

Case study: Willmott Dixon

Willmott Dixon Enables Site Managers to Take Direct Action on Progress



WILLMOTT DIXON

SINCE 1852

Summary

Willmott Dixon is wholly committed to bringing its people and more accountable for the use of time.

To that end it is trialling the role that Site Progress Mobile tracking can have in enabling its project leaders and site managers become closer to its projects, more aware of project progress, and better able to manage the supply chain.

The business gains not only efficiency and greater accuracy in progress tracking, but is starting to enjoy a clearer and more accurate visibility of progress and position on the trial projects.

Willmott Dixon is one of the UK's largest privately-owned construction companies, with more than £1bn turnover and employing 3,000 staff. With a strong focus on its people, and one of the sector's highest training budgets per person, it is hard at work empowering everyone across its organisation to become involved in planning through its Fiit Time (Focused Innovation and Improvement Team for Time, see case study: elecosoft.com/willmott-dixon/fiit-time).

Around two years ago, the company moved to Powerproject as its planning



software of choice. Since then has been working to embed maximum business benefits, using it to help boost engagement and continuous improvement in project planning.

Being well aware that planning is only part of the story, however, Willmott Dixon is also very keen to sharpen up progress management across the business. As National Planning Manager Paul Hoskins said to us: "It's one thing doing a plan but once we're live on site, certainty of where we are and predictability of where we'll be, becomes fundamental. The project controls element is an even bigger focus

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than what we've done in the first place. There's a real drive to know where we are.”

Plans need Progress

To assist it with engaging project leaders on site in progress management and project control, the company is now rolling out Site Progress Mobile, a companion app within the Powerproject suite. It has 19 licences, in use on projects across three of its five construction business regions.

The principles of Fiit Time are to make everyone not just involved in planning, but personally accountable. Paul believes that Site Progress Mobile is helping with that: "Traditionally your planner or project lead would prepare the programme and do the majority of the tracking, but there are different managers responsible for work and the supply chain out on site. What Site Progress Mobile allows us to do is to push explicitly to them parts of the programme that they really impact, and are responsible for. Because you

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can move the information straight to a mobile phone or tablet – which all our managers use for quality and health and safety anyway – you’ve suddenly built tracking into the job they do every day.”

An end to dog-eared paper

Progress tracking with Site Progress Mobile is a neat process that is a far cry from ‘the old days’ that Paul related: “It used to be an old-fashioned process. The project lead would print the programme out, and hand it to the manager, who would walk out on site with it. It invariably came back dog-eared and dirty, and the progress updates wouldn’t always be right.”

The addition of Site Progress Mobile is generating some tangible benefits. Paul told us: “We know they are saving time. For bigger jobs, a project lead could spend half a day walking round a job, just to track the progress on a piece of paper, and then would have to put it into software and interpret it. Getting everybody involved is saving their time, and also making it more accurate, by virtue of it coming from people who really know what is going on, but have never been able to engage with it in the past.”

It is directly supportive of the initiative to get more employees personally engaged with time: “Everyone can now take responsibility for time. We’re finding this tool is making it easier to build progress tracking into what our people do, rather than it being yet another thing that they have to do for someone else.”

Clearer understanding for all

Driving greater engagement with the programme, and enabling better visibility of progress directly from sites, is helping Willmott Dixon ensure it has one, up-to-date, version of the true position on each project.

Paul projected the future that the company is hoping to create, in terms of project visibility and understanding: “Before it was very fragmented, especially on large-scale projects. A job that involves 200 homes or a £30 million education facility is diverse, with lots of people involved, and you end up with programmes generated by different

people. They can easily become slightly disconnected. Before, everyone had to track their own bit then collate it back to the main delivery programme. We are hoping using Site Progress Mobile will simplify that process, make it easier and, by virtue of that, quicker for the project, clearer for the internal customer, and help us perform better for external customers. It can help us to sharpen our focus in knowing where we are today, and that certainty will help us predict what will happen going forward.”

He went on: “Site Progress Mobile is helping us move to where we want to be in the long run. We want everyone in a team, onsite or not, to understand our position. Then we can better shape our actions going forward. This brings people closer to really understanding what our current programme is telling us. It means you can make better choices and shape your future. If you don’t know where you are, you can’t know where you’re going.”

Early adopters driving the future

The company is gaining some very positive early experience feedback from site managers, as part of its process of rollout. Gareth Williams is the Operations Manager leading the Finzels Reach build-to-rent development, in Bristol City Centre, for the company’s Wales and West Region. He stated: “As project lead you know what is going on, but are not always directly in control of all areas at all times – so you are

always chasing people for information. In the old days you had to go out onto site with a book or a print-out, mark things up manually and then repeat the exercise back in the office later on. The beauty of Site Progress Mobile is that I can allocate sections of the programme at the start of the week to our people for the areas they are directly responsible for, and they can track things as they actually happen during the week and then automatically send their updates to the programme.”

The use of mobile tools on site is playing a role in supporting the company’s ongoing commitment to engaging every person more closely with time, as Gareth confirmed: “Our people are now certainly more engaged with time and the project programme. I am seeing that, by people personally understanding our current position, they are able to better shape our future actions.”

The Site Progress Mobile app has now been requested by the fourth of the company’s five construction regions. Paul observed that the process of targeting early adopters has proved positive, in this case: “The way we like to work is to find a project that is particularly keen first, with innovators who will give anything a go. The SPM rollout now has real momentum, and when you get that it takes on a life of its own.”

The rollout of SPM is also expected to expand as they company has recognised that it complements other forward projects, such as its parallel trials of 4D construction. Paul concluded the discussion: “This is something we are excited about. We want to connect SPM to Powerproject to inform the 4D model in real time. We see huge future benefit in our managers being able to show the supply chain visually where we are on the 4D model. The manager who needs to explain where we are can then be the same person who has been out there and tracked it on his device the day before. It makes the connection between the people and the project closer. When we bring Site Progress Mobile and 4D together, we will capture the imagination of our internal audience.”

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