Digital transformation with agility at its heart

How our agile methodology made transformation flexible and savings predictable for one local authority

THE CLIENT

Our client is a council in England, covering a district that's home to nearly 150,000 people. As a second-tier local authority, it is responsible for services that include planning, environmental health, recycling, housing benefit, leisure centres, parks and seafronts. The council covers a large geographical area, which has a mix of rural, urban and coastal communities. In addition to its residents, the area attracts many tourists and holidaymakers during the summer season, creating extra demand for its leisure and environmental services in particular.

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BACKGROUND & CHALLENGES

In common with all local authorities, our client has seen central government grants drop substantially over the last decade. This has meant that doing more with less – cutting expenditure while getting better results – has become increasingly essential to the way the council works.

One key area across which the client has worked to achieve major savings and efficiencies is its IT infrastructure, systems and software. Additionally, the council was keen to improve its customer portal software, making self-service simple for residents and less expensive to provide. As a public sector organisation handling large amounts of personal data and a responsibility for providing taxpayers with good value, any changes to its IT systems and offering have to be carefully managed, secure and deliver both cost and efficiency benefits.

Thanks to strong leadership at the council, it has undergone a digital transformation journey in recent years. Intergence originally became involved with this process when we were asked to undertake a WiFi audit across the local authority's estate. Our work soon led to us becoming the council's lead partner in formulating and delivering its digital transformation strategy.

FINDING THE RIGHT SOLUTION

Our client, like many public sector organisations, was reliant on a large number of IT applications to help it deliver its many services. Some of these were common items such as Microsoft Office, but many were specialist packages that were needed to administer everything from its housing stock and rent collections to its recycling services and electoral services. A good number of these were hosted by the organisation itself, necessitating a complex and expensive network of servers and other hardware.

Our first task was to compile a detailed picture of the council's IT assets and software. This enabled us to gain insight into the IT estate, its functions and shortcomings. Importantly, it allowed us to make detailed transformation recommendations, complete with costings, that would help the council progress on its journey to digital transformation.

At the core of the strategy was a plan to migrate the client's servers to Microsoft Azure Cloud. Estimated costs and projected savings were particularly essential at this stage of the project, and they not only included server and storage maintenance, licensing and virtualisation, but also staff, electricity and all other relevant factors.

This enabled us to project both conservative and

optimistic cost savings for the cloud migration project, resulting in a minimum predicted saving of almost £500,000 over three years.

However, as the project progressed it was vital to employ an adaptive evaluation approach alongside our agile methodology. As part of a 'discovery process', we undertook both top-down and bottom-up analysis of the council's IT usage and needs, giving us a much deeper understanding of the IT estate and enabling us to re-evaluate both hardware and systems in the light of the client's evolving requirements.

Central to this was analysing servers, databases and applications in order to find the best outcome among the '6 R's':[1]

- *Retain* – keep 'as is'

- *Retire* – remove application from the estate

- *Rehost* – 'lift and shift' into the cloud (Infrastructure as a Service or IaaS)

- *Replatform* – emulate in IaaS (legacy technologies)

- *Refactor* – rewrite application to become cloud enabled

- *Repurchase* – change license consumption model

Working closely with the council, this model allowed us to continually refine the council's digital transformation roadmap to better meet its needs. There were lots of good reasons for doing this. For example, a legal requirement that the council's backups remain within the UK meant that a small number of on-premise servers were retained rather than wholly migrated to the Microsoft Azure cloud.

Utilising other Azure and Office 365 services meant that we could consolidate functionality and substantially reduce the size of the estate being migrated to the cloud. Additionally, considering 'off-the-shelf' cloud systems like these allowed us to deliver greater cost savings while laying a solid foundation for better, future-proof digital services across the council.

> Adopting this agile methodology ensured that our client was never working in the dark. As we encountered issues, we were able to react quickly and adapt the roadmap accordingly. Not only did this lead us to results that better met the council's objectives, but we were able to keep them updated about costs and savings in real-time.

It's an approach that is currently getting major results for the council. By a process of constant evaluation, adaptation and re-prioritisation, the local authority's digital transformation journey has been shaped and re-shaped to its changing needs. The client has worked in close partnership with us to do this, implementing effective changes while making sure that costs are controlled and significant savings are made.

Indeed, as the strategy progressed, much more accurate financial forecasts could be made instead of conservative / optimistic estimates. Indeed, as the programme progressed, we were able to better express the benefit realisation breakdown in a constantly changing council environment. Not only will the council recognise better savings than originally forecast, but the new digital landscape has provided early tangible benefits outside of the current programme, something that would not have been possible without the digital transformation. In short, our approach is making digital transformation both adaptable and measurable, as well as delivering the results the council needs.

Intergence continues to work with the council using its highly agile methodology, ensuring that the digital transformation strategy can always adapt to new insights, events and technologies – and deliver measurable and predictable financial and operational benefits to the client. We are currently working with the authority on a number of other related projects.

[1] *See 6 Strategies for Migrating Applications to the Cloud, AWS Cloud Enterprise Strategy Blog, 1 Nov 2016.*