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Great Lakes Cheese transforms the employee experience

Enterprise-wide initiative driven by HR and built on SAP SuccessFactors

Great Lakes Cheese (GLC) serves the nation's retailers and food-service operations as a premier manufacturer and packer of natural and process bulk, shredded, and sliced cheeses. Utilizing eight state-of-the-art plants, GLC products are distributed coast to coast.

Founded by the Epprecht family in 1958 and still a family and employee-owned business, GLC has experienced annual growth between five and eight percent since it opened. With more than 3,000 employees and multiple plants in various locations, it was time to evaluate its human-resources processes and scale them to meet the company's growth trajectory.

Moving away from paper

Even with the addition of employees and plants, many HR processes had remained paper based. New hires were filling out a stack of applications for every benefit and the paperwork would often sit in files, awaiting HR intervention.

"It was not a great employee experience and, in some cases, people signed up for benefits when they started but they may not see that piece of paper again for 20 years," says Mara Kamat, Vice President, HR, Great Lakes Cheese. "There was really no existing HR information system and we were still building our HR organization. We knew we needed a better HR system and an integrated experience for employees."

GLC is unusual because employees own 20 percent of the company through the Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). That means when they walk in the door the employees are empowered to make decisions and provide a level of engagement and accountability.

Launching a new employee experience

GLC chose SAP SuccessFactors and Benefitfocus to provide the HRIS backbone that would transform the entire HR experience. It partnered with Capgemini as the systems integrator. Building a fully integrated system for all the major HR processes was a significant change-management initiative.

"The goal was to have employees be a part of the system from the day they start until the day they retire, and for every transaction in between," says Kamat. "We really started talking to employees about this change eight months before it happened. Leaders were part of those discussions and it was presented as a business transformation, so it was not seen as just HR-driven."

GLC integrated the Benefitfocus benefits package with the SAP SuccessFactors Employee Central and Payroll modules. "Super users," cross-functional and cross-level team members, were identified to support employee training across the company. These change-champions ranged from hourly employees all the way up to the plant managers at the sites.

> *"We had a great team, with people from both Capgemini and Great Lakes Cheese, that was very dedicated and worked well together. That enabled us to stay on time in the 18-month delivery window and stay on budget."*
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> **Mara Kamat**
> VP, Human Resources
> Great Lakes Cheese

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"The payroll was the big moment when all employees first interfaced with SuccessFactors, because we needed to make sure everyone received their paychecks on time. We have a weekly payroll system which is complicated and gave us a really short window of time to work in. It was important it went smoothly."

Driving towards transformation

The multi-faceted change-management and user-engagement approach made sure employees had ample advance notice and trial interactions before the system went live. The goal was a seamless transition and a better experience, and the team at GLC, Capgemini, and SAP delivered.

"The self-service option has been transformative for the company and employees," says Kamat. "For example, we made the decision to integrate mobile. Not all of our employees use computers every day, but many people are using their phones to get online. Now, employees feel like they have ownership of their data. They can see their benefits, make changes, and validate their addresses and personal information, rather than having to make requests to HR."

From the day they start, employees now have a one-stop shop for all functions related to their benefits, wellness, and communication. They can access information on various websites without having to enter multiple passwords.

GLC has also integrated LinkedIn Learning, safety skills courses, and custom courses for learning and development, rather than using the old method of flipping through slides or listening to a presentation. The company is also implementing gamification to promote learning.

The new HRIS is empowering the business with data and information. Leaders can look at their department and make data-driven decisions. It also means GLC can review benefits and ensure they comply with government standards.

"We are able to see very clear reporting on our employees, payroll, diversity, succession planning, retention, hiring, and compensation," says Kamat. "It means we can model out what we expect the year will look like and plan. Our tools before could not give us this kind of information."

Regarding the choice of a system-integration partner, Kamat said, "After interviewing multiple options, we chose to work with Capgemini because they were collaborative, organized, and detail-oriented. They all had the very strong technical expertise that we needed to be effective and successful across the project."

About Capgemini

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