Innate resource management software or Microsoft Project Server?

Comparing requirements for a successful implementation

With a high percentage of enterprise project management systems ending up 'just doing timesheets', jumping from spreadsheets to such systems is high risk, expensive and very disruptive. Why introduce another major project when you already have too many?

Innate resource management software is the logical next step; it converts your spreadsheets into a robust multi-user system at a fraction of the cost, time and risk. Web based spreadsheets hold resource planning data centrally in SQL Server or Oracle and project management functions apply across the entire workload, including operational tasks. Each user sees just the information that they need and there is superb integration with Microsoft Project, if required. The resource management software is quick to implement, has great flexibility and is competitively priced

This white paper compares the requirements for successful implementation of Innate with Project Server 2007. The opinions we express about Project Server are based on:

- What Innate clients and prospects have told us about Project Server.
- The 900 page Project 2007 Bible (Elaine Marmel, published by Wiley in 2007).
- Information published on Microsoft's web site.
- Our knowledge gained from developing Innate software to synchronise with Microsoft Project and Project Server.

Project Server

Project Server is an enterprise project management solution with Microsoft Project at its heart; it covers in some form all the main attributes of project and program management. It is a complex set of tools, however, that takes a lot of effort to implement, both from the consultants that lead the implementation and from the organisation itself, in terms of business process reviews, solution design & configuration, training, and ongoing administration.

Project Server requires that Microsoft Project is used to plan each project and treats every plan as part of the corporate data. For reports to be meaningful therefore, data standards must be strictly adhered to by every project manager. This entails consistent use of detailed plan templates and strict adherence to a project planning methodology, such as PRINCE2. Successful implementation therefore requires a sophisticated project management culture, established project management processes and well trained project managers, as pre-requisites.

Innate

Innate resource management software is more limited in scope and does not address some of the items provided by Project Server, particularly some portfolio management (governance, workflow and optimisation) and risk management capabilities. Innate has a much lighter touch, yet provides:

- **Demand Management**

Web based spreadsheets capture demand profiles for new work - project, services and business as usual. Pipeline reports show the skill capacity to take on new work, and scenarios help to evaluate project options when bottlenecks occur.

- **Planning & Scheduling**

You can use Microsoft Project or the web based spreadsheet for detailed planning. Budgets and constraints can be developed within Innate and copied to Microsoft Project for top down planning. Multi project reports and milestone tracking are standard.

- **Resource Management**

Staff get assigned to the most important projects, based on their skills and commitments. As project task dates change any new conflicts are highlighted, and scenarios help evaluate the alternatives.

- **Timesheets**

Web based Timesheets track how time is being spent and can record estimates of remaining work. These can be returned to Microsoft Project for detailed project tracking. Standard reports show staff utilization and project effort, and automatic alerts drive the timesheet process.

- **Performance Measurement**

Time and cost variances for each project are updated as timesheets are processed. Planned vs. actual reports show how staff are being deployed.

- **Cost and Rates Management**

Activity based costing ensures that the appropriate rates are used when staff perform different roles in a project. Changes in staff rates and departments etc are tracked for accurate cost centre analysis.

- **Expenses and Billing**

Expenses can be captured as part of the timesheet process. The billing process applies appropriate rates to the booked hours and captures expenses for approvers to review and prepare invoices. Project profitability reports track each contract's financial performance

- **Project documentation**

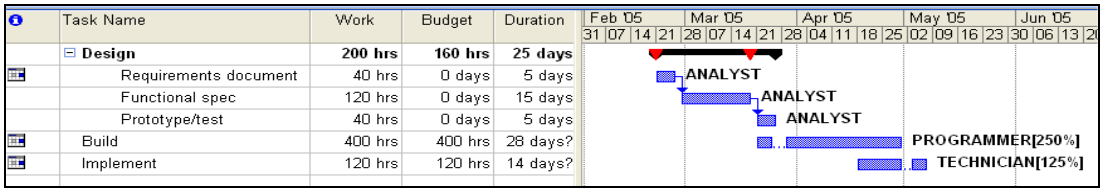
Like Project Server, Innate can utilize Share Point Services to manage project related documents, working in a very similar way.

- **Integration with other systems**

An Innate Integrator manages the transfer of data to and from other management systems. A two phase commit process reliably exports csv files of time and cost data to finance & billing systems.

Innate is a particularly good fit for organisations that are struggling with the use spreadsheets for their resource management and that may use Microsoft Project to plan more complex projects. It converts spreadsheets into a robust multi-user system at a fraction of the cost, time and risk. Web based spreadsheets hold data centrally in SQL Server or Oracle and project management functions apply across the entire workload, including operational tasks. Comprehensive reports, including a reports editor, and data access controls enable each user to see just the information that they need.

The integration with Microsoft Project supports a variety of process steps. For more complex projects, resource and date constraints can first be developed in Innate and then copied into MS Project for top down planning by the project manager.



The Design task from Innate is being broken down into greater detail within Microsoft Project; time and budget overruns are clearly identified.

This approach maintains Innate's integrity as the repository for corporate project and resource information, whilst enabling each project manager to do their detailed planning independently – reducing the need for a more sophisticated process and for consistency of detailed plans.

Alternatively, detailed Microsoft Project plans can be synchronised with Innate, for resource planning at the task level. Resources can be allocated within Microsoft Project, or from cross project views in Innate when the plans get updated with the allocated resource names.

Innate resource management software is quick to implement and easy to use. Typically the total external services cost of implementing of Innate will be around one third of the cost of implementing Project Server, with internal implementation costs being correspondingly lower. Apart from the external costs and the considerably greater internal client resource commitment required for Project Server, the complexity and duration add to the risk of the implementation not meeting its objectives. Innate is much simpler in approach, as described in the Morley and Welcom case studies that are downloadable from http://www.innate.co.uk/clients.html .

Conclusion

Where the current system is spreadsheet based and use of MS project is inconsistent or limited, Innate's resource management software seems to be the more logical next step. Should implementing an enterprise project system be the long term objective, then using Innate as an interim solution will assist with the cultural change and business process development that are the necessary pre-requisites.

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