

The Office of Government Commerce - Modernising procurement

The Office of Government Commerce has successfully completed a major project to update its purchasing methods.

The OGC Service Desk (the flagship Centre of Excellence in Customer Service), which uses the *Marval Service Management Suite™* went live in April, and was both on time and within budget, says Brian Johnson, Director of Knowledge Management within OGC's customer relations division.



But he adds: "The above statement, although true, makes the project sound too easy and does not accurately reflect any of the challenges and frustrations encountered, or the levels of hard work and commitment shown by the project team throughout the three-month lifecycle of the project."

OGC was set up to lead a wide-ranging programme to modernise procurement in government and deliver substantial value for money improvements. Working at the heart of government, OGC is developing an integrated procurement policy and strategy across government. OGC represents the UK on procurement matters in Europe, in the World Trade Organisation and other international fora.

In close co-operation with departments, OGC is taking a fresh approach to many important aspects of procurement policy and practice. By improving performance, OGC is helping government to raise its game in commercial activities.

Value for money in procurement comes from focusing on the optimum combination of whole life customer quality, rather than initial purchase price. In support of this, the OGC's agenda is based on defining 'procurement' to mean the whole life-cycle process of acquisition of goods, services and works from third parties. In its first year, OGC has concluded a strategic partnership with Vodafone which will save the Government over £38 million over two years.

OGC (through The Buying Agency) has also negotiated the Watermark contract, an important step forward in government water consumption with the potential to deliver savings of 10 per cent a year on water services, amounting to £30 million a year for central government alone.

A priority for OGC in the coming months will be the gateway review process, which aims to improve the management of projects through the use of

independent peer reviews. The reviews will identify and implement actions needed for project success, understand and apply best practice and ensure lessons learnt are shared.

Peter Gershon, formerly CEO of, among other bodies, British Aerospace, was appointed CEO of the OGC in April 2000. The role he defined for OGC is best expressed through the vision statement: Working with civil government as a catalyst to achieve best value for money in commercial activities.

As part of his strategy to achieve the vision, Gershon planned to fully absorb the component parts of OGC, including CCTA, PACE, the Buying Agency and HM Treasury policy teams into the OGC by April 2001. He proposed that a single service desk should form part of the newly structured organisation to provide a unified source of contact and information for new (or confused) customers.

Late in December 2000, Gershon initiated the work, stating that the service desk should operate as a centre of

excellence in customer service in the new organisation -- and he wanted things operational by 2nd April 2001.

This meant that there were effectively just three months to deliver the project, to expand on the concept behind his initial statement, to gather the more detailed requirements, and then design and implement the service.

Gershon knew that he was setting a difficult challenge for the team but was sure that if the right people, processes and technology were brought together then his vision would be achievable within the timescales he had set.

It was critical to the success of this high profile project, therefore, that the right supplier was selected. OGC needed a service management software tool that complied with the ITIL processes (a natural requirement since CCTA was about to be absorbed into the new organisation). The supplier had to be selected carefully, ensuring that it had a high level of expertise in service management, a proven track record, and most importantly, the same high level of commitment as the OGC team.

After careful consideration and a rigorous selection process, OGC chose to work with Marval, whose service management software tool (MSM (Marval Service Management Suite™) is one of the most *ITIL compliant* in the industry.

With selection out of the way, everyone had to hit the ground running. Marval very quickly gathered an understanding of OGC needs

and with careful, targeted questioning, pulled together the scope and requirements of the project and produced a detailed project plan which further highlighted the tight schedules that would need to be met.

Although deadlines were extremely tight, as with most 'real life' projects the requirements changed regularly but the 'go live' date remained the same. In this case the requirements changed far more frequently than usual as the different elements of the new OGC organisation became clearer. There was also a constant change in project personnel to contend with throughout the extremely short lifecycle of the project, which was caused by high volumes of staff moving to new roles within the new OGC structure as each element was announced.

The Marval team provided the continuity and enthusiasm needed to keep the rest of the team focused on the key requirements of implementing the Service Desk, as a single point of contact to provide a professional, effective service to OGC customers.

The key processes, procedures and workflows were developed and documented ready for the people to follow and to be mapped on to the technology. As we all know the key to good service management is the right combination of people, processes and technology. With all these in place OGC was ready to go - or was it?

The selection of staff to manage the desk would be crucial to the success of the project moving forward. The two-week period prior to Go Live proved that the right

choices had been made. Although the personnel who were to manage the service desk were not released from their 'old' jobs until two weeks before Go Live, and the staff who were to work on the desk were not able to be told of their new roles until one week before, (they were told on the Friday and began training the following Monday), they all hit the ground running and soaked up all the information that was given to them in a very short period of time.

They were also able to make use of the considerable knowledge they all had of the OGC operation to fine-tune the processes and procedures that had been developed for them. At this point the experience of Marval and the continuity they provided throughout the project really paid dividends. The different members of the new team were trained on the use of the product, which proved to be very easy to use, and were given a detailed overview of the service management principles and an understanding of the best practices that would form the foundation of the service they would now be providing.

OGC learned a lot throughout the course of the project, and the pragmatic approach taken to project management on the tight timescale proved successful. The Service Desk went live on schedule, within budget and there were no casualties.

OGC learned several key lessons, of which the first is that there can be too many cooks.

Multiple internal consultants were hired, each with a slightly different agenda, which took focus away from the main objectives and

caused much confusion. To be fair, those who engaged consultant support believed that they were doing so for good reasons and did so with the best intentions. Without central co-ordination of these people (they were managed in pockets), it led to duplication of work and a few missed opportunities and deadlines.

The second lesson: make sure that you fully scope out the roles, responsibilities, skill sets and any other requirements of external help (including consultants) and don't be afraid to check their credentials.

The reasoning here is that the project depended on people with a good understanding of service management best practices. The members of the team who had these credentials spent a lot of valuable time keeping others (who had very high skill levels in their particular field, but no understanding of the ITIL principles) on track and explaining certain concepts. This need not be an issue if the project timescales allow time to bring the team members up to speed, however in this case we did not have that luxury.

The third lesson: keep one internal dedicated person in control. Marval advised, designed and planned the Service Desk. The overall project control was initially assigned to an external project manager, but this proved to be another 'best intentions' appointment that failed to work out. Regular meetings driven by the project owner resolved the problem.

This might have seemed to be the end of the project, but it is really just the beginning. Service management isn't something that you do on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It's a philosophy to live by and is a powerful foundation on which a successful business can be run. The first phase is complete. The OGC Service Desk is active and has proved a resounding success.

Reports were produced at the end of the first month of operation and it was the first time that such detailed information had been made available to the senior management team, information which would enable them to make business decisions based on fact, not best guesses.

Three months on, a report is now published monthly on the intranet, the directorates have instant access to such information as: which of OGC's customers are making use of their services; what they are enquiring about, and how many of those enquires are dealt with directly by the service desk; how many are passed over to each directorate for further information to be provided (and how quickly they are dealt with).

The new Service Desk is proving to be an untapped resource of essential management information, which is highlighting other areas for improvement and success, for the first time taking a proactive approach to service delivery rather than a reactive one.

Now that the initial manic start-up stage is over, this is where the real work starts and OGC begins to reap the benefits of the hard work and effort expended by Marval, and the OGC project and Service Desk teams. It is important to keep the momentum alive and look at areas of improvement.

Work is already underway to allow the business to have controlled direct access to the information via the Web. It has also become evident that OGC can utilise the rich functionality of the Marval *Service Management Suite*TM to support the range of services that OGC offers to the community both within government and industry at large.