HOW THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE TOOK CONTROL OF ENTERPRISE PROJECTS

When the University of Melbourne consolidated its systems in support of a shared services business model, it looked to Sensei Project Solutions for a boost to the capabilities of its Enterprise Project Management Office. Over the course of five years, Sensei has substantially enhanced the University's project management capability by fine tuning Microsoft Project Online with the implementation of solutions including Sensei Integration Hub, Sensei Reporting Packs and Sensei Reporting Hub. Crucially, Sensei has also led the integration of Project Online with the University's Enterprise Resource Planning solution for consolidation of financial reporting, while building a bespoke solution for human resources management (Contractor Recruitment Management Solution, "CRMS").

As a result, the University today enjoys a highly capable EPMO which supports a standardised approach to project delivery with transparent and accurate information available at all times.

Established in 1853, the University of Melbourne is ranked number 1 in Australia and is among the leading universities internationally. With 10 academic units, the University is home to more than 4,600 staff members and some 52,000 students. The University is associated with numerous institutes and research centres, including the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, Florey Institute of Neuroscience and Mental Health, the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research and the Grattan Institute. Among its 15 graduate schools are the Melbourne Business School, the Melbourne Law School and the Melbourne Medical School.

COMPANY NAME
The University of Melbourne

INDUSTRY
Education

LOCATION(S)
Melbourne, Australia

HEADQUARTER
Melbourne, Australia

SIZE
4,600 staff and 52,000 students

SITUATION

Sheridan Nanscawen, EPMO analyst at the University of Melbourne, says there are 14 people in the EPMO. "We're very much an enabling office setting a high premium on corporate reporting. Our projects range from construction and building-related initiatives, with the biggest worth over half a billion dollars, while there are always a series of internal IT and business improvement projects underway at any time."

Examples of the projects conduced through the EPMO include a $100 million life sciences complex, opened in 2019. Located in the Melbourne biomedical precinct, the new facility offers Australia's most sophisticated STEMM teaching laboratories and facilities. A $200 million major capital works project at the Southbank campus including the library, is set for completion mid-2020 and includes construction of a new state-of-the-art conservatorium for musicians and the conversion of historically important buildings for use as future-ready training facilities.

A new student precinct on the Parkville campus is currently under development, with a commitment of $229 million and an anticipated completion date of early 2022.

Ms Nanscawen explains the organisation made the move to Microsoft Project Online as there were information deficits in the management of projects. "Various projects used various methods to keep track. For example, construction used spreadsheets with macros that continually broke, IT teams used a legacy system beset with limitations and which required plenty of customisation and support, and business teams used their own offline processes and tools."

In an organisation where more than 300 projects collectively valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars are underway at any given time, gaining a clear view of any one project was difficult. The problem was exacerbated at a portfolio view. "Collating reports was a one- or two-week exercise and with multiple disparate data sources, validation was a challenge. We just weren't sure the information was trustworthy."

Project Managers, too, faced difficulty in the absence of a standard approach and toolset in the delivery of their initiatives.

Ms Nanscawen says that when the University moved to a shared services business model, it examined the market for suitable products to support the consolidation of all projects into the (then) newly established Enterprise Project Management Office. "Rather than disparate reporting from our various business units, we wanted a single view. This exercise showed up the multiple approaches and practices being used in each area, and the difficulty this caused in managing people's time and resources."

While Microsoft Project Online emerged as the preferred software, Ms Nanscawen points out that at the early stages, it still wasn't a solution. "We realised we were setting off on a maturity journey and that it would take several years to go through setting up EPMO with an enterprise-wide set of tools and standards for how we manage and report on projects."

For that journey, it needed a partner well-versed in project management best practices, a task for which Sensei – with its multiple independently developed enhancements for Project Online – is ideally suited.

SOLUTION

Key among the enhancements delivered by Sensei to Project Online is integration with the University's Oracle-derived ERP solution. "This delivers a major benefit and a capability uplift for project managers; where they once had to rely on monthly financial reporting, they now have a live feed that runs overnight and delivers financial data as recent as the previous day," says Ms Nanscawen.

A crucial component applied for the task is Sensei Integration Hub, an Azure-hosted solution which facilitates the movement of data between Oracle and Project Online.

A second tool developed and built by Sensei specifically for the University is the Contractor Recruitment Management System (CRMS). This provides capability to manage externally contracted project managers effectively, including all aspects of the hiring process from notifications to recruiting agents, through to onboarding and time management.

Delivering the all-important reporting on which the EPMO and the University's executive officers rely, Sensei deployed its Azure-hosted Reporting Hub data warehouse.

Reporting Hub synchronizes Project Online data in real-time, combining it with Oracle ERP data for combined reporting which includes financial data. Reporting Hub works hand in glove with Sensei Report Packs, which have provided the University with base reports that have been further developed to accurately meet its reporting requirements, with Microsoft Power BI as a further layer providing visualisations for the creation of more effective, more engaging reports.

BENEFITS REALISED

By using Sensei's Project, Portfolio and Work Management solution The University of Melbourne can today enjoy substantially improved project visibility and reporting across the organisation.

REPORTING
Key Stakeholders and departments have access to consistent and trusted reporting from a central function.

EASE OF INFORMATION ACCESS
Corporate finance can access the capital plan profile to track spend and manage treasury.

CONSOLIDATED VIEW OF PROJECTS
The EPMO have a consolidated view of all projects including project contractors.

FORECASTING
The EPMO and corporate finance have easy access to trusted reports that can track and forecast spend in a detailed manner.

RESULTS

Powered by a mature and capable EPMO, the benefits to the University are clear: consistent and trusted reporting from a centralised function which provides the ability for corporate finance to understand the capital plan profile, track spend and value in a detailed manner, forecast spend and better manage treasury.

Asked how many projects are presently underway, Ms Nanscawen used Project Online to provide a precise answer: "Right now, we have 309 projects...there are 118 IT projects in progress, and we can see exactly the point at which each one is."

These immediate insights, she says, equip the University to rapidly identify and address any issues; at the time of writing, the effects of COVID-19 were taking hold. "With this solution, we're able to identify the projects which are less pressing, potentially put them on hold, or reallocate resources to those which might be more important as enablers for, for example, working from home."

CRMS, continues Ms Nanscawen, has been taken on by a number of business areas outside the EPMO. "It lets us manage and consolidate a single view of our project contractors, reporting we could not replicate easily with current systems. It means we can monitor and manage contracts, something which is key in this current period as it delivers a clear understanding of who is on the ground, what contracts are underway, and along with reporting out of PowerBI, it means we have an improved capability of understanding our contractor commitments."

The EPMO has used Power BI to enhance reporting capability; "In house reporting skills in Power BI has enabled the EPMO to create customised reporting specific to the University's needs. It also means our internal clients have self-service on project reporting, so those who need reports can access them whenever they need rather than being dependent on a monthly cycle by which time crucial information may come too late."

"Not only does the EPMO now enjoy a consistent source of truth on all projects at any time, but that data is quite literally at the fingertips of those who need it. Equally important our project managers now have a standard methodology and toolset for entering data; coupled with a robust quality assurance process.

Overtime this enabled us to develop Executive support and trust in the reporting, giving means to be able to address problems as they arise rather than retrospectively."

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