

case study United Utilities

£2.9 billion Asset Management Programme flows smoothly using Business Collaborator

Achievement

With an allocated budget of £2.9 billion for its' Asset Management Programme (AMP4), United Utilities recognised that to manage the risks effectively in a project of this magnitude they needed to take a leading role in programme management. After a rigorous selection process, the company chose Business Collaborator (BC) over previously used collaboration tools particularly because of the way it facilitated the sharing of documents and management of partner organisations. In doing so, BC has enabled United Utilities to develop unified processes, create a standardised approach, provide effective sharing of information across organisations, and facilitate the successful collaboration of approximately 3,500 people throughout their supply chain.

Key Benefits

- Enabled and assisted in the introduction of a standardised approach across all projects involved in the AMP4 programme.
- Provided a functionally rich, reliable, robust, and independent platform for collaboration, overcoming security issues normally associated with sharing knowledge typically secured behind firewalls.
- Encouraged the sharing of best practice between partner organisations.
- Provided a single data store for all project and management information.
- Facilitated the introduction of unified processes increasing both efficiency and effectiveness.
- Ability to share information in a secure manner, across multiple organisations and regardless of location.



image courtesy of United Utilities

Background

United Utilities owns and operates water and wastewater systems and electricity networks in north west England and manages utility and business process services for clients throughout the UK and overseas. The company maintains reservoirs, water towers, aqueducts, sewers and water treatment works all to supply 2,000 million litres of water everyday and treat 2,200 million litres of wastewater.

business collaborator case study

AMP4 is the five-year investment programme United Utilities is carrying out between 2005 and 2010 - the fourth programme of its kind since water privatisation in 1989. Through its AMP4 programme the company has committed to investing £2.9 billion to further improve water and wastewater services.

Asset management programmes involve multiple projects, requiring collaboration across numerous companies, often with different cultures, management styles, processes and locations, all of which increase the risks normally associated with programmes of this scale.

At United Utilities, the delivery strategy for AMP4 is to build on previous success, but this time with the group taking a leading role in programme management. "We had outsourced previous AMP Programmes to a number of companies, for AMP 4 we recruited key resources allowing us to take the lead role" says Glyn Hughes, Special Projects Manager at United Utilities.

Another reason for the company leading the programme was to increase its internal resources in engineering and design whilst placing greater emphasis on performance management through the alignment of financial targets. This approach focused on enabling the group to target significant cost savings through the use of common systems, improved scheduling, and more integrated supply chain management.

United Utilities recognised that in order to achieve their aims they would need to create a standardised approach to all projects with a central repository for sharing information. Due to outsourcing previous AMP programmes, one of the initial challenges for the company was in defining project and business processes.

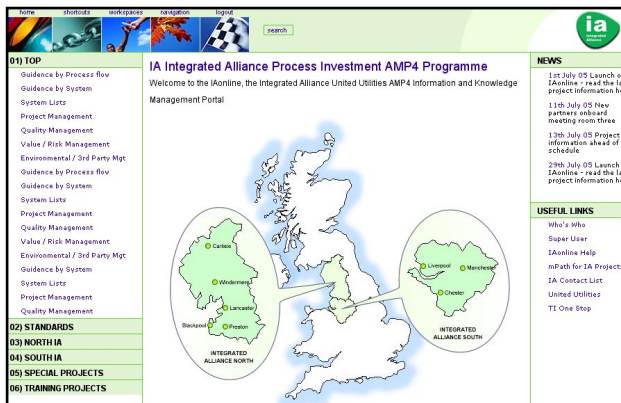
The Approach

One of the key differentiators of BC is that it is not prescriptive to the user. It offers a great deal of flexibility, and can be quickly adapted to work with existing business processes and workflows. Business Collaborator Ltd (BCL) consultants were able to bring a wealth of experience and knowledge gained from implementing collaborative solutions in many other companies. They worked closely with a steering group of representatives from United Utilities and partner organisations to identify and develop standard procedures for use across all projects.

Another question initially raised was "How do we get so many people trained?" Keeping control of training costs was a key concern. BCL's experience at rolling out systems to thousands of users allowed them to devise a training programme whereby a number of 'Super Users' were trained who were able to pass their knowledge and skills on to other users in their companies. BCL also designed animated walkthroughs delivering on-demand e-tutorials that supplemented traditional training sessions. These Flash-based training manuals deliver basic user training sessions over the system, demonstrating for instance how to upload multiple documents or respond to a task, whilst providing additional hints and tips. The animated walkthroughs were devised as both refreshers for trained users and self-training manuals for basic users who feel confident enough to use the system after watching them rather than wishing to enrol on a traditional training course. As a result, roll out is ahead of schedule and on budget with over 1,500 users successfully using AX4online, as the implementation of BC is locally known.

BC facilitates the collation of information, knowledge and skills across all projects. For example, project and document templates improve consistency and reduce project set-up times. Projects have similar structures containing photo libraries, project email folders, and document storage areas providing familiarity for users who are members of several projects. An online central information repository that includes project email means that there are no issues with locating the latest document or drawing due to files being sent via email.

“Version control in BC is excellent and it certainly helps people to follow a more disciplined approach, particularly when they are under pressure to deliver many projects.” Glyn Hughes explained: “Historically there had been lots of key information kept in emails whereas now emails are filed around a particular project, making it much easier to track history and get up to speed quickly on projects”.



Above: United Utilities required their extranet branded to reflect their corporate colours. The customised Process Investment homepage shows an interactive map giving rapid access to projects and a news database showing latest project news. Capital Projects and Networks Investment divisions have homepages relevant to their projects.

The in-house Administration team carry out a range of tasks from administration of user accounts to the provision of management information on system usage and user profiles. A benefit of the reporting tools is that United Utilities can monitor usage and capacity independent of BC. This information supports capacity planning and training activities. The sheer size, scale, and duration of AMP4 mean that visibility of projects to all concerned is critical to overall success. Implementation of BC has enabled Unites Utilities to adopt a high level of standardisation that in turn has facilitated a consistent approach across multiple projects.

“Implementation was much faster than usual and the common element is Business Collaborator” concludes Hughes. Although initially deployed for project collaboration on AMP4 in Process Investment, its success has led to BC being rolled out to other business units, enabling online collaboration across the entire business to support the Capital Investment programme.

Management Issues

As the programme is set to run over a five-year period there are likely to be ongoing training requirements and the animated walkthroughs have been used to augment traditional training methods. As well as providing reference for existing users, as new people join the programme or change roles in the future, they offer a cost effective way for users to get up to speed on using the system fast.

Key Lessons

- To achieve efficiency on programmes of this scale it is critical to have clearly defined processes in place and time spent up front in configuration with BC consultants helped tremendously.
- Ensure you have appropriate training in place; don't just introduce the system and expect it to work.
- Be aware and deal with cultural change and differences across all companies.
- Encouraging use can be an issue as some users don't always see the benefits to themselves.

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