

## Case study: Cullum

### Cullum retunes its project planning to drive a high performance business



#### About Cullum

Cullum Detuners Limited is a world-leading engineering company with a proven track record in providing advanced solutions to the Aerospace, Energy, Marine and Nuclear Sectors, in the form of high-specification noise control equipment, turbine support for power generation and other solutions.

Careful project planning and on-time customer delivery is as critical to its business as engineering excellence – and when the company decided to focus on improving that capability even further, it turned to Elecosoft to advise it on how to switch out MS Project and deploy Powerproject as a strategic business tool.

Cullum Detuners Limited has been working with customers in the most exacting of engineering industries for many years. Established in 1898, it now works with customers spanning Nuclear, Energy, Marine and Aerospace.

With a requirement to design, manufacture and install high-specification engineered equipment to exact timescales, project planning was always a factor for the Cullum team. Yet the senior management team was aware that further improvements could be made. Action was spurred when economic turbulence hit the oil and



gas sector. As well as restructuring the business, the leadership identified a need for even greater consistency in delivery, a desire for more repeatable practices, and a reduction in business risk from project delays or issues. The company made a decision to refocus on planning.

#### Putting planning at the heart of the business

The company had already recruited an expert planner, David Brinklow, and expanded the planning team to include Project Co-ordinator Hannah Whitmore. This team was tasked with exploring how planning could be brought closer to the heart of the company and its culture. Hannah explained the challenge: “Although planning was always a factor, we needed to become far slicker and deepen everyone’s understanding of what we were doing and how we were doing it. To create a more project-

focused business we needed to create cohesive project teams, regardless of disciplines. We needed to be able to see exactly where time was being taken at every stage, from reviewing suppliers to working with manufacturing lead times, to managing where we were waiting on information, and to balance out any customer changes that could cause delay.”

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Planning at Cullum had not been done in a consistent way in the past. Some individuals in different departments created plans, using MS Project, while some planning was outsourced when a need for a fully worked project plan was required by a customer. When David arrived, he was already an experienced Powerproject user – but, to avoid bias, did not lead the software research project, handing the responsibility to Hannah. She said: “The challenge we set out to meet was to enable programmes to drive projects. To do that, we needed a tool which was fit for purpose. We undertook a review of how we programmed currently, and looked at MS Project, Primavera P6 and Powerproject. I did a lot of research, and paid particular attention to the case studies, and built a business case for moving away from MS Project. I found Powerproject to be more intuitive,

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The planning team’s main concern was that the software would be used effectively and consistently. To ensure that, they arranged for Elecosoft to help them bring the solution into the company. “We purchased 6 licenses, including 5 floating licenses that could be used by different people across the business. Elecosoft came along and did a Consultancy day, speaking to each of the senior management team to understand the business needs. The senior management team’s concerns were about things like departmental performance and resource planning – whereas for the sales team it was a need for progression and the ability to do ‘what if’ planning. Lindsey, our Elecosoft consultant, had to absorb a lot of information to understand the management’s aims, and what the templates required would look like.”

The planning team knew that direct training would be needed for all potential users in the business. While not everyone would be required to create programmes from scratch, they would be critical to ensuring the right information was input, so that programmes would have value. Hannah stated that “The biggest hurdle we had was getting people

to understand that MS Project isn’t the holy grail of planning – and that planning isn’t a dark art. We needed to get across that increasing familiarity with planning would reduce people’s worries about doing things differently. Elecosoft tailored the training to help us communicate that. We held training over two days for representatives from across the business including the senior management team, the drawing office manager and two of the team leaders, some people from the projects team, and a couple more from sales.”

The team were very happy with the outcome of the training, which allowed them to implement Powerproject successfully across the business. “It was a really good training day. Lee, our Elecosoft trainer, was really good in answering a variety of people’s questions – because everyone had very different levels of understanding. It was all tailored to us, and he spoke in plain English. If someone didn’t understand something, he took the time to explain in a different way. He walked us through everything, and it was never just ‘click this’ but explaining the reasoning behind it.”

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### Creating control, raising responsibility and reducing risk

The previous planning model used programmes more as a presentation tool for customers than for internal control and progress management. As Hannah put it: “Powerproject now enables us to question things internally, and generate a clear percentage of progress on each project. Where we have a manufacturing task, for example, it may include a number of different elements. In the past we might ask people ‘are we on target’. We had a terminology issue – people didn’t know what we meant by ‘on target’. They didn’t understand the information that

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we needed to input to get an accurate picture – such as all the different elements or stages of manufacturing, which might include design, as well as machining and production. Now we can ask more clearly for statements of progress.”

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As a result, teams and specialists across the business are understanding their own role in relation to project delivery much better, Hannah believes. “Using the software, we can now show the engineering team how any delay in getting drawings out to the manufacturing team or sub-contractors can directly cause project delays. They always knew that delays might mean missing a manufacturing slot – but never really had to take responsibility. People are now really being made responsible for their tasks.”

Powerproject is not just helping Cullum to keep projects on track, but also to mitigate risks that can have financial consequences. Hannah told us: “It’s common for contracts to state deadlines for the delivery of documents, such as acoustic calculations and so on, that are on the Vendor Documents List. These usually carry a percentage of contract financial penalty and, in these tougher economic times, customers will often state that they will exercise their right to levy those penalties. These can be heavy, especially on a multi-million-pound contract. Powerproject enables us to see on the programme whether something is likely to be delivered late. Because we can see the delay we can turn that into a clear cost to the business, so people understand the impact of those delays.”

Managing the implications of customer changes or delays in supplying information is a challenge that the



company faces on a regular basis. Hannah explained that “Customers often want changes and don’t anticipate that it will have an impact on their delivery. For example, they might ask for a change in materials when a project is half-way through. We can use Powerproject to show exactly how it affects their delivery. You can demonstrate everything on the programme, and justify how a cost will increase as you show that you must do additional designs, potentially scrap and entirely remake an item. The software helps us to create a basis for the conversation for the customer and explain to them that if they put a project on hold for several weeks, it can create a much longer delay due to a missed manufacturing slot.”

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### Planning for the future

Powerproject is now in daily use by the planning team, with managers and department heads becoming used to seeing programme PDFs and meeting requests for detailed information inputs. However, now that it is in active use to support projects, there is growing recognition of its potential as a business planning tool, with the senior management team now starting to look at it as a resourcing tool for departments. Since deploying Powerproject, Cullum’s planning professionals have started to work on further ways to use programme planning to enhance the business. This includes looking at new areas where templates could help create greater control and consistency, such as in procurement.

Hannah summed the position up nicely, concluding: “I think we have a really good foundation with which to work from now. We’ve increased the visibility and understanding of planning in the business. We’re now at a pivotal position in understanding what we could do with Powerproject, and we’re planning further training for people, such as production managers, who could use the software even more. People aren’t afraid of planning anymore.”

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