

Federation University transforms HCM systems to enable a unified platform

Legacy people platforms were unified and modernized, creating a scalable foundation for the future of staff and student management.



At a glance

Industry
Education

Location
Australia

Products and services
Workday

Challenge

Deliver HR platform transformation for multicampus university as the foundation for ongoing transformation of staff and student engagement systems.

Success Highlights

- 12-month deployment for HCM full platform
- Three additional Workday module deployments within 18 months of go-live
- Moved from annual employee engagement survey cadence to quarterly with the rollout of Workday Peakon Employee Voice

The challenge



Federation University is Australia's leading regional university, spanning multiple campuses across Victoria, as well as extensive Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and online offerings. The university has built a strong reputation for improving education equity, fostering local and global partnerships and building connections to industry while supporting a diverse student population. Its strategy aims to build a strong and sustainable institution that equips graduates for success and drives economic and social growth across regional Australia.

However, this ambition has been constrained by a complex, fragmented administrative environment and disparate legacy systems. Finance, HR and payroll processes relied heavily on manual workarounds, offline data sources, point solutions and outdated infrastructure. These challenges presented operational risk and limited the university's agility at a time when the higher education sector faces increasing financial, regulatory and competitive pressures. Federation wanted a new platform that would become the foundation for a better experience for people administration to move into the future with confidence.

Our approach

From the project's inception, Federation and Cognizant teams were clear that the Workday program would serve not only as a technology uplift but as a strategic enabler of Federation's long-term vision. Instead of focusing solely on system replacement, the teams aligned around a partnership model that balanced immediate operational needs with the university's broader goals of strengthening insights, simplifying process and supporting a future-ready workforce.

Through a structured governance model, the program established clear scope discipline, ensuring alignment to design principles that emphasized standardization, simplification and minimal customization. With these foundations in place, Cognizant deployed Workday Human Capital Management (HCM) as the anchor for the university's unified administration platform.

Championing the new platform:

Confirming and embedding the program's guiding principles early, and reinforcing them consistently throughout delivery, became a powerful enabler of Federation University's success. In support of these principles, Cognizant built a process for the team to capture enhancements that were not critical for initial go-live. This helped to maintain focus on the most important problems for day one while being supportive of improvement and expansion requests from the Federation project team and end-user base.



To build and maintain buy-in from staff, internal champions helped to drive internal preparation for change while supporting the adoption of best practice processes that would maximize the university's value from the Workday platform. Internal champions also reinforced them within faculties and business units, helping staff understand the rationale behind standardization, the value of minimal customization and the importance of aligning to best practice Workday processes. This built trust and enabled smoother adoption across diverse staff groups. Through this program-wide alignment, our teams ensured that HCM set a stable foundation for future phases in the HCM and platform space, and for Workday Finance.

“Bringing together Workday and Cognizant, we work in a partnership to really challenge the way we were running the organization and look at new ways to streamline the way we are operating.”

—Paul Oppenheimer, Chief Operating Officer, Federation University Australia

Business outcomes

University downtime is limited, making on-time delivery critical for a smooth platform transition. By carefully focusing on the initial project scope, Cognizant and Federation University worked together to deliver the university's Workday transformation on time and on budget. Immediate follow-on enhancements were rapidly deployed within four months of go-live.

By building the strategic partnership around shared purpose, and not only technical skills, Cognizant and Federation continue to look toward more ways they can work together to support the university's mission of bringing industry together with students to train future-ready graduates.

Strong adoption

With a strong commitment from Federation University leadership to the Workday platform, the team could move quickly to implementing the Workday People Experience (PEX) support solution. This granted users a robust support system during onboarding and beyond. As a result, Federation was able to immediately track user activity trends and achieve impressive adoption rates for the new platform.

Workday Learning and Workday Peakon Employee Voice have also seen rapid and sustained adoption, driving employee engagement and an enhanced professional development and compliance framework for the university. With the rollout of Workday Peakon, the university was able to move from annual to quarterly survey cadences, enabling more agile responses based on more accurate insights.

Post-go-live optimization

In the two years following the successful Workday HCM and Workday Payroll go-live, Federation University has continued to mature and extend its digital ecosystem through a structured program of targeted enhancements. The university prioritized critical compliance needs first, including significant uplift to support the new TAFE Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA). This initiative required detailed configuration, testing and deployment work to ensure entitlements, rules and payroll dependencies were accurately reflected within Workday, enabling accurate administration of pay.

Federation has further advanced its employee engagement capability by deploying Workday Peakon Employee Voice, enabling leaders to capture real-time sentiment, track engagement trends and adopt more data-driven cultural interventions. Workday Peakon quickly reduced administrative effort required to launch surveys, and its framework enabled Federation to enhance response relevancy by increasing survey cadence to quarterly and embed best-practice listening rhythms across leadership, HR and managers to drive continuous improvement.



Federation has also trusted Cognizant to support the expansion of its learning ecosystem through the implementation of Workday Extended Enterprise Learning and Workday Cloud Connect for LinkedIn Learning, bringing the LinkedIn Learning's extensive course library directly into Workday. This provided a unified learner experience, simplifying discovery and reporting, and strengthening the university's professional development and compliance frameworks.

As the university moves toward its broader transformation roadmap, it must prepare the technology environment for the next major phase: Workday Financials. To ensure that the Financials program launches on a secure, scalable and future-ready foundation, the university is prioritizing a major infrastructure uplift by migrating Workday integrations and workloads to AWS public cloud with advisory support from Cognizant. This sequencing is intentional and will allow the university to improve performance and resilience and to position itself to fully leverage analytics and integration capabilities required for Workday Financials and future Workday Student adoption.

12-month

deployment for HCM full platform

3 additional Workday modules

within 18 months of go-live

Quarterly

employee engagement survey cadence

About Federation University

Federation University has delivered education services in regional Victoria for over 150 years and now reaches students across Australia. With campuses in Ballarat, Gippsland, Berwick and Wimmera, as well as online offerings, Federation offers university, TAFE, VCAL and VET programs that have helped over 123,000 graduates succeed. Learn more at <https://www.federation.edu.au/>

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