



PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY

Project synergy – creating an effective project

HR system development objectives were to be operationally efficient, improve customer service through better functionality, improve access to data, and reduce paper usage. Further objectives were, to enhance the reputations of both the HR department and the university by providing key HR information across the university; and to develop project skills in the HR operational team.

Head of HR Operations, Plymouth University

Plymouth University is one of the UK's most prominent universities with over 30,000 students and almost 3,000 employees. Creativity and an enterprising spirit are characteristics that are valued by the university as they help to achieve the university's goal of transforming lives through knowledge.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The Head of HR Operations at the university, explains: "HR is committed to providing a positive working environment. Our proactive people are respected and supported in a sustainable manner, contributing to outstanding results. We place great value in employee diversity and consequently, consider students' experience to be enriched. Individuals' contributions are recognised and rewarded in line with the university's strategic aims, which are evident in our range of HR policies." One of the university's objectives was e-business, a commitment to developing its use of technology to enhance its teaching and learning offering and business capability. Aligned with this, HR's strategy to prove its commitment to delivering the university's strategic objectives was to develop an integrated HR system.

Establishing specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time framed goals was essential to the success of the project. Three key phases were identified. First, upgrade to iTrent. Second, implement Web Recruitment for online applications, in addition to piloting Manager Self-Service (MSS). The final phase introduces performance development reviews and the rollout of MSS.

SUMMARY

Improved HR Service Delivery

- Support of university's agenda
- Outstanding external provider audit report
- Improved applicant, employee & manager experience
- Empowerment of line management
- Improved personal development process
- Improved visibility & accuracy of HR information

Improved Reputation of HR

- Enhanced reputation of HR to deliver projects
- Strengthened working relationships between university & HR

Skills and Knowledge Development of HR Team

- Increased project team knowledge through working with MHR
- Developed HR team's project management skills

Improved Operational Efficiency for HR

- High levels of automation for majority of operational processes
- Increased levels of online applications (880 hrs pa saved)
- Established platform for future developments

Phase 1: Team, Upgrade and Employee Self-Service

To successfully manage the entire process, a designated project team was launched to manage the iTrent upgrade and implement its improved functionality, particularly:

- **Workflow** – improves process efficiency & reduces paper usage
- **Enquiry tool** – delivers key information to HR users & potentially users outside core HR
- **Process chaining** – improves efficiency
- **Improved templates** – delivering efficiencies & improved service
- **Analysis** – improves efficiency by identifying where in the team processes/ activities are completed

Using a project team comprising operational area experts ensured that different roles and contributions were recognised and valued. The commitment and engagement of team members was evidenced through successful problem solving and communication. Effective team work ensured a collaborative approach which continues today, despite the team having dispersed back into their normal operational areas.

The effective communication and documentation of objectives, plans and expectations were fully managed, providing a transparent basis for measuring project progression. Under the leadership of the project manager, the team developed project management skills and increased its knowledge of the iTrent system. This benefited operational teams considerably as continuous critical reviews and development still take place.

Greater Visibility and Engagement

“To ensure executive support and recognition at the highest level, regular briefing papers were issued to the university’s executive groups and trade unions. This allowed the project team to anticipate and address concerns as the project evolved,” explains the Head of the operations.

“To gain the confidence and support of our academic community, we worked with university subject experts – academic managers from our computing school, technical specialists, prominent academic and professional managers and employees. Without doubt, this consultative approach supported the successful system delivery.”

To maximise project visibility to the wider university community, the intranet and direct email were key. All project and system related documents were uploaded to the HR community on the university’s intranet, while regular employee announcements via the intranet home page increased general awareness, shared progress, and outlined the expected impact on users. Direct e-mail proved particularly successful for the launch of Employee Self-Service (ESS).

The system sponsor actively engaged on a regular basis with the project manager and the team, which ensured that things could happen and move forward quickly to achieve the objectives. Without this commitment and close liaison the project would not have been able to deliver the objectives within the given time frame.

Phase 2: Manager Self-Service and Online Applications

“Before iTrent, employees and managers identified the need for better access to data and electronic processes. Initially, read-only functionality of key information was delivered for two pilot areas: HR and another Directorate totalling 300 employees. A mechanism for collating and maintaining reporting manager data was established which then fed the release of MSS functionality to other areas of the organisation.”

The system development co-ordinator worked closely with the project manager and the MSS focus group (representing their area’s reporting managers) to design an MSS profile providing read-only access to key personal and contractual information. By developing MSS, further improvements in visibility and access to HR information will be seen across the organisation.

“Having reviewed iTrent’s Web Recruitment functionality, we decided to replace the paper-based application process for iTrent’s online version to allow applicants to search and apply for jobs internally and externally online, thereby improving applicant experience and providing HR operational efficiencies.

With each manually input application averaging five minutes, it amounted to around 880 hours per year, around half a full-time equivalent.” a representative explains.

The recruitment and project managers designed an online application process. This was tested

and developed using a dedicated focus group representative of recruiting managers acting as applicants and recruiting managers across the university.

The focus group and project team discussed and agreed various aspects of the system, including the application form design, whether managers receive applications electronically or in hard copy, the look of the printed application, etc.

“Test applications were completed by the focus group, HR staff and some students studying HR, with feedback collected on their experiences. Following go-live, each applicant completed a survey and responses were very positive. We’re also looking to provide managers with direct access to recruitment data and shortlisting via MSS.”

Phase 3: Performance Development Reviews and Full MSS Roll-Out

The university is now focusing on performance development reviews (PDR) and the continued roll-out of MSS across the organisation. The long term objective is to implement a facility for employees to complete appraisal forms online. This will support the Performance Management Framework Project and demonstrate HR web-based processes, helping to improve employee and manager access to HR systems and information.

Review

A review of all the project phases will ensure a complete evaluation of the project’s objectives thus far, to identify what went well, key learning points, and to ensure that areas yet to be finalised are incorporated into future development. The university will also seek feedback and suggestions from all involved, having issued surveys in relation to ESS, online applications, and the core system which will inform the approach for the overall review following project completion.

Over the last 12 months, HR has aligned with the university’s strategic aims for technology and e-business. iTrent’s implementation and ongoing developments have facilitated HR in driving use of the system and improving customer service.

The project team’s success has subsequently led to the decision to identify a team within HR to focus on continuing system and process improvement to enable realisation of the university’s future aspirations.



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