

HIGH ROAD TO WORK ORGANISATION

CASE STUDY

Province Noord Holland



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Abstract

Developments in ICT have consequences for the way organisations organise their daily work. Electronic systems can carry out tasks previously carried out by employees. This case study describes the process of implementation of a new document flow-management system at a public organisation and the impact the change has had on the employees.

HI-RES Case Study: Province Noord Holland

Sector

Nace code L.75, Archiving & Registration of a public administration

Key Words

Flexibility; document flow management system; public administration

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1. Background Information

The case study describes changes in the Archiving & Registration Department of a public administration organisation - a province in The Netherlands (Nace code L.75). The province employs 1500 people, has 12 departments, 55 bureaus and over a hundred projects and is the administrative tier between the local authorities and the Dutch government. Its main job is to make sure that laws are executed rightfully. It is also responsible for road building, housing and for serving the public well being. The Archiving & Registration department receives all incoming documents and registers, distributes and archives them; it provides services to the whole of the organisation.

2. Drivers for Change

The main reasons for starting the change and implementing a new document flow management system were:

- The old documents management system was outdated and not millennium proof.
- A new system was needed to improve the speed and efficiency of the document flow from receipt in the department to delivery to the addressee.

To realise the change a project group was formed with people from outside the Archiving & Registration Department who controlled the implementation process. This project group operated in close cooperation with employees of the Archiving & Registration Department.

3. Characteristics and Process of Change

The orientation phase ran from May 1998 till June 1998 during which a new documents management system was chosen. A project group of three people was set up to control the whole implementation process. Two of them belonged to the Archiving & Registration Department, but were in relatively new posts. The project group worked alongside people from the Archiving & Registration Department to establish the system requirements. Seven work groups were then formed to make a considered choice of the most appropriate new system and realise its implementation. In November/December 1998 the system was acquired. It had a good quality/price ratio and could easily be implemented within the organisation. In January 1999 adjustments were made to the system in order to enable its implementation within the organisation. The system required well-defined process descriptions.

The project group worked on the redesign of the whole workflow specific for this organisation. Nine standard processes were defined. Because there were 15 departments in the total workflow, it was decided to create a specific process for each department to assist the employees, especially the secretaries. In total over 700 new processes were set up, which was time consuming.

In January 1999 the pilot system was tested prior to implementation in May 1999. Employees of the Archiving & Registration Department, secretaries, some managers and other interested employees were divided in groups of three. The objectives were to test the system, to engage the employees and to let them get used to the new system. This pilot also enabled employees to be trained to work with the new system.

The change process consists of the following relevant steps:

1. Decision of the management to implement a new document management system.
2. Orientation phase for the selection of a new document management system.
3. Formation of work groups to select and control the implementation process and to update the system.
4. Selection of a new documents management system.

5. Redesign of a new workflow for the whole organisation.
6. Practice test of the new system.
7. Implementation of the new system.

The purpose of the change process was to effect an improvement of the efficiency of the flow of documents.

At present, the workflow management system is still in use and has not been changed much. The organisation is now facing a new reorganisation in which a planning and control system will be implemented to determine the quantity, quality and throughput times of documents within the organisation. Three internal employees are working on this and no changes in personnel are expected.

4. Obstacles to Change

Some obstacles in the change process were:

- The employees considered the possibility of quality and speed control of the new system as threatening; it was now possible to measure individual productivity which had not been possible with the old system. This led to decreased willingness to support the change.
- The work changed from archiving to registration. People who had worked on archiving were afraid they would lose their jobs and this in turn led to decreased willingness to support the change.
- Both of the above points resulted in a temporary increase of the absence rate. In addition, communication and relations in the project group deteriorated and the system was manipulated by the employees so that at times, it temporarily stopped functioning.
- A technical obstacle was that the hard disks for the stored data of the documents filled up much more quickly than expected. This required extra adaptation of the system and extra cost.
- Some employees found it difficult to adjust to the new technology.

The resistance of the employees led to frustrations and confrontations in the work groups. To prevent these developments from escalating further, it was decided to communicate only when new improvements were almost in the final stages.

5. Risk Analysis

The change took longer than expected because the implementation of the new system required (unexpected) adaptation of the work processes; it was therefore more expensive than planned. The result of this was that a more thorough change in the organisation and its processes was realised.

6. Benefits of Change

For the organisation the following benefits were realised:

- The introduction of a quality control system led to an improvement in the quality of archiving and registration. Based on the results of a questionnaire, there was about a 40% improvement.
- Productivity of all employees increased by 20%.
- The total database of addresses was "cleaned" which increased the efficiency of the system.

- Initially it was found that the same work could be done with less people - a 6% reduction of the number of employees was possible. However, these employees were taken on again later to improve quality.
- The management can easily get information from the system.
- Decreased absence rate; the highest rate had been 25% and has now decreased to an average of 7%.

Conclusions

This case shows that in spite of a participative change approach the employees still present obstacles to the change process. It is also possible that during the change process unforeseen consequences for the organisational structure arise. This slows down the change process and requires extra expenditure. It is therefore important to reconsider and redesign the production and control structure first and then make changes to the information structure and implement new information systems. In this way the conditions for successful implementation are set.

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