a friendly audit

persuading people to change their working habits
and adopt a systematic approach to records &
document management

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the challenge

For a 10-month period in 2004, Sparknow helped the DTI's Fair Markets Group to increase usage of MATRIX, the recently installed DTI-wide EDRM (Electronic Documents and Records Management) system.

> Over a six month period tracking usage levels, there was an increase of between 32% and 50%, dependent on team; usage for any activity at August 2005 was over 90%.

At the time the DTI was a large, central UK government department with 3000 London-based policy oriented staff responsible for a wide range of market, industry, energy and employment regulation, in the client's words 'a very intelligent and professional work-force'. As a Department, an early-adopter of electronic records management, implementing a TRIM system in 2003 with a lot of training and communications to back it up.

The majority of people in the DTI HQ worked in small teams on policy issues. Over the past 15/20 years they had developed habits of saving documents in their personal drives and emails in their own private folders. This encouraged a belief that information was a personal possession rather than a corporate asset; and the historic regard for and excellence in maintaining central records was lost.

we've forgotten how to file

Though MATRIX had been installed on every desktop by the spring of 2003, it was hard to use, with a complex interface and rather poorly integrated with Office
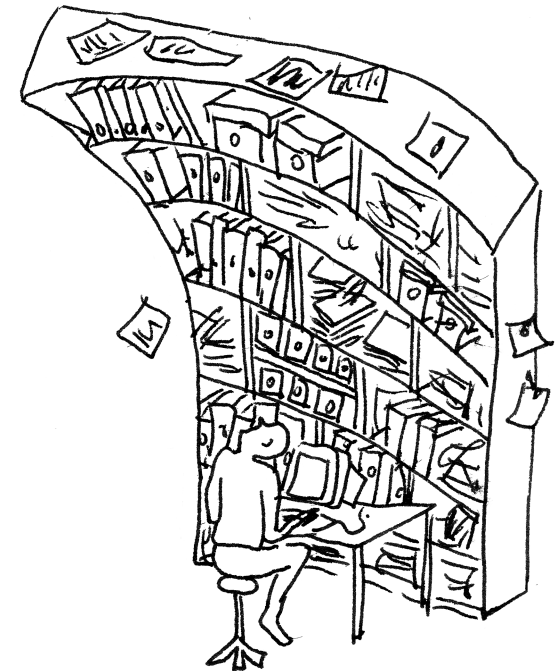
applications. Everyone had been through initial training to ensure they could use the system. But the approach was too generic: in particular it failed to engage enough people in changing long-held working habits. Many people weren't persuaded that filing was part of their job and in fact it had fallen out of that habit or relied on others to do it for them, so were not budgeting the time for a commitment to filing. In spite of all that had been done, usage was still too low. As well as business effectiveness, legal issues loomed with the advent of the Freedom of Information Act in January 2005.

In January 2004 a Departmental Matrix Change Panel was formed as part of the Change Management strategy to transfer ownership of MATRIX to the business and ensure that it wouldn't remain a centrally-driven initiative. Chaired by a Director General with each member representing their Group's Director General, the Panel's aim was 'to increase intelligent usage of Matrix.'

The Panel member for Fair Markets Group asked Sparknow to help. Our job was to support him in his role of Matrix champion to help users understand why electronic document and records management in general and MATRIX in particular were important for the DTI.

intervention

There were five core strands to the project we undertook.

getting people on board

The first big thing we did was to investigate how people felt about the system through face-to-face interviews and forum sessions supported by a variety of diagnostic tools, with a vertical cross section of users. Playing to the DTI's top-down culture we made sure strongly persuasive messages were communicated from the Director General's office to the Branch Heads and then to staff. And through a series of one-to-one meetings we persuaded Branch Heads to play an active role in promoting usage of MATRIX.

a self-audit

We pushed each team to take responsibility for increasing its own usage levels , individually and as a group, with the support of the information manager, sponsored by the Branch Head. Our intention was to generate as much dialogue, sharing of experiences and local engagement as possible. We developed structured workbooks for this to enable Branch Heads to conduct a self-audit. Among other things, the workbooks were used to:

* profile existing usage habits, barriers and problem areas and good practice

* track changes in staff usage of MATRIX

* make action plans for change – these plans were developed over a period of five months

* inform users of the arguments for improving EDRM practices across the DTI.

involving the Information Managers

Another early decision was to work closely with the existing Information Manager network. Putting people in place locally, who can help colleagues at their desks, is both tactically sound in the short term and strategically effective over the long term, helping to build internal capacity rather than creating dependence on external change agents.

Assisting first with the design of the workbook, the Information Managers then continued to remind Branch Heads to fill theirs in and offer support and guidance where necessary. As a result of our support and encouragement, they also created a model for the production of more meaningful statistics. This allowed more accurate assessment of usage levels and the identification of non-users, resulting in the ability to take more targeted remedial action.

Over the lifespan of the project the network went from strength to strength and, thanks in no small part to their dogged determination, marked improvements began appearing in the usage statistics for all branches.

bridging the divide: business users versus 'techies'

A palpable divide existed at the start of the project that could be characterised as a 'them and us' feeling where on the whole 'us' referred to the business user and 'them' referred to 'that lot in technology, sitting in their ivory tower.' The 'techies' told us that they were forever receiving complaints from users saying, 'X or Y is wrong with the system, but you never get back to us.'

We set up a two-way communication process that over time promoted a much healthier, less defensive relationship. By the end of the project it was felt that the 'techies' had become a lot more proactive and the role of the superusers and information managers as onhand coaches, with the backing of the central team was a much happier one.

planning for MATRIX II

Supplementary to the core strands of the project we were asked by the 'techies' to run two larger sessions in early 2005 around email protocols and to facilitate a workshop for senior managers responsible for planning the introduction of MATRIX II - an upgraded version of the system.

benefits and lessons

The project showed that you cannot install a large, complex IT system without winning people's hearts and minds.

Bringing people into the process, enlisting them not only as participants but also as owners of the change will encourage them to care about what the system is trying to do. Only when the right level of understanding and attachment has been achieved, when problems are responded to with warmth and professionalism and when senior management leads by example do people begin to use these systems properly.

Having to work out their own EDRM goals and devise their own action plans meant they **retained ownership of the process and the outcomes**. Specifically, giving the Branch Heads ownership of their workbooks meant the onus was on them to get results in their own team. The project would have been tougher had we not had the full support of an enthusiastic in-house team.

People were left with **a better understanding of the critical importance of good EDRM practice**. The approach was designed to make people sit down and think, and it worked. Teams had spent time understanding how they did things, where they stored things and why.

According to a review by the National Archives in October 2005, the DTI was able to report that it was leading Whitehall when it came to electronic record storage.

The project also had positive knock-on effects on another initiative: the **freeing up of space** to make way for the DTI's new flexible working arrangements, cutting the

number of desks and so on. The self-audit process helped teams organise ambitious 'black bag' efforts, throwing away many duplicate records.

'Overall the project was a tremendous success. It created a buzz on records and information management and we have continued to build on this success.'

DTI Information Manager

a footnote on design principles

As well as playing with strengthening the triangular relation ship between the central IT team, the Branch Heads and the Information Managers to build a powerful personal dimension to the work, there were two other design principles.

These were a little more nuanced and played on tensions between collaboration and competition.

a friendly audit

Building on a project we'd worked on with Property Services at the BBC to help with the move to White City, we'd thought carefully about the positioning and communications style for the project and chose to brand it as friendly and participative: it's us all doing this together in collaboration.

a marketplace

We also set up a structurally aligned process driven by the notion of 'Fair Markets' as more than a name, but part of this process too. The Director General of the Division, an active sponsor, carved out a space on his portion of MATRIX in Fair Markets and part of the process insisted that electronic workbooks and plans were completed and filed in this area by a certain date. We knew that the transparency of the process would egg teams on to complete their workbooks, at least competently, and also encourage an exchange or marketplace, driven by competition and curiosity, leading to good practice ideas travelling right across Fair Markets quite naturally, without the need for an extra push.

design overview

getting started

overall programme design, positioning and risk management

Designing programme components. Casting the team.

core partnership

Developing a working relationship with the system delivery team. Formulating an activities programme including communications and training strands.

links with business units

Linking relationship managers to each business unit, based on investment banking and broking principles.

deep investigating

interviews

Conducting 24 face-to-face interviews (4 per business unit, across a representative sample) plus analysis

small focus groups

Facilitating 6 focus groups of 6-8 people – fora for people to feed back and share both qualitative experiences and quantitative usage information.

presentation of findings and options for future action

Presenting key findings from investigation. Discussing and reaching consensus on way forward.

pivotal decisions

Working counter - organisational culture where individuals and teams tend to be independent, respond only to top-down instruction and method of communication tends to rely on written rather than verbal processes.

Taking on risk of working with informal networks and creating space for business units to share and cross-reference their approaches.
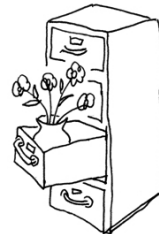
making it happen

participative completion of workbooks

Collaborative approach to design, implementation and updating of workbooks over a sustained period. Designed to profile current approach to records management and agreeing future activities to improve behaviour. Through participation to catalyse team interaction and conversation, encourage people to take ownership and responsibility for action plans and prompt sharing of best practice.

supporting the change community

Encouraging and supporting embryonic informal network of information specialists.

events programme

Formal | brokering the relationship between the change community and the system delivery team to identify and support key action-oriented events e.g. developing naming conventions, file structures, user guidelines.

Informal | regular, informal get-togethers to share experiences and network.

ongoing strategic view

Identifying strategic implications as they emerge and feeding those back to sponsors.