

Connect in Construction

A Project Summary |

Introduction

Our client is a household name in the UK with over 100 years' experience in the construction industry. It now focuses on the business and construction services industries with a turnover of £2 billion and over 20,000 employees. It operates throughout the UK and in international markets in Canada, Europe and the Middle East.

Their vision is to be a company renowned for working in a spirit of openness, collaboration and mutual dependency to ensure that their customers' success becomes their own success. Their corporate values create *"an innovative culture where knowledge is shared"*. They believe that this is a culture for success in which everyone can work to the highest professional standards, and through which they can achieve sustainable, profitable growth.

With such a vision, it is no surprise that they put a high value on the success of their Knowledge Management initiatives.

The construction industry is rapidly changing, driven by both commercial and public demands for sustainability, safety and quality. In line with these changes their business is also changing, moving away from straight development projects lasting 2 to 3 years to longer service based projects which not only include the initial construction but the on-going facilities management, maintenance and servicing, and which can last for 20 to 30 years or longer.

"Given the very tight margins in this highly competitive market and high risk industry it is of paramount importance that we consistently get it right first time" said Manager of Web Development & Innovations.

Pilot Study

Connect was first piloted within a subsidiary of this organisation which provided fee based construction management and consultancy services.

A key factor in this business was getting the right people with the right experience involved in each project; process innovation often being the differentiator between competing project bid proposals.

The Pilot was used to help understand the potential barriers and develop buy-in from the stakeholders of each subsidiary for promoting Connect's use across the broader Group.

Cultural barriers were remarkably rare and isolated to a very limited number of individuals: most employees wanted to promote what they knew and to find others that could help them deliver better outcomes for their projects. 80% of the client's employees were using Connect within weeks of its launch.

Although the client was recognised as being at the forefront of information technology use in construction, a technical barrier that would affect the sharing culture was identified. The company's Knowledge Management strategy noted 'equity' as a key success factor: Every employee had to feel that their knowledge and experience was equally important to the organisation.

Connect suited the equity premise perfectly but of their 200 employees, not everyone had easy access to a computer that was connected to the intranet, particularly the hands-on site supervisors. The solution employed was to install an additional desktop computer on each project site for use by the hands-on employees. The computer was branded a "Knowledge Centre" and looked physically different to all other desktops. This solution was embraced by most of the hands-on site supervisors.

Having been impressed by the success of Connect within the pilot group, it was decided it should be rolled out across the whole group.

Connect is viewed as an essential part of the Knowledge Management jigsaw. It is not a

solution in its own right but plays an important role, along with their Knowledge Forum, the Knowledge and Innovation network and Best Practice Programmes, many of which are substantiated by a Community managed within Connect.

“Connect enables you to find out what knowledge and experience exists, very effectively.”

Implementation

Following the Group-wide launch of Connect, which was initially supported by a poster campaign, articles in the company newsletter and e-marketing campaigns, the system continues to be championed as part of the team's more general Knowledge Management initiatives. As such Connect is part of a larger culture change programme within the Group.

The team believes there are four critical factors for the successful implementation of Connect;

- Senior Management support
- Having a dedicated team of people for implementation and support
- On-going promotion and coaching
- Introduction to new employees at induction stage

These four aspects combined, constantly revitalise the system and ensure its wide spread uptake and on-going use. To date, approximately one third of the employees with access to the internal network are now active users of Connect.

Connect is integrated with the organisation's existing AD corporate directory. This populates the basic information about the employees including name, address, telephone number and email address. Daily synchronisation between Connect and AD ensures that the population is always up to date, automatically adding new staff and hiding people who have left, thereby minimising the administrative overhead.

Client Experiences

The main business driver for implementing Connect and introducing Knowledge Management is the very nature of the modern construction industry: highly competitive, high risk, low margins. The newer Business Services side of the company is highly customer focussed in an equally competitive, but growing market.

The company's Knowledge Management initiatives are aiming to avoid people making

costly mistakes, but if they do, to learn from it so that no one in the organisation makes the same mistake again.

In the UK, PFI (Private Finance Initiative) and PPP (Public Private Partnership) tenders are very hotly contested. A significant amount of money and resource can be spent tendering for a bid, so successful knowledge management is relevant not just to the end project but in tendering for the business in the first place.

“It is essential that we have the right people, the right lessons learnt, the right knowledge and all the information at our disposal so we can tailor a bid quicker and better than ever before” said Manager of Web Development & Innovations.

“Connect for Knowledge has contributed to the overall success of our knowledge management strategy.”

Prior to Connect being implemented people relied on talking to people they knew, which was limited by the size of their own informal networks. Connect opens up those networks, breaking down the natural boundaries of location, functional structure and cultural background to create an environment that promotes sharing and fosters innovation. This was particularly important to the client as it is split into 8 major functional divisions and any particular project may involve people from more than one of these divisions.

Connect has broken down the barriers to knowledge flow across the whole organisation. *“Connect enables you to find out what knowledge and experience exists, very effectively.”*

The awareness of knowledge management as a discipline in the construction industry has now reached the level where it is commonplace for prospective suppliers to be asked what their knowledge management strategy is, within an Invitation to Tender document. As such Connect is regularly demonstrated to potential clients in bid presentations. This not only impresses these clients but also generates an additional incentive for staff to ensure their information is up to date within the system.

Two small examples of how Connect for Knowledge has helped our client;

1. Their rail division decided it should explore the business potential of expanding into Scandinavia. Connect was used to find people within the organisation who spoke Norwegian & Swedish and had the

appropriate experience in the railways business. One of the people found subsequently gained a “Value Award” for her performance in achieving business objectives that were above and beyond expectations.

2. An announcement was made that the company had appointed a Retail Director to their building business, who would be looking to develop the Business Plan for the following year. A surveyor in another business sector heard about this and looked up the Retail Director’s details, background and what knowledge he was looking for on Connect. Armed with this information he approached the director. The resultant Property Asset Management offering was added to the business plan and has created additional business that otherwise may not have happened!

For further information

Contact Us

United Kingdom

T +44 1932 237830

F +44 1932 237847

E info@addept.com

New Zealand

E nz.info@addept.com

South Africa

E za.info@addept.com