

Going the Distance: How the Mile High City Simplified HR

SEP 5, 2017 BY WORKDAY STAFF WRITERS ON HUMAN RESOURCES

Governmental organizations combine all the complexity of a traditional business with the need to serve the public, their employees, and departments ranging from public safety to utilities to planning. Finding a way to deliver simple, effective HR in this environment can be a challenge. But after streamlining workflows and sending heavily customized technology systems packing, the City and County of Denver is on its way to becoming a more efficient metropolis. After going live on [Workday Human Capital Management](#) (HCM) in January, Denver's employees are spending more time serving a growing population while creating better working relationships with one another.

Karen Niparko, executive director of HR, and Chris Longshore, director of HR technology and innovation for the City and County of Denver, shared with us the challenges they've faced as a government entity serving a complex network of independent departments, as well as the benefits they've seen from operating with greater stability and automation.

What originally inspired Denver to overhaul its HR systems?



Karen Niparko

Niparko: We were working on a very old version of legacy software. Because of the intricacies and policies of being a government entity, we invested heavily in customization, so much so that we could not sustain the system or afford to implement new releases. Our HR system became unsupportable. It reached the point where the city was operating on so many different, outdated systems that we were forced to take a step back and reevaluate. We had two options: Invest considerably on an upgrade just to keep things running, or explore other HR applications.

“We went from being a city with limited user capabilities outside of the HR department to providing employees with a much greater level of self-service.”
—Karen Niparko, executive director of HR at City and County of Denver

How does the government sector, and HR in government specifically, differ from other industries?



Chris Longshore

Longshore: There are a lot of HR checks and balances that are built into the government sector. There are rules that specify the employee relationship with the city, how people are promoted, how they're hired, how they're paid, their leave management, and so on. So we must have an HR system that can help us comply with these rules.

Government organizations also differ from the private sector in the sheer number of different types of organizations they work with. We support up to 50 different business units and their unique needs. They all do things quite differently and have different requirements. Just within the public safety sector, the way we recruit and hire varies for the police department, fire department, sheriff, and so on. This presents us, and any ERP system, with a big challenge.

How has Workday HCM helped alleviate some of these challenges?

Longshore: We've been able to improve and streamline some of our highly complex processes. One example is with union [payroll](#). Because of the way the collective bargaining agreement was set up, we had to customize our old legacy software to create an advancement process that was 50 steps long just to pay our employees. We have employees that have a normal salary progression, but then many that also get longevity pay, so we ended up having to create a pay step for each year of service in our legacy system. Workday handles this scenario simply, right out of the box. It may not seem that complicated, but it was tricky, and not the way you would normally use a system.

Niparko: We went from being a city with limited user capabilities outside of the HR department to providing employees and managers with a much greater level of self-service. For example, the ad hoc reports that our internal clients asked for to help them manage their people—they were just impossible to get previously. That made people think of HR as a roadblock rather than as a facilitator. And, this led to us not being able to consult with our clients to help them achieve their business goals as much as we would have liked. I'm happy to say that we've seen a huge cultural and technological shift in terms of manager-employee relationships since streamlining these processes with Workday.

Denver is one of the [fastest growing cities](#) in the U.S. What challenges has your HR department experienced as a result of this growth?

Niparko: Denver has a highly competitive job market. Unemployment is at 2.3 percent, companies are moving in, and over a thousand people a month are moving here. It's a hotbed of economic activity, which means ongoing workforce changes and a lot of opportunities.

The challenge has been making sure that we have the tools we need so our HR staff is helping our clients, as opposed to pushing paper and running reports. As the city grows, the need for new top-notch city employees grows as well, and recruiting is an area that requires a tremendous amount of attention. But, it's an area where we haven't been able to focus on in the past. [Workday Recruiting](#) will provide our recruiting staff with the increased capability needed in this competitive job market so that we can focus on the candidate experience and fill these open positions quickly and efficiently.

What advice would you give to other government institutions considering a shift to a cloud-based HR system?

Longshore: As you go through a deployment like this, try to make all business processes as simple as possible. Cut out extraneous steps. As you look at each part of an approval process, ask yourself what value a certain step has in the bigger picture. We tried to do that, but still found that we had a lot of overly burdensome business processes that weren't adding value. Six months later we're starting to reevaluate some of these business processes and are making some modifications. Luckily, Workday makes it easy to adjust as these needs change.

Niparko: Don't be afraid of change. Take a critical look at the way you've been doing things—the processes, transactions, etc.—and take this opportunity to improve them. Government organizations are built on stability and moving forward methodically and purposefully. We're not built upon a culture of constant change like you would find in the private sector. However, if you don't take that critical look and challenge the status quo, you won't maximize the benefits that applications like Workday can provide.

Interested in learning how to future-proof your government agency? Watch the [webinar replay](#) with Workday and the City and County of Denver to gain practical advice and strategies on how to move administrative processes to the cloud or visit www.workday.com.