

business collaborator case study

“Property Services is dependent on its extensive supply chain and we believed there was room for improvement in the way that we managed our supplier relationships” explained Steve Head, Electronic Services Manager at Nationwide.

Historically the structure of the Property Services Department consisted of a team of project managers, managed by a programme manager. However, the programme manager found it difficult to get an accurate overview of projects. Refurbishment is document rich and over 100 key documents typically flow through the process at Nationwide. “Managing these through the project was a priority,” says Steve Head, “but we also found that after a refurbishment the paper trail ceased, as documents were spread around the organisation and the supply chain. What we required was a central document repository which would avoid this issue.”

The Approach

Having reviewed most of the well-known collaboration software products on the market, Nationwide found that while most were strong on document management they were usually weak on process management. Having had internal experience of working with the Business Collaborator (BC) system, and having been impressed with the flexibility of the system and the company behind it, Nationwide approached BC to discuss a solution. They wanted a system that pushed the process along and allowed them to involve the right people at the right time, with an overview for management, collaboration requests, virtual meetings etc.

After working up a specification with Business Collaborator, within a tight budget, an initial trial began in January 2003.

	Develop. Brief	Allocate Resources	Feasibility	Pre Contract Period	Lead In Period	Siteworks	Project Review
	Measure						
End User Satisfaction Product	% scoring 8/10 or better						
End User Satisfaction Service	% scoring 8/10 or better						
Defects On Handover	% scoring 8/10 or better						
Safety Accidents	Mean Accident Incidence rater per 100k employed						
Predictability Construction Cost	% on target or better						
Predictability Construction Time	% on target or better						
Predictability Design Cost	% on target or better						
Predictability Design Time	% on target or better						
Productivity	£ / week						

The system, known as WideXchange, enables Nationwide to hold all project associated information in one place, with a consistency of process and information. Their supply chain can add and change information on the system, with controlled levels of access.

Initial reluctance from some suppliers, particularly those with little previous experience of this type of system, was soon replaced with enthusiasm for its use, and many are now keen to extend its use.

“We now have an internal and external team who could previously only have coped with relatively low numbers of projects - now we estimate that we could ramp up our activity by 600-700% with no reduction of quality or loss of control” comments Steve Head. “Having one central source of project information has been invaluable in keeping everyone informed of progress”.

In late 2003, Nationwide reviewed its market position and a change in corporate branding led to increase in workload over the next 6 years. The team decide to extend the scope of the system to include design management, performance and risk management, and improved programme management.

WideXchange was enhanced to look at all activities involved in a project from physical delivery to implementation management to a continuous improvement loop with knowledge capture. The whole programme management regime was re-engineered to create ‘a more programme-centric approach’ and the strategic drive to work more closely with the supply chain.

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TeamRoom - Communities of Practice

At Nationwide knowledge management is a strategy with high-level commitment. Exploiting knowledge is included in the company's operating model and in late 2002 Nationwide created the role of knowledge manager.

The key elements of their knowledge plan are to share information, leverage knowledge and experience with employees and with the supply chain, and to put people in touch with people. The mechanism to deliver this is TeamRoom, a network of 'communities of practice', or CoPs.

An obvious place to start the project was with the supply chain working with the Property Services Department. "Nationwide has a large number of suppliers. We found that by no means did all of these companies have a particularly good understanding of Nationwide and how we worked - and to be fair we had a patchy knowledge of them, while they certainly had little or no knowledge of each other." explained Lynne Keech, Knowledge Consultant at Nationwide.

"At the most basic level CoPs contain information on contacts and who does what within Nationwide and our suppliers. At the next level we have made available Nationwide's programmes of best practices which have proved extremely useful. One of the things that we learnt is that each CoP needs to have a set of objectives - otherwise they can just drift and become less and less active - and these objectives must offer mutual benefits to users in order make it worthwhile to all parties to stay involved. We have also brought our supply chain strategy in line with TeamRoom, so that suppliers are made to see being involved as part of the process of working with the Nationwide."

As the early CoPs became established and their benefits apparent to the user community more have been created. What they have also put in place is a CoP champion.

"At its best, knowledge management becomes this self-perpetuating process which builds on its successes," said Lynne Keech.

"One particularly interesting possibility would benefit the whole banking sector," claimed Lynne Keech. "There currently exists a community of approximately 200 building societies who share crime prevention information but who have nowhere to store this sensitive information - currently it is just exchanged at regular monthly meetings. It is likely that

we will build a CoP for sharing this information which just by its very immediacy will instantly improve the speed at which information can become available and be acted on,"

CoPs can contain a range of different facilities such as space for information sharing, for virtual meetings, collaboration and problem solving. They improve innovation and encourage people to question things while removing wheel reinvention and avoiding repeating mistakes or problems.

"Internally we can now see this strategy expanding into major departments such as marketing and retail, but I feel we have addressed its launch in a sensible way - looking to develop a core of high achieving CoPs on which we can build," concluded Lynne Keech.

Benefits Achieved

- Improved version control of the documents with a master copy that is centrally available, reduces errors and ensures consistency.
- Project data can be mined to monitor progress against key performance indicators (KPIs) at project and programme levels. The team can see which suppliers are performing best.
- Risk management is improved as physical and environmental risks can be checked such as asbestos, listed building status and health and safety risks.
- Communication has improved, internally and across the supply chain.

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