in HR systems spans all industries. Drawing on this experience, Ken has developed innovative solutions to challenges faced by Temple University's Human Resources Department.

You have a medical group under your purview and have overseen other changes.

Can you share some of your thoughts and takeaways from your experience?

As COVID-19 made its way into our country, we saw the closure of our university. We then had to look at how we could still pay our employees, specifically the employees whose jobs require them to be on-site. We've leveraged the power of our UKG system to track time worked, and update leave, vacation, comp, and pay rules. I'm excited that I can share with you all how easy it was for us to implement these changes.

COVID-19-related pay codes

We created a new pay code which we applied to employees' schedules when they couldn't do their job on-site as required. As things changed each day, we made sure the system tracked hours worked that should be tied to this COVID-19-related pay code versus regular time, ensuring we didn't inadvertently over- or underpay employees. Our clinical staff were the first to use this process, and it's worked seamlessly for them.

Leave and vacation policy changes

Other policies that we changed on the fly were our leave and vacation accruals. Our vacation policy was "use it or lose it." We decided to take a reasonable approach to this restrictive policy by changing it so staff can carry over up to half of their accrued vacation for the fiscal year, and we track time taken from this vacation accrual bucket. Using the accrual cascade feature ensured available balances were expended in order.

New comp time policy

Using the accruals engine, we implemented a new comp time policy. As a benefit and thank-you to our essential on-site employees, for every hour worked, half of that time goes into a comp time earned bucket, with a maximum of two weeks. This is time those employees can use well into the next fiscal year. With a number of our workforce working in a very challenging and stressful environment, we found that UKG has the tools available to help us be more fluid and accommodating with these new policies. We also have confidence that all new policies are implemented universally and consistently across the campus.

UKG

Connect with us online @UKG.com/highered