



The Scottish Government's E-Business Suite Release 12 project

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Oracle E-Business Suite Release 12 was announced in January 2007, as part of a wider series of release announcements. While implementing Oracle E-Business Suite Release 11.5.10 the Scottish Government made the decision to change the project and implement Oracle E-Business Suite Release 12. The Release 12 implementation was successful, with the transition from Release 11.5.10 taking only three weeks and generating improved business acceptance of the product. Ovum's David Mitchell examines the lessons learned from the upgrade.

Overview

Key messages

Release 12 has improved usability, which can drive greater business acceptability

One of the key elements of Oracle E-Business Suite Release 12 was a focus on improved usability, with Oracle taking on board its own usability research plus the expertise from PeopleSoft and Siebel development teams. As a result, the user experience is simpler and more consistent in Release 12, and there is greater focus on task-based interfaces that support the work that users have to achieve.

The focus on usability has improved the business acceptance of Oracle E-Business Suite Release 12 compared with earlier implementations within the Scottish Government.

Moving from 11.5.10 to 12 during an implementation can be achieved successfully and at low risk

The decision to move to Oracle E-Business Suite Release 12 was made while the Oracle E-Business Suite Release 11.5.10 implementation was still under way. Upgrading software releases, particularly a major release, during a project is traditionally considered to be poor project management practice and somewhat risky. The conference room pilot (CRP) set-up that was built in from Oracle E-Business Suite Release 11.5.10 was upgraded in only three weeks to an equivalent on Oracle E-Business Suite Release 12, with the project resuming directly afterwards.



The decision to upgrade to Release 12 showed little business and technical risk for the Scottish Government, and was executed well by its implementer, TCS.

CRP is a key stage of upgrade

The conference room pilot (CRP) has become an extremely useful tool when customers look for a rapid implementation of business applications like HR, ERP and CRM. They enable the rapid creation of a software baseline and encourage business user participation, which lessens business change management issues.

The lesson from the Scottish Government experience is that upgrading a CRP instance of E-Business Suite from 11.5.10 to 12 can be readily achieved in a short time period. Upgrading during a CRP phase also encourages business interaction with the upgrade process, working with the CRP instance before and after the instance has been upgraded. A pure 'technical upgrade', or one that is done remotely (factory-style), doesn't produce the same level of business engagement and may increase the chance of business users rejecting the software.

HRMS is a key component of any broader ERP implementation

The implementation of Oracle E-Business Suite Release 12 within the Scottish Government is based around a Human Resources Management System (HRMS) core. It interfaces with a number of other systems, most notably the payroll system provided by LogicaCMG and a business directory that in turn integrates with the Microsoft Active Directory for the Scottish Government.

HRMS is, and always has been, one of the foundation blocks of a successful, integrated, ERP implementation – with people being one of the key assets that need to be managed across the organisation.

Background and analysis

The Scottish Government project's organisational scope

The Scottish Government employs around 8,000 staff and has a further 2,000 contingent workers, and is responsible for the government of Scotland through a core function and a number of agencies.

The remit of the project was to provide an HRMS platform that helped the Scottish Government manage its staff better across that core function and around 23 different agencies, including agencies such as the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency and the Scottish Public Pensions Agency. The Scottish Prison Service was not included in the organisation scope of the project.



History

The Scottish Government selected Oracle E-Business Suite as its HRMS platform during 2005. It was an existing user of Oracle Financials and had been for many years. Oracle was still engaged in takeover discussions with PeopleSoft at the time of the decision, and this played a role in the Scottish Government selecting Oracle E-Business Suite as its HRMS software platform. However, it should also be remembered that Oracle E-Business Suite HRMS was the market-leading HRMS platform in the UK at the time – substantially ahead of PeopleSoft and others – and that the global strength of PeopleSoft HRMS software was not replicated in the UK market.

In February 2006, the initial implementation project was stopped, as the project was experiencing delays, lack of business commitment and other project management issues. A review of the project was initiated in April 2006, to learn the lessons from the failed implementation and to determine whether a revised project should be restarted. The review was led by Peter Collings, a senior civil servant within the Scottish Government.

The review produced a revised business case and implementation plan, with that revised business case being approved in 3Q06. A new prime contractor for the implementation was selected in January 2007, with the intention of basing the implementation on Oracle E-Business Suite 11.5.10.

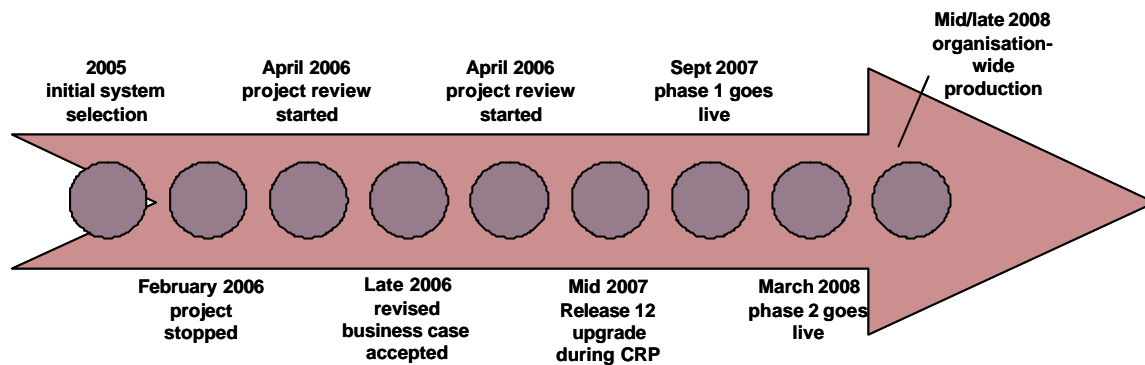
The first phase of the implementation went into production on 26 September 2007, with a focus on the professional HR users and on absence management functionality. A larger second phase went into production in March 2008 with a focus on self-service HR for the wider employee base. The plan is for the final implementation to support 10,000 employees across the wider Scottish Government, with up to 2,000 concurrent users on the system at any point in time.

The project team was relatively small in size, peaking at 15 Scottish Government staff and 12 TCS staff.

The timeline of the overall project is shown in *Figure 1*.



Figure 1 **Timeline of the Scottish Government's Oracle E-Business Suite HRMS project and the Release 12 upgrade**



Source: Ovum

Initial drivers

The Scottish Government had a number of different business drivers when it made the decision to revitalise its HRMS systems in 2005. These were:

- **cost.** The lack of integrated HRMS within the previous environment was forcing data to be manually entered into multiple applications, and processed through multiple different applications. This was proving costly for both IT and business respectively
- **data quality.** Existing systems were fragmented and there were significant data quality issues that were caused by that fragmentation and lack of integration. This led to a lack of business confidence in the data they were provided with and/or a lack of confidence in business decisions that were taken, based on the data provided
- **management information.** The existing systems did not provide quality management information. Lack of quality management information meant that it was difficult to address HR-related business issues such as absence management. Providing quality management information enabled absenteeism to be managed more professionally, producing better business outcomes
- **recruitment.** Like all employers, the Scottish Government is engaged in a battle to attract and retain high quality people. In Scotland, the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the new machinery of government that surrounds it means that the need to recruit high quality staff is even more important. Existing systems and processes were too slow, resulting in difficulties in recruiting the correct staff.



The Release 12 upgrade decision

In May 2007, the project team produced a strategy paper recommending that the project implementation be delivered on Oracle E-Business Suite Release 12, rather than the originally planned Release 11.5.10. Several elements were important in the recommendation.

- Release 12 was underpinned by a more modern technology stack than 11.5.10, with a newer version of the Oracle database, JInitiator. Being based on a more modern technology stack was felt to reduce technical risk for the project.
- Although it had substantial new functionality in many areas, Release 12 was a continuity release for HRMS. There were no major architectural changes, and the focus was on consolidation of previous functionality from the Family Packs together with extensive localisations. This meant that the functional and architectural risk in upgrading to Release 12 was small.
- Release 11.5.10 in the CRP required a number of post-release patches to be installed, whereas Release 12 did not. Having fewer patches to install meant that the technical risk in migrating from development to production environments was lower with Release 12.
- Upgrades between earlier versions of Oracle applications have not always been easy, as is true for upgrades of business application software from all vendors. The Scottish Government had previously upgraded its Oracle Financials system to 11.5.10, and they were able to treat this upgrade as a benchmark for a potential Release 12 upgrade. It was this benchmarking that convinced the project team that moving to Release 12 in the implementation phase was a better option than a post-implementation migration, especially when compared to the possibility of multiple future upgrades.

Release 12 project lessons

A number of different lessons came out of the Release 12 upgrade and its business implementation from technical business perspectives. These include:

- usability for professional users. Release 12 focused more on usability, reducing the number of forms needed in a particular task flow. The simplification of task flow was a more important element of improved usability than aesthetics here
- usability of iRecruitment. The improved look and feel of iRecruitment was particularly noted, and one where improved aesthetics and design did play a role in increasing user acceptability. The 11.5.10 release had not been received well by the user community
- product quality. Product quality was improved in Release 12, with the project reporting around eight technical assistance requests (TARs) and



only three to four priority 1 problems. This is an improvement on prior releases and a sign that product quality has been an increased area of focus

- workflow. Workflow configuration has always been a sensitive area in business application configuration, determining the business rules for things like escalations and delegations. The Scottish Government found that it needed to revisit initial workflow configuration after implementation, as it became clearer that some formal business rules were not always workable in practice. This is a common lesson to learn when configuring business applications – there is a difference between formal and informal business rules
- apathy. There was neither a strong adverse or a strong positive reaction from the majority of self-service users in the broader workforce. On the face of it, this could be considered to be an issue. However, the reality is that users simply want to do simple tasks with the least possible fuss; they don't want to interact and 'have an experience' with the software. A lack of strong response simply means that people can do what they need to do. The key lesson is that soliciting feedback from professional users and self-service users needs to be done separately, as two different and discrete forms of response are to be expected
- customisation and configuration. The Scottish Government, like many users, sought to reduce the volume of configuration and customisation to a minimum, but it still customised in two areas – firstly, simplification. Even though the Release 12 forms are simpler than in prior releases, the Scottish Government sought to make them even simpler, removing some elements that were not necessary for them. Secondly, they used special information types to support local processes (e.g. the declaration of gifts) to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest.



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