



Interview with Erik Smetana,

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The UM system has used DataOnDemand and homegrown tools to plan retirement programs, formulate compensation structures, and keep academic leaders informed of progress at each campus and across the system, transforming HR into a data-driven entity informing decisions at the strategic level.

Tell us a little about the human resources organization at UM System.

HR's role at the university system is multi-faceted — we facilitate, support and manage enterprise-wide HR initiatives, support the myriad needs of the HR offices at our four campuses and provide day-to-day HR services and consultation to the university system staff.

Our unique mix of customers — from faculty and staff to retirees and students — have unique needs from and interactions with HR, so we're always working to provide the best customer service to all of these different groups so that we can meet their needs.

As we talk about what kind of HR organization we are and what we want to be, we have to be cognizant of competing needs within the university. There is a mix of strategic and operational demands, and there is a need to understand how those demands interact with our employment value proposition as well as the unique career value propositions of our faculty and staff. And that all circles back ultimately to the student experience as well as our impact on the community and external stakeholders.

In short, we work to support our faculty, staff and retirees so they can best support and educate our students through a mix of shared services, campus-specific services and collaborative programs.

What are HR's strategic goals?

In terms of a broad view, our goals are to continue to foster and support the academic mission of the university, which underpins everything. In HR, we've done a lot of great and interesting things over the last three to five years. We've made significant changes in terms of how we do work, what that work looks like and what our focus is.

We've moved into looking at process and effectiveness, efficiency and operational excellence. We're in the midst of evaluating our ERP technology and how we use it. In a nutshell, we're transforming what we think about when we conceptualize HR, moving its role from transactional to tactical, moving into the operational and becoming more strategic, becoming more impactful by moving into areas such as workforce planning, and understanding where we can create better collaborations with the campuses and where we can shore up efficiency for our organization.



How do you use data to inform your decisions?

We use data in a variety of ways from a total rewards perspective, from plan utilization to plan cost to actuarial data around valuation of our retirement programs. We use data to address compensation questions and manage our compensation structure. We use data to inform our academic leaders — a key example being our Faculty Salary Comparator Tool. It allows our leaders insight into where the market is for our tenured/tenure-track faculty by discipline relative to their comparators campus by campus.

We use data to talk about the work we're doing across campuses and how we are doing it from a transaction perspective. Recently, our board approved some significant changes in our retirement medical plan. We worked in partnership with finance and others to make sure that we had the right information and the necessary data to inform the decision process.

Over the past few years, as we have begun placing greater emphasis on making highly informed decisions, we have become a very data-driven organization.

Have you encountered any resistance to the use of data to drive decisions or any challenges to the use of the data?

HR, regardless of the organization, often has a reputation for not being "numbers people." Over the last several years, we've made huge strides towards data-driven decision making. Our campuses have been hungry for data for several years. Starting in the spring of 2014, the system HR office began having conversations with leaders, campus HR offices and others. Over the course of several months, we learned a lot about the data needs and wants of our internal customers. Later that year we launched a new team — People Data and Analytics (utilizing existing staff and resources) — to tackle HR data opportunities.

That team has been fortunate to closely partner with our division of finance, and jointly we developed a "data roundtable." Although it was initially intended to be an informal group of data leaders at the different functions of the university system office, the group moved quickly to a recognized committee.

In terms of the challenges or resistance to the use of data to inform decision making, there are always going to be barriers any time you try something new. At the end of the day, though, strong communication and collaboration are key to working through those barriers.

How do you use CUPA-HR data from our salary or benefits surveys?

CUPA-HR data is the foundational data set that we use when we talk about compensation at the university. On the staff side, it informs everything from market studies to managing our range infrastructure to equity reviews to hiring decisions. On the faculty side, it allows us to better support compensation decisions. Whether we want to compare our AAU campus to its peers or one of our two Urban-21 campuses, we are able to do so with the help of DataOnDemand. With the data, we are able to relate what the lay of the land looks like if we want to be competitive in the job market. DataOnDemand is an invaluable tool that supports the work we do directly in compensation and provides data that influences decisions across the entire HR spectrum.