INFRABEL OPTS FOR WELL-CONSIDERED PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Infrabel is the infrastructure manager for Belgian railway tracks and is responsible for the maintenance, modernization, expansion and management of the railway network. Infrabel's Asset Management team sought out a project & portfolio management approach and associated application in order to increase the efficiency of their projects. They opted for Microsoft Project Server and initially went looking for a partner which could take care of the tool setup. "What began as a service to increase maturity in project management grew into a partnership in which all aspects were addressed: from configuration to customization and coaching of internal users," explains Mathias Vanden Auweele, project manager in the Asset Management team and the initial driving force behind Smile 2.0.

CREATING THE RIGHT FOCUS

"In 2017, management challenged me to find a way to make our projects come in on time and on budget," says Mathias. This challenge was part of Infrabel's Smile 2.0 project, an initiative to take an even more structured, pragmatic approach to managing strategic objectives. "We were the first to prioritize a few strategic projects and closely monitored periodic reporting. These projects went well and it was concluded that other projects should be handled in the same way. That's how the question of 'How can we give more projects the right attention?' came to me. I quickly arrived at the answer: project management. It came down to determining the desired results and looking for a suitable application," explains Mathias.

Other teams within Infrabel were already working with Microsoft Project applications; they had had both good and bad experiences with them and therefore weren't able to provide a ready-made answer. In the end, a public tender was launched, with Realdolmen emerging as the winner. "Realdolmen stood out due to the content of their proposal and approach. All the facets we deemed necessary were present. The knowledge of customization and development of the application shone through in the strong answers to my questions, which gave me the necessary confidence," explains Mathias.

FROM SETUP TO SPARRING PARTNER

"We started working with Realdolmen at the beginning of 2018. There was limited scope, duration and budget, with only the basic setup provided. I specified the functional requirements, and Realdolmen then determined which technological developments were needed. We are delighted that Realdolmen was able – and wanted to – change gears quickly. In practice, it was a matter of surfing the waves that were cresting at the time," states Mathias. At that point, a start was already being

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made on motivating and training users. We provided training to a limited group of people and worked according to a proof-of-concept scenario. During this training, the team felt the need for a central point of contact. The intention was to take on more and more projects and involve more and more project managers. Partly for these reasons, it was decided in 2019 to continue and even expand the cooperation. Infrabel wanted to take the project application further, train more people and provide a central point of contact in house so that everything could be realized in a pragmatic manner. In addition to the tool, the focus is now much more on 'how to tackle a project using this tool'. "We regularly have a representative from Realdolmen on-site to actively approach users and to talk about how they work with the tool," adds Mathias.

WORKING TOGETHER ON DATA QUALITY

The time has now come to obtain results using the tool. "We want the reports from the application to act as a single source of truth for strategic decisions. This does imply that all data must be in the system and that the data should reflect reality. The next step is to organize steering committees, with their approach serving as a benchmark for the rest. Only when the data is right and validated and the projects are properly categorized in

terms of importance will management focus their attention on the reports. Only then can the mindset that has been developed flow to other projects and teams," states Mathias. In the future, we will work together on coaching to bring all project pipelines in order. This is the only way to increase the quality of data in the tool.

Ultimately, the intention is that Realdolmen will, in time, largely pass on its role as specialist to the team so that Infrabel has all the necessary expertise in house. Our goal is to empower them and to simply act as a sparring partner where Realdolmen can pass on hints and insights from theory and Infrabel can test them in practice.

MAXIMUM EXPERTISE, MINIMAL MANAGEMENT

This project was realized by one of Realdomen's multidisciplinary teams. This approach means that the client relies on a single contact person who provides the necessary functional framework and provides a solution with the person with the right expertise. In this way, the client can rely on the maximum amount of expertise without having to manage an entire team. "Such an approach requires trust, since a number of things also be done remotely. This way of working is succeeding here. We don't have to make room for a whole team and we don't have to be constantly thinking about to whom we're going to ask the question," explains Mathias.

The strength lies in the mix. The contact person can throw out a question to a team with different profiles and give a complete answer to the client. The contact person is also the liaison between business and IT. Hiring skills rather than people means you can work much more efficiently.

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WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

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