



# Employee Retention

## People over Processes is Key to Shared Services' Success

It's all about the People. Processes can be trained. Process improvement can be strategized. It's easy to train people to do value mapping – but it's difficult to train someone to deliver a vision and to be responsive to people. That takes a lot more time.

"I've learned over the years that the more time I spent with the people the more successful we become," says **Pam Gabel**, Executive Director, Shared Services Center, **University of Michigan** in this exclusive interview. Pam will again join the [Shared Services in Higher Education Event](#) this **April 18-20 in San Diego**.

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By Hannah Hager

**SSHE: How do the shared services implementation obstacles differ between the public and private sectors?**

**Pam Gabel:** In the public sector the biggest obstacle is getting buy-in across the unit. It's much more consensual in how you get approval. In the corporate sector, it's usually a small group of executives who know the business plan, approve it and then everyone moves forward.

In higher-ed, as in the public sector, there's a bigger group of people. There are a lot more stakeholders – and a lot more people who have to say yes. The interesting part is, even when they say yes, they have to keep saying yes, in order to keep moving the process forward. The biggest challenge is to have a method to presenting what you're trying to do in a way that can be presented to lots of groups, lots of times, and meet their specific questions each time.

### **What role does shared services play in the higher-ed sector today and where foresee it to be in the near future?**

**Pam Gabel:** I think shared services is still a new phenomenon within higher ed. It started around the time of the recent recession and I think people are looking at it as a financial way of getting out from under large costs, which is exactly how it started in the corporate world, too.

But, if you go down that path, it really doesn't work out too well. Shared services' place is really about taking the administrative part of the university – the business part – and housing it in a way that is efficient and effective. This results in cost savings, but it's really focused on increased compliance and proactive thinking. You are really trying to create a way for the amount of responsibility on the academic side is removed so they can do what they do.

The faculty members, especially the researchers, want to do research. They don't want to sit there and approve an invoice or worry about filling out the proper paperwork. It's not that they're not interested, they are, but they don't want to have to worry about those details. So, the place for shared services is to find those pieces and make it so efficient and effective that it happens without the faculty member having to become a semi-expert in how to do tasks such as accounts payable.

### **Looking back, is there anything you'd do differently throughout your shared services journey?**

**Pam Gabel:** I would have started the university sooner. I think it's very important for the person who is going to be the leader set that direction and that vision early on, because it has to be part of that story you're telling. To change the story midstream is very, very difficult. That's why you've got to take ownership.

Over the course of my career, the one main thing I've learned is that you can change a process anytime and there are really good tools for you to use to do so. That's not the hard part. The hard part is the people. How do you take people who have not worked in a shared service environment and get them to understand the concept and ultimately be productive?

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You've got to help your customer understand that even though I'm simplifying a process, I still need to be responsive to your needs. Therefore, I need to know what your needs are. So, I spend most of my time dealing with the people side. I can hire someone to handle the process side – to train people, to do value mapping – but it's very, very difficult for me to train someone to deliver the vision and to be responsive to people. That takes a lot more time. I've learned over the years that the more time I spent with the people the more successful we become.

### **What are the next steps in your journey?**

**Pam Gabel:** The next step for me at the shared services at Michigan, is to take the same next step that corporate America did and say, "how can I go past the transactional part and truly start to pick up the value-add in pieces?" This requires us to look deeper into the organization to ensure that we're sharing resources at a higher level.

For example, why are we doing financial analysis in every single department? Financial analysis is something that could be done in a shared-type environment. Think of what we could learn if we had people doing analysis across multiple units and they can start to see trends one way or another. They can see the differences that the smaller units or the larger units are having and they could feed off of each other and learn together and then collaborate better. Shared services is all about collaboration. Research is all about collaboration. The medical side of the university is all about collaboration, so we need to be a part of the collaborative effort to move forward.

### **Pam's Main Takeaways from the Shared Services' event – Lessons on Employee Retention**

**Pam Gabel:** My main takeaway from the event is teaching leadership that employee retention is not a plan; it's an individual effort. Leadership needs to be available, visible, and truly empathetic to their staff. You have to spend time with them - it can't be something that you sort of just check off a list - you need to spend real time. You need to be out on the floor talking to people. You need to say hi to them; it's helpful if you know their name.

People want to be known for who they are, and the more that you can put your time and effort into focusing on how you can grow your people, then the more successful you're going to be because the more you invest in them the more they're going to give back to you.

What do you want from them? You want to receive that groundbreaking process improvement idea, that cultural experience that changes you from being a call center, to a contact center, to ultimately a service center.

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