



Clients and Consultants Collaborate for Change at Seddon

Summary: Seddon Construction has been keeping its promise of on-time delivery to customers for a staggering 120 years – and counting. This family firm is anything but traditional, however. It is proactive with its digital construction strategy and continues to seek better ways of working. Its latest initiative, OneProgramme, will see best working practices and use of programme information extend to every stage of its work, from design, through procurement of people and material, to the build itself.



Already a Powerproject user, Seddon chose to work with Elecosoft to scope out and validate the enabling programme software change and start to bring it to life with Powerproject Enterprise.

The initiative is well underway in the construction business, with ambitions to extend into the house-building division by the end of 2018.

Delivery on time is a universal goal for construction businesses. At family firm Seddon, keeping that promise to customers and delivering a first-class service is very important. Ensuring that Seddon was equipped with the very best means of delivering was one of several key strategic aims identified in 2016 by Managing Director Peter Jackson.

In 2016, technical manager, Michael Crawford, led a task group to explore the company's needs over six months. The result was One Programme. This corporate initiative set out to extend current best practices and embrace every team involved in planning and delivering projects: from earlier in the process, more consistently, and armed with the tools they needed to hit the mark every single time.

The Seddon team approached Elecosoft to consult, help scope the challenge, and recommend the best way forward. The result was adoption of Powerproject Enterprise across the construction business as a proving ground for the process, platform, and plan for change.

The starting point

Michael related the company's starting position: "We already used Powerproject as our planning software of choice across the business. However, although project managers reported their progress, there was no real consistency from business unit to business unit as to how they did it."



The company had recognised that there were many influences which impacted their ability to complete on time, which spanned design, procurement of materials and subcontractors, client approval processes, regulatory standards checks, and more. The company was using numerous standalone forms and documents to manage time-related project matters. Michael said: “We wanted the ability to generate a fully linked programme – one which showed everything from when we were awarded a contract, onwards. The aim was to ensure that everyone involved had the information they needed available, accurate, and approved, when they needed it.”

First steps

Seddon knew that it wanted to improve control and co-ordination of the supply chain and production process. However, one thing the company knew they didn't want was the status quo – lots of spreadsheets moving in every direction. Yet, with these aims in mind, Seddon wasn't entirely sure what its options were. It turned to Elecosoft, as a trusted supplier of a platform they already knew, for support.

“We asked Elecosoft to come up with a proposal, and their recommendation was to use Powerproject Enterprise. We priced against what we saw as the scope of the need, which was to work with Elecosoft's developers and find an appropriate licensing model” Michael recalled, then continued: “Elecosoft gave us a very good proposal paper with several options. That enabled us to prioritise what we wanted. They spotted a few development challenges, that was very transparent. The problem with development is that you can only get an indication of what it will cost to get to a particular point, but they clearly presented how the system could work, with evidence to back it up, and outlined how they could see it all fitting together. That gave us the assurance it could all be integrated together.”

Once the approach and development costs were signed off at Board level, the project team was able to coordinate with Elecosoft's consultants to agree in more detail how to take each step in understanding how goals could be met and piloting the changes. This collaborative team of client and Elecosoft consultants and developers spent eight months developing the systems. The goals became clearer as they understood what the platform could deliver, Michael told us: “Powerproject Enterprise would allow people to access and work on the same project in tandem with others, while one

person kept control and oversight. All these people could work interactively and independently, without having to go into an email environment.”

OneProgramme was designed to bring people with responsibilities for design, commercial, materials, plant and production together. Throughout the development, care was taken to optimise the system appropriately for its target users, as he continued: “We took care not to bog people down seeing too much information, by creating views for different members of the team. People could also input information easily into the programme, in a format much like the spreadsheets they were using before. We also generated a mobile app based on Site Progress Mobile, a companion app to Powerproject, so it could integrate, and would work for the site teams, and make it simpler for them to report progress on fortnightly basis.”

A major goal was to ensure information from across the business could be connected, often for the first time. OneProgramme would help to move away from disconnected data to a single, integrated version of the truth.

Michael described the original model for us. “Previously our people had different schedules such as information required schedules, or procurement schedules, and each discipline used to monitor and report on these individually. But none of that information talked to each other. There was a discussion every month about who was telling the truth and the whole truth – and whether there was a weakness in something someone was telling us. We were hoping that having this as a collaborative system would mean we could see it all more accurately.”

As this initial development moved on, confidence grew about the value this could deliver to the business and to teams, as Michael described: “We've now reached a point where we can baseline, at an agreed date, the actual programme and its supporting logic. Now a team has a chance of being in agreement right from the outset about the plan for the project, ensuring the design information supports the procurement strategy or construction logic. Everyone is in alignment, rather than doing everything separately.”

Driving change

Once there was a working system, the team could move on to trialing with early adopters inside the construction business, through a series of workshops both in-house and over the phone. Michael related how the process was initiated: “We first identified two pilot projects, and chose key strategic people from among the planners, designers and commercial teams, to up-skill on the new system. We did some training days and produced training pamphlets to provide a user guide and show people their role in using it.”

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Of course, changing a culture isn't easy, as Michael acknowledged: "It's always a challenge to try to change culture – it's not just getting software to work, but how to encourage people to make consistent updates, fill in information more diligently, to get better outcomes."

Once changes start, however, valuable intelligence can be gathered about how to embed the changes, as Seddon has noticed: "From these pilots we learned some good lessons about how users responded to the system, and also the education and support they might need to change their current habits and methods, to evolve away from spreadsheets to the Powerproject system."

The project was rolled out on new projects from 2018, and the learnings have continued. Individual roles are trained in slightly different ways, with some individual training documents and video guides. Michael said: "Success has varied between people, due to differences in their ability to take ownership and willingness to change their way of working – it may take another 6-12 months to get this completely ingrained."

Champions of change

The process has created some strong champions for the change. Michael outlined how these were proactively identified: "We put a number of people in positions of influence to help drive through the change. They were people with a desire to help, and specialists in their field across design management, planning, cost management and so on. We needed a number of these, to be a support mechanism for their colleagues, to help if others don't understand the system or can't get it to work as they want. This approach helps you reinforce the change in the business, because otherwise you can have a lot of disgruntled people behind the scenes. Our champions helped keep this to a minimum."

Others are emerging as time goes on, as he continued: "We are seeing real positivity from teams now. They feel integrated and that they are delivering as one team – when previously they were delivering in disparate ways. It is no longer the case that a planner creates a programme and six months later everyone thinks 'that doesn't work'. People are reviewing how they want to deliver a project at a much earlier stage and getting buy-in from the whole team."

He added: "There's feedback that teams feel more energised, enthused and engaged – and we all have more intelligence about how we can deliver our projects."

Unlocking insight

OneProgramme is well underway and Seddon is confident that the proof will be seen clearly when it delivers the first projects managed start to finish with this philosophy, programme platform and inclusive process.

Michael is happy with what's been achieved already: "We already have a much more collaborative approach. As people buy in and understand it a bit more, we should get some more accurate reporting and potentially better and more accurate completions for our clients and end users. We are still on a journey, or course – there are still a few more things to do but they are in the pipeline."

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The focus is now on ensuring that Seddon can unlock the maximum insight and decision-making power of the data that resides in Powerproject Enterprise, linked to a range of different schedules and activities, across its construction specialisms. Michael confirmed that this was a goal which was integral to the development project from the very start: "Phases One and Two were to get the system developed and up and running. Now we are going into Phase Three, which will be to work with Elecosoft on the dashboards that the business wants. We've set up a network group, led by our Planning Manager Stafford Neild, who will work with the champions, and explore how the data from OneProgramme can be used to benefit the whole business."

Fully connected and linked programme and planning information, which is more complete, better managed and more easily accessible by management, should not only help Seddon to operate more effectively but add value to client relationships. Michael stated: "In the end it's about how we can use information to influence the business and deliver for clients, and how we can have conversations with them based on accurate information and an ability to discuss future projects at an earlier stage. We aim to become the contractor of choice for our clients, and for them to choose us for all the right reasons."

Partnering for success

Michael acknowledges the significant contribution and role that Elecosoft's consultants and trainers have played so far in helping the company make the right decisions, select their platform, and embed the changes. He said: "I would recommend Elecosoft to anyone. The team did not over-sell, were never pushy on commercial basis, and were flexible on the odd occasion we exceeded our development hours. It was quite apparent right from the start that they wanted to get to a solution. They were very open, honest, transparent about what they could do, how they could do it, and the next steps. And they were very consistent in delivering on those promises and the goals we set at the start. I'd recommend the service for developing a system to anybody."

Responsiveness in the Elecosoft team was part of what made this relationship work so well, as he went on: "They were fantastic. Our consultant was very open minded and patient, especially because there were several times we relayed information that was a bit contrary to what we said previously. It allowed us to be flexible in how we thought something should work, try it, and if it didn't then we could tweak it. That kept a good cap on the development costs too."

The company is now looking towards expansion into its house-building division. It will work with Elecosoft again to develop customised templates to suit the specialised and more repetitive nature of this area.

Seddon is determined to deliver on its customer promise of on-time delivery, every time. With OneProgramme, and with the help of Powerproject Enterprise to enable true collaboration around every programme, it is confident it can.