



END OF PROJECT REPORT FOR THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF A WEB-BASED PLATFORM
AT HEMPSTONE INSURANCE CONSULTANTS

MODULE NAME: PROJECT MAMAGEMENT
MODULE CODE: LCBB5005
LECTURE NAME: NANDISH PATEL



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Business case overview

Hempstone Insurance Consultants is a firm dealing in insurance services with a staff of 230 people working in various departments. The firm has a centralised legacy system that has been used to undertake payroll and administrative functions. Since the firm has designated regions where it operates, each region has a manager responsible for carrying out the payroll and administrative tasks as required. However, and each pay cycle, these managers have to travel with the regional data to the head offices and feed these data into the legacy system for processing. Apart from the delays experienced during the process, there are higher data log error rates that have impacted negatively on staff and resulted in staff turnover. Recent COVID19 has worsened the situation, especially at the head offices as a higher staff load at the office heightens the risks of infection. To resolve these issues, it has been proposed that the company implement and migrate its services to a web-based platform where staff from various regions will autonomously carry out specific payroll and administrative functions relieving the regional managers to expedite their responsibilities and produce reports in a timely way. Further, the company will see a reduction in the cost of hiring extra staff at the head office to expedite the process during every pay cycle. The budgeted cost of implementing the web-based platform was £50000, and the schedule of the project was six months achieved through a phased approach typical of the PRINCE2 project management principles (Bentley, 2005; Barker, 2013; Marsh, 1996)

Objectives of the projects (Were these achieved?)

The following objectives have been achieved.

- *To ensure that the current overhead cost at the HQ are reduced by £16,000*

This objective has been fully achieved considering that with the launching of the web-based platform the extra staff who were needed at the head offices during every pay cycle to assist the regional managers in streamlining the payroll are no longer needed as most staff can be able to

undertake the payroll and administrative functions in their remote locations and forward the results to the regional managers for onward processing.

- *To automate staff payroll and administrative functions.*

The web-based platform has been fully functional for the last four months and therefore been 95% effective in ensuring that staff payroll and administrative functions are automated. Additionally, staff training will ensure that the success rate of implementation is 100%.

- *To expedite staff payroll and administrative processing cycle to real-time.*

So far, the payroll and administrative processing cycle is operating at a 94% efficiency with a little adjustment and additional staff training likely to bring the efficiency rate to 100%. For example, the current data log error rates at 25% will significantly reduce with increased user experience and additional staff training.

- *To enable those concerned to receive reports as and when they are needed.*

Currently, the top management in the company are getting the periodical and ad-hoc reports on time and hence this objective is 100% achieved following the implementation of the web-based platform.

Benefits that have been achieved from the project (were these expected or unexpected?)

- The web-based platform has been successfully implemented in a phased approach, as was envisaged according to the PRINCE2 methodology. Currently, the administrative and payroll functions are now decentralised and are performed by staff at their remote locations in real-time consultations with their respective heads of departments. The head office has been dedicated to hosting the servers that are also mirrored on an external site so that the service can only experience a very minimal downturn.

- The staff efficiency has been significantly improved with staff success data log rates at 89% meaning that with increased use and experience more staff is likely to gain sufficient knowledge and ensure a 100% data log in the next two months.
- The data log errors are at 25% and as noted there is going to be a significant improvement with continued use with the data log error rates to decrease to less than 5% the acceptable rate envisaged by the project team.
- It is expected that the annual cost savings after the deployment of the web-based platform will be as projected. However, this is yet to be ascertained because the web-based application has only been in operation for the last three months. Tentative cost savings for the first quarter in operations as calculated by the Finance department reveal a general cost saving in terms of recruitment costs for extra staff during the payment processing cycle at the headquarters. The overhead is currently pegged at £1750 including savings on hiring, transport and accommodation.
- Staff health insurance costs are likely to decrease, considering that the head office staff population has been effectively reduced, meaning the possible impact of the current COVID19 pandemic is significantly mitigated. Fewer staff at the head office means a safer environment and a reduced risk of the pandemic effects at the head offices. The web-based platform also offers an alternative for staff to work from home still a safer option, particularly at this time of the COVID19 pandemic.
- The payroll and related reports are efficiently compiled and accessible to the top management of the company within the stipulated period. Without the delays that were due to slowed staff and regional managers communication and information exchange, the top management has been getting timely reports on the company HR status that also indicates that the staff turnover rate has significantly reduced.
- The cost of renting the head office premise has also reduced although this was not expected but has come because of the reduced staff load at the head office.

Consequently, the head office operational area is reduced by 25%, which translates to cost savings in terms of rent on the premise.

Project execution within its scope (Timescale, budget and tolerances)

- The project's initial budget was £50000; this was capable of kicking off the web-based platform. However, the company had to source for additional funding to actualise the mirroring of the company's data and information on an external secured cloud-based storage for an annual fee of £4500. This is to ensure that the website remains secure and available with very minimal downturn rates.
- In terms of the time, the six months assigned to develop the project was sufficient, as noted in the management plan. Considering that website projects typically take a shorter duration, most of the time is often dedicated to the migration and conversion of content. However, the IT department was able to deploy the appropriate workforce to manage this part of the project within the envisaged timescale based on the PRINCE2 methodology. Additionally, the cost of undertaking the conversion and migration was well within the budget because most of the manpower used for this purpose is internal. It was at the mirroring point that the IT department invited an expert/vendor to conduct the process and also induct the IT head of department on the same.
- It was expected that the web-based platform downturn would be 9 seconds. At the same time, this is a short while it can significantly affect the user of the platform, especially when the platform has a peak workload. Although this is tolerated, it was decided that a downturn of 5 or less would be most appropriate for a web-based platform like the one at Hempstone Insurance Consultants.

- The current data log error rates at 25% are still high, though tolerated at this point. If they were higher than 30%, it would be necessary to re-evaluate the staff training based on the PRINCE2 principles (Graham, 2010; Kerzner, 2017). This is arising from the unpredictable learning curve that staff are experiencing. It is expected that this rate will gradually reduce with time to 5% or less as the staff get used to the system.
- While the projected budget for the project was pegged at £50000, the company needed to have an auxiliary fund of £15000 to handle any emergency requirements that would be critical to the successful implementation of the web-based platform. It was from this fund that the mirroring cost was drawn from to ensure that as the system was up and running, it was highly secured and available all the time.

Changes made to the run-up to the completion of the project. Effects of the changes to the original plan and the effects on the project

The main change that was made in the run-up to the completion was the creation of an effective external interface to provide the mirroring services. While this was not on the initial plan, it became apparent that with the kind of operations at the company, availability of the platform at all times was very critical. Consequently, it was necessary to implement an interface with an external site within a secured cloud offered by a third party data security company. The IT team were therefore required to scout and source for a suitable provider within a supplementary budget. This meant that the IT team composition also changed to include an expert from the cloud service so that the development and deployment would be synchronised and training for the IT team would also be implemented. This resulted in additional costs to hire the expert who offered training and secure the subscription to the cloud-based security services. Consequently, as much as the mirroring option had not been factored into the initial plan, it became apparent that this procedure was very critical to the proper functioning of the web-based platform.

Lessons learnt during the Project, Project's Success and Areas of Improvement and Recommendations for Future Projects.

I think in line with one of the principles of PRINCE2, the project was distinctly divided and managed in stages (Besner & Hobbs, 2006; Todorović et al., 2015; Wideman, 2002). This was important because it helped to ensure that each of the stages was fine-tuned to meet the business requirement. As such, the project stages could easily be tailored to suit the project environment.

Overall the project went well except for the staff training that experiences a slow response and hence affected the user acceptance testing process. Often change is perceived differently by staff and hence the need for the top management to be actively involved in highlighting the benefits of such change. While the top management at Hempstone Insurance Consultants was actively involved, some of the staff were anxious about the new system. Most had initial fears about how competent they would need to become before they can use the system. I think staff training played a very critical role in ensuring that these fears were significantly reduced. More staff gained confidence in using the system and as has been noted the current 25% data log error rate is likely to reduce as staff use the system more and gain confidence. Generally, I think the grouping of testing and staff training in one activity of the project worked very well to help the staff to receive the skills to use the platform and also ask any questions that may arise. On the other hand, it also helped the IT team to gauge how well the prospective users were receiving the system. As such, by combining user acceptance testing and training meant that the project duration was reduced and this was also critical to the other main factors in project management, namely, cost and quality.

I think if I had to encounter a similar project in future, I would reconstitute the IT team also to include experts from the support services that the platform may need. This is in line with PRINCE2 methodology that assigns significant weight to learning by the project team (Barker,

2013). For this project, it was only after the project had significantly progressed until the hosting stage that it was realised that mirroring the platform was very important. All along the IT team was unaware of this fact because most of the requirements for the proposed systems were as they believed covered. In fact, with the introduction of a mirroring aspect to the installation, the team also reviewed the security of the platform. As such, it was necessary to combine the mirroring with security so that the company data and information was well secured even as it was hosted in the cloud. I think in this case, the composition of the teams must be undertaken with a global view of the project. As the project manager, there may need to advise the IT team to consider any external expertise that they consider critical and include a representative from the third-party vendor within the project team.

While the top management was very supportive of the project, they were, however, not publicly committed to ensuring that the staff accepted the change. This, in part, shows why the IT team reported a slowed uptake of training by the staff. It is highly recommended that during the time of change, the top management of the company strongly and endorse the change so that staff can avoid any speculations that can affect the effective implementation of the project (Besner & Hobbs, 2006; Crawford, 2005; Kerzner, 2017) . The top management at Hempstone Insurance Consultants needed to have come out clearly and reached out to the staff using available channels of communication to reassure them of the importance of the change and the benefits of having the platform.

Future projects are better off when the top management is actively involved and supporting the project. In this way, the staff will take a shorter time to adapt to the new system and enhance the productivity achieving the desired objectives of the project.

Risks Initially Identified, Limitations To Identifying The Risks Early Enough (Were These Unavoidable And Unpredictable?)

Although the PRINCE2 framework emphasises the products (Great Britain. Office of Government Commerce. 2002; Hinde, 2018), I think for this case, the user acceptance will be critical to defining the quality of the product (Bentley, 2005; Marsh, 1996). As such failure to identify the effect of slow staff responses to training emerges as a risk. This according to a PRINCE2 approach qualifies as a mini task (based on the Work breakdown structure – WBS) is identified and separated and addressed to ensure that it does not interfere with the final launch. If staff completely reject the platform, the company will have invested in a product that failed to meet its business requirement. As much as other factors like unclear project need or purpose, and vague parts of the product design, the effects of inadequate staff training was also a significant risk (Todorović et al., 2015). The platform availability and security was never considered within the risk register and was also not identified earlier until later. This risk though very substantial was not identified as would have been expected because the IT team may have overlooked the working of the platform and how it would interface with the external environment (Cobb, 2011). By far, slow staff uptake was a risk that was identified, although this was unpredictable. While it has manifested after the project, the effect is variable may be better or worse, meaning such a risk could not be predicted earlier with accuracy.

I think relying entirely on an internal project team can also be risky, especially when undertaking a project that must interface at some point with other external systems (Cobb, 2011). The project manager must provide room for including experts within the project team to ensure that the experts resolve issues that may be beyond the internally constituted technical team (Cobb, 2011). This is the essence of adopting a PRINCE2 methodology that focuses on the abilities of the project manager to execute the project within the defined scope. For this case, rather than outsource the process, the IT team opted to handle the design and development. However, at

the interface point, they would need to seek expert advice to achieve the server mirroring and security function of the platform.

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