



Enterprise’s global transformation begins with HR

General Mills goes “truly global” with new employee service experience

General Mills, Inc., a leading global consumer packaged goods company headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was 150 years old when its leadership decided to start an enterprise-wide global transformation.

General Mills’ human resources department was one of the first teams within the corporation to tackle this monumental project. “The HR initiative was one of several that General Mills started with and it was at the forefront of what transformation looks like at General Mills,” says Lynsey Wherry, Vice President of Talent Acquisition and HR Strategy.

Lynsey led the three-year HR transformation project at General Mills, which has 38,000+ employees worldwide and boasts numerous world-famous brands, including Cheerios, Betty Crocker, Pillsbury, Haagen-Dazs, Progresso, and Yoplait, sold in more than 100 countries. “My role was to lead the various teams through our transformation journey. That included coming up with our strategy, our overall plan, as well as our vision map and execution plan for each work team,” says Lynsey.

Lynn Plaschko, a 25-year veteran of General Mills and Director of HR Operations, was also a key contributor. She recalls, “This was our first truly global initiative that impacted every single employee.”

The background

The leaders at General Mills wanted a more agile company. They needed more visibility into the HR inquiries General Mills global workforce were making so that they could be better informed and make decisions faster. “You have to know who your people are because people are such a differentiator for companies. We feel like it’s THE differentiator,” says Lynsey.



Highlights

General Mills has a real HR solution that works. It’s dramatically changed the employee experience and shown the entire corporation how well global transformation can be done.

Headquarters

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Geographies

100 countries

Employees

38,000+

Industry

Consumer packaged goods

Challenges

- Leadership needed more visibility into the types of employee service request they were receiving
- Managers wanted the same functionality with tools and processes at work that makes their personal lives easier, in other words: a consumer-grade experience
- Employees worldwide all wanted the same service experience no matter where they may be located and to be able to get instant answers and the right solutions for their problems

In addition to General Mills leadership demands, the company's middle managers had expectations, too. Lynn elaborates, "HR used to do everything for them [managers], but as with everyone in their personal lives today, they've gotten used to doing things for themselves. We all like to have choice. We all like to have a say in how we live our lives digitally. So our managers wanted the same functionality with tools and processes at work that made their personal lives easier." In other words, they wanted a consumer-grade experience.

General Mills employees also had needs that weren't being met. Lynsey explains, "Depending upon where you were sitting, you had a very different HR experience. Sometimes you'd get the right answer and the right tool to solve your problem and other times you didn't. As the company became more global, it was decided that we couldn't have that drastic a difference depending upon where an employee happened to sit. There should be some commonality as a General Mills employee—where you have access to information, where you know where to go to get basic questions answered."

Lynsey continues with the HR team's perspective, "Our old system used to be so rigid that we'd joke around internally that you need a minimum of a half-million dollars and two years to make a change. Okay, I'm exaggerating a bit because there were slight functionality changes we could make, but it was literally that hard."

"As an HR person, we were ready for change. We spent the past few years focused on the mechanics of the business, our cost structure, and the categories in which we play. And there was an acknowledgement that we hadn't invested in systems, tools, and processes that would make our jobs easier as well as the jobs of our leaders, managers, and employees. So we had a strong desire to change," says Lynsey.

Finding the right partners

General Mills began the transformation initiative by identifying the partners they thought would best help them complete the task. Since Lynsey, Lynn, and team were looking at the initiative holistically, they knew they wanted a suite of technologies to transform the way that they interacted and served with General Mills' employees, managers, and leaders.

"Workday was huge for us because it was our core, foundational data with HR functionality. So after we signed the contract with them, we quickly found a key part of the employee equation was missing," says Lynsey. The missing piece was "a jumping off spot," in other words, a portal where employees could get vital information easily and quickly. That data would include policy and practices, toolkits, guides, and even how to navigate Workday. To power the portal, General Mills had narrowed their search to two vendors.

"We were looking at ServiceNow and another competitor. It was not only the employee experience that was important to us, it was also the service center rep experience and having metric capability," says Lynn. "ServiceNow gave us the visibility to see the cases coming in and triage them when previously we had nothing. Plus, it helped us manage our employee base, so we could give feedback to our HR service center. As an example, we had a rep that was handling a lot fewer cases than their peers, and we asked, 'Why is that?' So we were able to have actual data to enforce performance expectations. Also, ServiceNow came with an approach of how to get things done, and we were able to adopt that to what our needs were. That was a big selling point for us."

Solutions

- ServiceNow® HR Service Delivery

Results

- Chat interactions between HR and employees up from 1 or 2% to nearly 33%
- 76% of the General Mills team has accessed the G&Me portal
- Greater than 70% of cases have been resolved at the tier one level

Bipin Paracha of IntegRhythm—a ServiceNow Gold Services Partner specializing in HR implementations—says when General Mills initiated an RFP process, IntegRhythm responded jointly with ServiceNow. “General Mills has been a terrific success story even from the pre-sale perspective. From day one, IntegRhythm, ServiceNow, and General Mills have all been working extremely closely together to define the project and ideal solution, even before the actual contracts are signed. It was kind of a lovefest from the very beginning.”

“Own and manage our own data”

Lynsey adds that another ServiceNow differentiator was that it provided General Mills with access to its own data. “As technology advances, we all need to take a bit of ownership and skill-building for the tools and systems we use. One of the things I really like about ServiceNow is the accessibility of our information. If we want to change a policy, we’re not waiting on ServiceNow. We were trained on how to own and manage our own data.”

Because **ServiceNow® HR Service Delivery** is a robust system, General Mills can pull data in and out and adjust quickly. Lynsey says, “So what happens is 1) we actually build ownership of our data in terms of policy and what we have posted on our portal; and 2) we have a partner there and if we don’t know how to do something, or if we feel like we’re doing something wrong, or it seems clunky, we at least have someone who can provide us feedback. I know that’s a different business model than what the ServiceNow competitors have—where they hold the data and there’s this lock-and-key situation.”

“I think it’s a much better enabler for the companies that ServiceNow supports. It lets them be agile and adjust their information in a way that makes them a better partner to the business. This was something unique and differential as we made the decision to go with ServiceNow,” says Lynsey.

Workday and ServiceNow

“We found the two technologies (Workday and ServiceNow) very complimentary of one another. And from a technology perspective, nicely integrated. For example, we could use the Workday deep links on our branded G&Me [the portal powered by ServiceNow]. That was very helpful, because an employee doesn’t honestly care what system they’re in. What they want is their questions answered and to be taken to the right place to do what they need to do. So that integration was really powerful,” says Lynsey.

According to Lynn, “Workday is the transactions that you can do, but your launch point and the ability to access the information you need is in ServiceNow. If you’re looking at just Workday, that’s okay depending upon what you want to do. But if you need the knowledge base and the ability to chat with people about what you need to do with a case in knowledge management, you need the ServiceNow overlay on top of that.”

Senior Manager of Global HR Service at General Mills Pam Velcheck adds, “ServiceNow is really helping to enable the employee to get everything they need from a knowledge perspective, and Workday is how they transact on what they need to get done.”

When outsiders questioned using Workday and ServiceNow together, Lynsey had a response. “I honestly can’t imagine that we would have done it any other way. Because you’d hate to put in Workday with none of the guidance, landing points, supporting materials that we had sitting in G&Me. You couldn’t have done that successfully.”



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– Lynsey Wherry, Vice President of Talent Acquisition and HR Strategy, General Mills

"At the same time, you couldn't have put up G&Me practices and policies without tying into the same global data set; that would have been a waste of time. So the idea that they both came together in one launch and one seamless employee experience was really important. It was a 1+1=3 equation that really had a meaningful impact on our employee base."

Bipin of IntegRhythm says it was important to first have a "soft launch" of ServiceNow® HR Service Delivery to ensure the application data was populated accurately. Also, Bipin knew that General Mills' HR team would be more comfortable managing the case volume when Workday rolled out. This turned out to be a very good decision as Bipin says, "We had 11,000+ cases in the first seven weeks of Workday's go-live and they could handle all those cases with ease. Without an efficient solution like ServiceNow® Case Management, handling such a volume of cases would have been very difficult."

Designing a consumer-like employee service experience

When they designed the HR transformation initiative, in addition to addressing the leadership, management, and employee demands outlined above, Lynsey, Lynn, and team wanted to be sure the new solution met five key criteria: value added, standardized, trusted, connected, and user friendly.

Value added—Lynsey's team prioritized data and focused on insights that enabled actions, ensured the fewest possible steps were designed into processes, and made sure that it was easy to access information that's current and tied to business priorities.

"Data is data, but you want data you can act upon. We're not doing activities just to be doing activities. We're doing them to actually drive business value," says Lynsey.

Standardized—The HR team made use of common processes and definitions, minimized and measured exceptions (using only when legally required), and employed processes only that are standards enterprise-wide.

"We focused on how do we align to a single or standard way of doing it, where the only exceptions would be any legal or regulatory changes. That gave us a very different mindset. It forced us to align on standards. So all the decisions and customizations that would make it hard to execute were removed by saying we're going to align on a set of principles and practices," says Lynsey.

Trusted—The transformation designers wanted consistent transparency to data and processes so that employees and managers were empowered with self-service options.

"One way to make data accurate is to make it visible so that our people can see it and ask questions about it. And if it relates to our Workday data, we want to make sure we have our employees' data right. We want to be transparent on why we're collecting information and why we're sharing particular information with teams. We realize we're only as effective as how trusted our data is," says Lynsey.

Connected—Having a single source of truth for all employees globally was a must-have for the team. Also, they wanted integration across all processes, systems, and geographies to facilitate innovation by connecting employees with each other worldwide.

"We're working in a global environment. While we might think that North America doesn't need to talk to Asia or Latin America, they do. Employees want to connect. So how can we enable that with the work we're doing in HR? So we talk about the importance of a single source of truth in our data so that everyone's working off the same platform, which is ServiceNow and it is global, as is Workday. We want to be integrated so that employees feel a part of General Mills, not just a particular segment of the company," says Lynsey.



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User friendly—The HR transformation team wanted the new solution to be easy, efficient, and time-saving, as well as providing accessibility—anytime and anywhere.

“Being user friendly is super-important to us. It’s about bringing consumer-grade experience into work and ensuring that processes are the most efficient they can be. And that you can get them on your phone. And that there is a purpose to what we’re asking employees and managers to do,” says Lynsey.

Implementation hurdles and challenges

In the implementation stage, General Mills team says they tried to leverage the “wisdom” of their partners. According to Bipin of IntegRhythm, at first “General Mills wanted to implement processes that they defined. So we said, ‘As much as I love my Ford, I would not want to buy a Ferrari and replace it with a Ford engine.’ Then they saw that ServiceNow value of delivering as a platform on HR and any HR fulfiller logging in will feel comfortable using it out of the box.”

“ServiceNow was great. We asked, ‘What comes out of the box on the portal? And why won’t that work for us?’ versus taking what we had and spending countless hours—non-value-added time—to come up with a solution that maybe looks similar to what we had but isn’t driving anything strategically different,” says Lynsey.

One way the HR team avoided user complaints was to be very clear from the beginning. “Let us learn the platform before we make changes. We told everyone that we would have an opportunity to personalize the platform once we get comfortable. With our soft launch we did learn and adapted a few things so that made everyone comfortable we would stick to our word. This helped us manage expectations throughout the extended user community,” says Lynn.

Results and stats

“It’s amazing now in our new environment. Employees are able to find things that are pertinent to them. What I hear most people talking about is the ‘Ask HR’ component of G&Me,” states Lynn. “What they liked about it is knowing where it is; they know how to follow up on it; they know when it will be resolved and that someone will get back to them. So that piece of it has been huge, as has chat.”

“We had very rudimentary chat functionality in the past. It was 1% or 2% of our interactions in the past. Now, chat is about a third of our interactions with employees. So that’s how employees want to communicate with us. Now that we have a real tool that works, it’s changed employee behavior dramatically. The adoption is higher than we would have thought,” enthuses Lynn.

Within three months of the go live, 76% of the General Mills team has accessed the G&Me portal and greater than 70% of cases to HR Direct have been resolved at the tier one level.

Lynsey adds, “And we finally gave the leadership and managers something that was better and it actually wasn’t a huge splash. To my mind, it was probably the best indication that we managed the change really well and that we picked the right solutions for them—solutions that were so intuitive and consumer-grade that they actually didn’t lose a ton of sleep over it. I think that’s a sign that you are delivering something that is so in-line with their expectations that it shouldn’t be a big splash. I think that’s a huge positive for our system and partners.”

G&Me powered by ServiceNow

The G&Me portal is a central landing point for employees. “We really talked up the features,” says Lynsey. “Not sure where to start? Just like in your normal life, type it into the bar and see what happens. We also made it very intuitive. We have Employee Top Tasks, Manager Top Tasks, HR Top Tasks, and a clear point of how to come into contact with our internal team (called HR Direct). It clearly and simply laid out the things that were most important to them.”

“We did quite a few employee focus groups and got a lot of employee feedback to make sure that ‘moment of truth’ was accurate in their eyes. It wasn’t modeled or laid out how an HR person might like it, but rather in a way an employee would naturally think about it.”

For Lynsey’s HR team, G&Me was 1) the point of entry for General Mills staff, and 2) it set the standard for intuitive and simple processes. It made it quick and easy in for employees to get the assistance they needed.

“The search function has been a huge win for employees to quickly access the information that they need. It’s been fun to see that,” says Lynn.

"I couldn't be more proud of the team for leading and showing what a global system, tool, and process looks like and not doing it all by themselves, relying on partners like ServiceNow and Workday. That was a huge change for us culturally. Our internal mantra was #workdifferently. It was hard, hard work, but when we were done, it was like those Cheerios flowing out of the box: It looked seamless. It seems like it's not that hard, but if people only knew the effort and background."

"ServiceNow listens to customers"

"We didn't know what the service level was really going to be like until we became a customer. Clearly, in the sales presentation, promises are made, but you don't really know what you're going to get. But with ServiceNow, what we were told we were going to get on a service level is exactly what we're experiencing. ServiceNow has not let us down," says Lynsey.

Lynn adds: "ServiceNow listens to customers. We have the ability and a platform to provide feedback. And ServiceNow listens to the feedback."

The General Mills future with Service Now

What's next for General Mills and ServiceNow? Lynn says, "I'd like to see ServiceNow even more integrated with some of our other elements here."

Lynsey adds, "I want us to be well prepared for the workplace we find ourselves in. I think there's going to be some really exciting but undefined things. Things like automation, AI, and globalization. I'm hoping as we go on that journey—and I think it will happen really fast—that ServiceNow continues to be a valued partner to help keep us ahead of the curve when it comes to many of those macro themes that are hitting the workplace."

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– Pam Velcheck, Senior Manager of Global HR Service at General Mills

