

Re-Engineering Working Culture - How an ICT Project Promotes a University Towards Its Strategic Goals

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1. Summary

This case study discusses how HAMK, Häme University of Applied Sciences, has successfully promoted its strategic goals by taking a new approach to an “ICT project”. We have introduced Office 356 within the whole organisation, and at the same time systematically launched a change in the way of working and the culture of thinking. An ICT project has, in addition to gradually changing the everyday actions and applications, grown into a more profound movement around attitudes towards knowledge, collaboration, and communication.

The value of this case lies in showing how information and communication technology and a well managed project can play a major part in changing processes. The key is in seeing ICT as more than a set of technologies: strategically lead, it is tool for rethinking our processes and making them serve our purposes in the changing demands. In our case, the project works at three levels: tools, methods, and culture.

We will describe our change from the strategic leadership and the tactical ICT management points of view, and give an overview to the actions at operational level. We will also list the reasons to this project being different from previous ICT projects.

2. EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The Finnish education system, including regulation and funding, is facing major changes as part of the happenings taking place in the Finnish society. At the same time the state of the economy, the turmoil of the world of work and the rapid development of technologies pose demands for Universities' curricula, processes, and efficiency. HAMK has been faced with new requirements and has acted by bringing changes into its strategy and management system, as well as the ways and services of studying, teaching, and working. HAMK's aim as a publically-funded organisation is to act productively, cost-efficiently, and responsibly to the benefit of its stakeholders. One key element to success is digitalisation and collaboration.

The technology used at HAMK was reaching the end of its life phase and also hindered us from changing our working habits and attitudes. Combined with these no-longer-suitable solutions, we had heterogeneous working methods and insufficient staff competences as a challenge.

HAMK's new strategy and new management were the starting point for the change. The demand to differentiate from competition in terms of brand and processes, as well as to meet new customer expectations (future millennial students) lead to bold decisions. One of them was advancing digitalisation. The technology change project - from Oracle Portal and separate tools for communication and cooperation to Office 365 platform - included the levels of working habit and communication culture changes.

As the project was aiming at new ways of working, it was carried out in new way, too. The desire for quick results lead to choosing agile methodology as the way to proceed instead of the traditional waterfall approach. In accordance with agile principles, the project was carried out in phases and demand-based releases instead of detailed descriptions of the finalised future entity.

This was the first large-scale agile project carried out at HAMK and it also served as a pilot for future development tactics. Forming future actions into a project ensured documented goals and sufficient resources, and picking change-minded developers and experts from several different units as project participants guaranteed that more than technical or technological viewpoints were taken into account while planning development and delivering quickly-employable results.

The project was a good pilot in testing a new development approach: it taught the participants new and valuable working skills at the same time enabling cross-boundary team-building. The project also pioneered in implementing full-scale cloud services enabling easy e-working, collaboration and communication - this was a major leap in both technology and ideology for an 'old-school' organisation. We have come to realise that the agile development principles and methods applied within the project must be applied among this and other projects. The project has thus given ideas to the new way of HAMK project portfolio management which is underway.

The O365 cloud service in itself forces us to continue to being proactive and carry on development in our working tools and habits. A complex system and changing environment calls for continuously seeking best practices and applications in different work roles. Choosing cloud also made us think of data and information security issues at new level.

The project was a kick-off for a process change: the advancement is no longer carried out as a project but as a natural part of people developing their own work as individuals, teams, units, and all of HAMK. During the project, continuous but comprehensible changes were brought into the everyday work: this paved the way to the change mindset in people which is seen as a fact of the future. The project also invited to looking at and changing the ways of working: different processes have been scrutinised, and in some cases we have been able to make chains leaner.

As a result of the project, the working culture and habits have changed: after one year of use we can clearly see more openness, more collaboration and more communication, which are elements of the strategic goals of digitalisation and collaboration. The changes, however, are not extensive nor final: a lot of work remains to be done in an organisation with 600 employees and 6000 students - with a service which is constantly evolving and changing by nature. From the organisation ICT point of view, we no longer deliver the same perfect set of tools for all users but provide optimal options for different user groups and individual users with their own devices. Choosing cloud is choosing change, and we have to adapt our services and service capability accordingly, and constantly.

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