

# Streamlining HR Transactions through Enhanced Electronic Forms

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## **Abstract**

*After implementing a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system in June 2004, initial implementation of HR transactions required hundreds of front line staff to navigate complex screens and learn data relationships between positions, compensation, FTE status, benefits, and personal data. In our new system, human resource transactions were extremely cumbersome, slow, and prone to significant errors. These problems lead us to create and launch a better, more efficient, and friendlier way to handle all HR transactions. In February 2006, we implemented Electronic Personnel Action Forms (ePAF), a streamlined approach to entering and processing HR transactions through enhanced electronic forms.*

## **Introduction of the Organization**

The University of Florida is a public, land-grant research university with the main campus located in Gainesville, Florida. It is a member of the Association of American Universities and awards bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, specialist's degrees, degrees on the doctorate level, and professional degrees in sixteen colleges. The colleges and schools at the University of Florida are the following: College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, College of Design, Construction and Planning, College of Fine Arts, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, College of Business Administration, College of Dentistry, College of Education, College of Engineering, College of Public Health and Health Professions, College of Journalism and Communications, College of Law, College of Medicine, College of Nursing, College of Pharmacy, College of Health and Human Performance, College of Veterinary Medicine, School of Accounting, School of Architecture, School of Building Construction, School of Natural Resources and Environment, School of Forest Resources and Conservation, School of Music, School of Art and Art History, School of Theatre and Dance, and the Graduate School.

With over 22,000 employees in 69 counties in the State of Florida, all colleges, schools and administrative areas have benefited from streamlining the HR transaction process through enhanced electronic forms.

## **Statement (restatement) of the Problem/Initiative**

In June 2004, the University of Florida replaced the university's business computer systems with new web-based, integrated systems that provide real-time information and improve university business processes—including a new Human Resources Management System. The decision was to decentralize the data entry of HR transactions--faculty, staff, student assistants, fellows, and temporary employees--to the departmental administrators. Initial implementation required hundreds of front line staff to navigate complex screens and to learn data relationships between positions, compensation, FTE status, benefits, and personal data. In our new system, human resource transactions were extremely cumbersome, slow, and prone to significant errors.

Although data entry was decentralized, review and approval of personnel actions still required two additional levels of approval—the appropriate dean, director, or vice-president's office and the appropriate central Human Resources (HR) Office. A workflow system was designed to notify the appropriate approval level that actions were pending approval and coding was added that would keep the action in pending status until approved by central HR.

While this solution allowed for decentralized data entry while preserving central review, it was extremely cumbersome and problematic. Some of the problems identified were:

- A data entry error rate of 67% due to the complex nature of the work which resulted in poor data integrity.
- Poor data integrity caused payroll errors, lengthy payroll closings, and missed paychecks.
- Inaccurate reporting due to invalid data active in payroll system.
- A workflow process that was bulky and inflexible.
- Payroll and benefit errors.
- No data entry edits which allowed inaccurate data to be entered.
- Extensive training required.
- Long turn-around times—often up to two weeks from origination to execution.
- Excessive time spent entering data which often resulted in timeout of the system and data being lost.
- End user dissatisfaction and disillusion with process.
- Failure to maximize readily available technology.

## Design

In response to the UF campus's need for a more streamlined approach and improved data integrity related to HR transactions, Human Resource Services and the Information Technology team, called UF Bridges, implemented Electronic Personnel Action Forms (ePAF).

The project design chronology was as follows:

- Proof of Concept
- Initial Design
- Acceptance Testing
- Pilot
- Campus Communication
- Training
- Implementation of ePAF

### Proof of Concept

To satisfy proof of concept without financial liability, we created a paper personal action form that would mimic an electronic version and launched a pilot program with the Department of Chemistry, the largest department in the College of Liberal Arts. The paper personnel action form minimized the amount of work for departmental administrators by requesting only basic information such as personal data, job information, and salary. The complex logic was then

determined and entered by the central HR offices. There were some immediate results—a reduction in data entry errors of 67.5% to 11.25%, a significantly improved turn-around time, reduced data entry time for departmental administrators, little training needed for use, and no payroll errors for the pilot group. The disadvantage was what we had anticipated--this approach shifted the burden of the workload to the central HR offices. This pilot supported that a simplified form for departmental administrators resulted in significant improvement in data integrity, turn-around time, training, and overall satisfaction when entering HR transactions.

An enhanced electronic form would alleviate the burden that had shifted to the central HR offices by automating the complex logic and reducing the data entry time needed to navigate through multiple screens when entering HR transactions into HRMS. We determined the advantages to enhanced electronic forms were:

- Easy and intuitive data entry for end users.
- Elimination of end users entering data directly into HRMS prior to approval by central offices, therefore increasing data integrity, reducing error rates, and decreasing the payroll closing time.
- Data edits performed at form entry.

- Easier approval process by core offices which would eliminate any data entry on their part. Focus would be spent on evaluating HR transactions instead of processing data.
- Reduction of data entry completed by end user by approximately 75% to 90%, depending on type of action being completed.
- Improved cycle time for HR transactions.
- Reduction in training requirements of end users.
- Full integration with our HRMS. ePAF would be developed and managed within our current ERP system.

### Initial Design

In order to be a success, campus administrative involvement was very important to this project. The project team consisted of various levels of involvement, including a steering committee, project management team, core functional team, and supporting functional team. The supporting functional team consisted of at least one representative from each of the colleges across campus.

We hired one technical and one functional consultant for 6 weeks to launch this project. There was one full-time technical UF employee dedicated to the project for 10 weeks and one full time functional employee dedicated to the

project for approximately one year. *Please see attachment titled "ePAF Staffing Guide".*

During the design phase, we determined the following electronic forms would meet the University's needs:

- **HIRE**-Use this form to hire a new employee into your department or to add an additional job for an employee that already works in your department.
- **Edit Existing Job**-Use this form to edit the job of an employee currently working in your department.
- **Change Employment Status**-Use this form to submit a termination, retirement, leave of absence or return from leave.
- **Submit Leave Cash-Out**-Use this form to submit leave cash-out information on an employee.
- **Add Additional Pay**-Use this form to add an additional pay for an employee currently working in your department.

### Acceptance Testing

Departmental administrators from each college were involved in acceptance testing for each form. This is an important step that required significant time. We found this testing a vital part of successful implementation. Additionally, it created buy-in and commitment to the success of ePAF by involved departmental administrators.

## Pilot

We recruited the Department of Chemistry to pilot ePAF just as they had piloted the paper process. This allowed us to test the overall process in a live instance to a controlled group. This proved valuable as we were able to make last minute changes and corrections based on their feedback prior to implementation to the rest of campus.

## **Implementation**

We adopted a very aggressive timeframe. Once our need was quantified and the project plan in place, we implemented to our first end users within 10 weeks. *See attachments titled "ePAF Timeline" and "ePAF Tasks" for detailed information on implementation timeline and tasks.*

The strategic communication plan was a vital part to the success of ePAF. Communication with end users began during the initial paper pilot in the HR Forum—a monthly informational session for departmental HR administrators on HR and administrative topics. Once ePAF was in the design phase, the communication plan included demonstrations to departmental administrators, deans, directors, and vice presidents; updates during monthly HR Forums, a designated ePAF website which included web demonstrations, an overview of new electronic forms, training schedules, security roles, and frequently asked questions; articles in the InfoGator—a monthly HR publication for faculty and

staff; and electronic memos from the Vice President of Human Resources to selected administrators.

The ePAF training plan was another key part of our successful implementation. Development of the ePAF training program was designed as the project progressed. In addition to classroom training, instructional guides were created and an on-line web tutorial was made available to campus. UF was able to link ePAF security to training so access to ePAF was limited to those who had attended training. This gave us the opportunity to train employees on ePAF, and reinforce HR policies and procedures at the same time.

Another important aspect of our implementation was a phased roll-out. We held approximately seven training sessions per week for seven weeks and designated departments to certain sessions. We then granted security to ePAF to the attendees once training was completed. This allowed for a phased roll-out, while allowing users to begin use of ePAF immediately.

The biggest pitfall we encountered was the ambitious timeline we set for ourselves. Because we were having the framework installed, we knew we could develop the form types quickly. The problem we encountered with the timeline was trying to design ePAF to include our most complex personnel issues.

Another problem we experienced was with testing. Although we invited users from every area of campus to test each form, we still needed more time for

acceptance testing. The best approach would have been a dual-entry system for a period of time to ensure that all personnel actions were tested. While we felt the testing was comprehensive, we still encountered problems after go-live that could have been addressed with more extensive testing.

## **Benefits**

The benefits enjoyed from ePAF are unprecedented. The overall satisfaction of end users has increased dramatically. The time spent entering HR transactions by departmental administrators has been reduced by 75-80%. This has increased resources available by allowing departmental administrators to perform other duties for the University. Other benefits of ePAF include:

- The electronic Personnel Action Forms that replaced the current practices are shorter--generally only one to three pages compared to the previous twelve.
- Step-based navigation unfolds naturally to collect only pertinent data.
- ePAF form types are intuitive. As fields are entered, information is limited within the data entry fields to only applicable choices--thus, reducing the possibility of errors and making the administrator's job much easier.
- ePAF automatically moves through the approval process to the next level of approver.

- From origination to execution, the ePAF has significantly reduced cycle time. It is not uncommon to see ePAF approved and executed in less than 24 hours.
- Central HR offices can spend time reviewing the validity of human resources transactions instead of HRMS logic and codes.
- ePAF simplified the data entry procedures for HR transactions. Departments can now hire, edit existing jobs, change employment status, submit leave cash-outs, and enter additional pay with more accuracy and efficiency. Multiple transactions can be processed with one ePAF form.
- Instant access to form status, history, and pending approvals.
- The time needed for training was significantly reduced from eleven hours to only three hours. In addition, the need for job aides to complete personnel transactions has been eliminated. Previously, a departmental administrator needed a 41 page guide to employment actions, a hiring matrix, a time and labor matrix, and numerous instructional guides just to complete a personnel action.
- Email notification for next approver and confirmation of form submissions, approval and executions. E-mails contain direct links to perform tasks or view data.

- Once approved by central HR, it flows automatically into our HRMS and uses coding to enter data previously required to be entered by the departmental administrator.
- Ability to require training to ePAF security access. This allowed us to ensure users were trained in ePAF and HR policies and procedures.
- Dramatic improvement in data integrity.
- Significant reduction in payroll errors caused by inaccurate data entry.
- Less than 5% error rate made by departmental administrators.

Sample user comments:

“Having been here for the launch of HRMS and all the training and matrices that went along with it, ePAF is a dream come true.”

“ePAF has made HR transactions incredibly easy, especially when hiring brand new employees.”

“ePAF is great! It reduced my workload significantly!”

“What a difference ePAF makes!”

## **Retrospect**

In retrospect, a longer time line would have allowed for a stronger design and less redesign during acceptance testing and the pilot implementation. Due to our timeline, position actions, including FTE changes and reclassifications, were outside of the scope. Because position actions are so closely tied to job actions, it would have been beneficial to launch these together. We are planning on launching a position ePAF in the future.

The implementation of ePAF has significantly improved the business processes related to HR transactions. ePAF is a friendlier, more efficient, and cost effective system. In fact, our success with ePAF is currently being adopted by three other major universities in the United States and Canada and being considered by several others.