

Briefing Notes on how The National Archives put in place an electronic records management system (ERMS)

Background

Prior to procurement, The National Archives spent a considerable amount of time researching the basis on which to introduce an electronic record management systems (ERMS). This included considering how to establish a file plan, and the likely users of the solution. Users tested the file plan proposals to ensure they worked. The outcome was to create a single file plan for the entire organisation in order to facilitate shared working and workflow, to adopt *Keyword AAA* terminology for classification, and to implement the system for both document and record storage.

The National Archives also referenced its own functional requirements for electronic records management, published in 1999, when developing the project's statement of requirements.

The 1999 functional requirements for electronic records management systems was one of the outcomes of an Invest to save budget project, which aimed to develop cross-government requirements for electronic records management systems, and to evaluate available software products against these requirements. These requirements were themselves revised in 2002.

Procurement of a solution

The tendering process complied with the official Journal of the European Union's legislative requirements. The National Archives chose Objective Corporation and its Objective software for The National Archives EDRMS solution. The Objective software had met the functional requirements for electronic records management systems in UK government (published in 1999).

We will use the software for managing all business related documents and records. This will help The National Archives achieve the 2004 target set by the government for all newly created public records to be stored and retrieved electronically. The Objective software is an extendable product, including components for workflow and content management.

Project management and delivery approach

The National Archives are located at the main site in Kew, west London, with the family record centre, based in north London, which links into the centrally hosted system. Use of the EDRM tool has been delivered to around 600 people, targeted at all staff who are likely to create records on behalf of the organisation. The remainder are do not use IT as part of their daily work, or are temporary and their line manager will file any required records on their behalf.

A project was set up to roll out the tool and manage the change process within the organisation. The National Archives numerous departments were divided into two main phases:

- Phase 1, a pilot to a total of 80 people, which comprised representative departments from each of the 3 internal directorates, plus the executive. This was followed by an 8-week gap for evaluation and rework
- Phase 2 consisted of the remaining departments split into two groups, with a 2 week gap between these groups.

The National Archives approach to change management

We approached change management early in the project, prior to the selection of software, by engaging each business unit in the development of file plans etc. appropriate to their business requirements. A variety of communication vehicles used including leaflets, posters, and newsletters.

A new role of department records manager was devised within each business unit to support the use of the tool. This has established an internal network with ownership and some devolved responsibilities.

Rollout was by department, so that users typically went live the day after receiving training, and no department rollout lasted longer than 2 weeks. 'See and tell' workshops were used to give phase 2 staff advance information on the phase 1 process.

Training and support

The training elements included a department briefing, and training in records management, the file plan, and Objective. Each user was given a half day's training in the required record management practice, prior to going live, followed by a half day's PC-based instruction on the use of the tool. Follow-up or recap training was available to all staff. Training sessions were typically for 9 people at a time. Specialist training was provided beyond this for helpdesk staff, departmental record managers, and system administrators.

Once users were live, 'floor-walking' was provided, when project team members were on hand within the department for a couple of days to assist with any procedural or technical problems. Where necessary, additional one-to-one training was provided for the duration of the project and there is additional desktop support available beyond the standard IT Helpdesk.

Technical features, interfaces, and legacy systems

The National Archives has, to date, primarily used Microsoft solutions for databases, and the Objective solution is also a Microsoft-compatible solution. Users have Windows 2000 client PCs, and the Objective application is hosted on Windows 2000 servers with a SQL Server 2000 database.

There are no direct interface links implemented to other The National Archives systems, but Objective have been contracted to provide export capability in XML format that will permit archiving to the Digital Archive at The National Archives.

The National Archives had an ERMS already in use on a restricted basis. The project has migrated data from that system into Objective. The registry of paper files has been closed, but there has been no retrospective inclusion of paper records in the EDRMS.

Project timescale

The procurement decision was made in December 2002. Implementation of rollout to the pilot departments commenced in early June 2003 with rollout completed mid-December 2003. The National Archives was formed in April 2003, with the coming together of the Public Records Office (PRO) and the Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC); relocating to the site in December 2003, and trained to use the EDRMS by mid January 2004.

Post-project arrangements

Considerable work has gone in to ensuring that the EDRMS is supported on an ongoing basis. This has included integration with Information Communications Technology procedures and support model, defining and delivery training to new joiners and those whose role has changed within The National Archives, and handing over system administration to the Departmental Records Officer (DRO).

Issues

It was a significant effort to develop detailed internal records management procedures and the file plan so it was essential to allow enough time to ensure that the system was tested to meet these as well as user requirements.

The types of user at The National Archives cover a very broad spectrum including, for example, records managers, researchers, archivists and finance and marketing professionals, so training courses and support have to take account of all these needs.

The future

Now that rollout has completed and all business areas are aware of what an EDRMS can deliver, we have established a further change management programme to optimise the use of the system and to re-consider some of the business issues and seek to resolve these.