The Challenges of Global Project Management

DATA Inc’s Project Management Solutions System
Introduction

Managing IT projects to time, budget and high quality has long been a struggle for organizations. In this new age of technology and streamlined project management, IT projects can no longer rely on the informal processes and communications methods of the past. Most organizations have made their own attempts to rectify this situation through the introduction of best practices, multi-tiered technology solutions and training. However, the average workload of IT personnel prevents such solutions from being implemented throughout an organization, effectively making the issues difficult to solve.

With recent advances in technology, project managers and employees can now collect, create and store enormous quantities of intellectual capital, creating the “knowledge network” needed to manage and support employees as they extract value from information.

DATA Inc. as a full service IT solutions provider needed a way to streamline and facilitate a method for dynamic collaboration throughout the organization, creating a 24-hour global development system. By developing a project management tool using a hybrid of customized and off-the-shelf solutions, DATA Inc. was able to integrate familiar tools, processes and IT infrastructure while organizing relevant project information. The collaboration solution addressed:

- Personal storage
- Team collaboration
- Enterprise services
- Project Management

Thanks to DATA Inc’s. Project Management Solutions System, the organization minimized the international barriers of collaboration and information exchange, improved operations efficiency and increased employee productivity.

Profile:
DATA Inc. delivers IT Software and Services Solutions to some of the biggest Fortune 500 clients globally.

Location:
Montvale, NJ

Type of Project:
Hybrid Development
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The Challenges

In the past, project collaboration activities at DATA Inc. varied across different types of audiences. Typically, project collaboration begins with one individual. An employee may generate an idea and share it with peers. From there, teams form around the ideas ultimately starting projects and creating the need to share and disseminate information quickly.

Teams working together on related projects might then form a group or division. With the amount of information generated on the division level, effective categorization of content becomes paramount. At the enterprise level, leaders assess high-level summaries and key documents as well as disseminate information across the organization.

Given the demand for collaboration features and the importance of working across teams, DATA Inc. identified the following problems to be addressed:

Workers faced too many choices for storing content. When employees saved documents, they had many choices about where to store them, based on content type, audience, purpose and accessibility. In addition, content often has several different phases during its lifetime, a circumstance that requires information workers to make the storage decision several times. The employees would then spend a significant amount of time searching for documents and information each day. This time was essentially lost productivity during which users browsed document management systems, reporting systems, or the Internet.

Teams had to learn to collaborate with each other. Communication and sharing of information was often a challenge for the DATA Inc. project management team. Projects spanned global locations and subsequently, global file servers, from which many team members were restricted. When a document was needed, project employees would e-mail a file request, colleagues would search file servers, and the file would be sent by e-mail. Frequently, information was kept in paper form and could not easily be located. Team members would have to wait, keeping the project from moving forward.
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Project teams also found that the e-mail inbox was not effective when version history was important, or when information had to be published regularly to a wide audience, since e-mail does not provide scoped search or browse capability across mailboxes, up-to-date documents, or a publishing model. With e-mail, message threads have to be pieced together to get a current view of a project or initiative. As a result, new team members could not easily learn historical information or current project status from stored e-mail.

Better management of the Project Development Life Cycle.
DATA Inc. was using various tools and software as a solution to the Project Development Life Cycle (PLC) to help improve knowledge capture and information sharing across the organization.

Although the solution demonstrated the value of PLC management, it never achieved organization-wide acceptance due to lack of proper usage and difficult interface. Employees spent a significant amount of time on nonproductive tasks including locating information, setting up meetings and updating the status of projects such as boards and systems projects. In addition, the product development teams were limited by their inability to collaborate and effectively share information. Furthermore, the environment had become too cumbersome for employees to use on a daily basis due to a non-standard tool usage across different centers.

The Solution
Subsequent to working with a variety of document management and knowledge management solutions, DATA Inc. realized the need for a single, long-term collaboration toolset with integrated project management capabilities. “Our goal was to create an enterprise solution that would make product development easier for our globally dispersed teams and that would support our future business processes.” says Charles Rich, Chief Technical Officer and Director of Client Projects for DATA Inc. “It soon became clear that a hybrid solution of customized off-the-shelf tools would be key to achieving that goal.”

After considering a myriad of options, DATA Inc determined that customizing off-the-shelf tools would be the most effective route for the organization. In a period of a few months, the technical team at DATA Inc. developed a portal structure / project life cycle tool powered by Microsoft® Project Server and SharePoint®
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Services. “The integration and customization of multiple Microsoft solutions to create a project management tool provided DATA Inc. and its employees with a technology infrastructure that can be supported by our organization” said Michelle Medley, Senior Project Manager for DATA Inc. “The new solution effectively streamlines our business process while allowing us to expand on our best practices in project management.”

DATA Inc. particularly focused on three major areas to simplify and facilitate overall user acceptance:

• A solution that capitalized on employees’ familiarity with Microsoft-based tools including Office®, Outlook® messaging and collaboration client and SharePoint® services.

• A flexible solution that allowed DATA Inc. to continue the facilitation, spread and refinement of business processes, corporate culture, methodologies and team environments.

• A common, standardized toolset that could be utilized across all project teams in the enterprise.

DATA Inc’s Project Management Solutions System was specifically designed to provision and manage team sites, document and meeting workspaces. Powered by Microsoft Project Server and SharePoint® services, the system aimed to provide an intranet-based portal experience that effectively enabled employees to find all the necessary information relevant to their project or work, regardless of location, time and resource allocation. Features include:

1. Audience Targeting
Powered by Microsoft Active Directory®, project managers could create groups of users with similar job roles, titles or interests to push relevant information and applications for use.

2. Integration with Partners and Customers
By extending key information into the portal, DATA Inc. partners and customers were able to communicate more effectively and able to manage the unstructured collaborative activity previously inherent in many project and service processes.
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3. Effective Search Engine
In addition to using the portals built-in search engine to search site documents, users also have their choice of off-the-shelf alternatives including Google. Additional off-the-shelf web modules are also available that allow seamless integration of the SharePoint Portal interfaces to other document repositories e.g. the Documentum Enterprise Document Management System.

4. Effective integration of data resources
Web Parts and Web Part architecture integration allows users to add views from to sites containing multiple data resources including web services outside of the scope of Microsoft software, XML data sources, InfoPath documents and more.

5. Security
The DATA Inc. Project Management Solutions System takes advantage of industry leading technologies to ensure that all data is securely stored including:

- Authentication using key Microsoft security principals — Taking advantage of strong authentication methods, password policies, account lockout policies and encryption.

- Permissions-based authorization — Authorization that is based on the permissions model to ensure a high degree of granular control over access to contents of a site.

- Code access security based on .NET Framework -- Allows a user to control code access to protected resources and operations.

- Security techniques including Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) and IPSec – that allow you to protect your communications inside and outside the firewall.

- Firewall protection of external sites.
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The Results / Benefits

With DATA Inc’s Project Management Solutions System, project teams are able to share calendars, task lists, contact, and other information more easily. Bringing team members closer together helps increase productivity and speeds project execution. “Windows SharePoint Services is a critical piece of infrastructure to our project management,” said Michelle. “Without it, project communication would be so difficult that many projects would be too expensive to execute.”

Increased Productivity

Tight integration of the DATA Inc. Project Management Solution with Windows SharePoint Services and Outlook 2003 has positively impacted employee productivity through improved access to contacts and calendars for efficient team communication. Central storage of documents has helped teams become educated faster and eliminated the need for administrative help in finding and transferring files.

Knowledge sharing across the organization

Business units could integrate their customized portal into the enterprise portal, enabling them to share knowledge with other business units. Teams could easily provide access to content in their project management site through browsing or searching. Portal users could also publish documents and best practices to the rest of the organization by adding them to the public view of their personal sites.

Enhanced Project Management

Individuals and teams using the DATA Inc. Project Management Solutions System found that they were able to execute work faster. Empowered by the backend capabilities of Project Server 2003 and it’s integration with SharePoint Services, the technology team was able to provide EPM capabilities with team workspaces to improve the overall integration and efficiency of project management tasks. These features include:

- Improved functionality by establishing the ability to add plans after first creating a team workspace.
- Improved links and integration between tasks and associated issues, risks, documents, and owners.
- Improved integration of task management between Outlook and the Project team workspaces.
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Technologies Used

- Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server
- Microsoft Windows SharePoint Services
- Microsoft Windows Server Standard Edition
- Microsoft Office Project
- Microsoft ASP.NET
- Microsoft Office FrontPage
- Microsoft Office Professional Edition
- Microsoft SQL Server
Consistently Delivering, Cost Effective, Quality and Timely IT Solutions

For over 25 years, the DATA Inc. Global Group of Companies has provided IT Solutions to global clients throughout North America, Europe and Asia by aiding organizations in fulfilling their business objectives and goals to solve their ‘real-world’ situations.

Started in 1983 as a Staff Augmentation and consulting operation to financial organizations, DATA Inc. has evolved over the past 25 years into a total solutions provider, expanding to provide solutions and services to insurance, life sciences, government and manufacturing / supply chain and transportation organizations.

Our expertise in providing a range of IT solutions, enterprise and infrastructure solutions and general technology consulting centered around a mix of the right technology with the right ‘people’ allows clients to improve the way they conduct their business globally.

Our Services and Solutions

• Technical and Management Staffing
• Global Custom Solutions Development
• Migration and Re-engineering
• Testing and Quality Assurance
• E-Learning
• Global Project Management

For more information, please visit our website at www.datainc.biz or call (201) 802-9800 to speak to a DATA Inc. Sales Associate.

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