How we helped JLL revive a global finance transformation

A finance transformation is rarely easy. It's no surprise, then, that many are time-consuming and few achieve all they set out to. But it doesn't have to be that way. Success relies on a clear goal, phased approach, fact-based benchmarks, strong change management and first-hand know-how. So when commercial real estate and investment management firm JLL saw its finance transformation drift off course, it turned to Berkeley for our experience.

JLL employs 93,000 people in more than 80 countries. A Fortune 500 company, it had revenue in excess of US$18 billion in 2019, up from US$16.3 billion in 2018. This growth, combined with ageing systems, led the firm to take on an ambitious programme to modernise and standardise its HR and Finance functions.

In January 2017, JLL began a very large, three-year programme to upgrade its HR and Finance platforms globally. In Finance, it wanted to drive efficiencies by achieving consistency across the business and realigning the function to support business decisions with data, analytics and reporting.

Finance being inherently complex and each region using different systems meant implementing a new PeopleSoft platform proved tricky. It had been launched in the Americas, but there were challenges operating the systems and processes. The programme team was focused on supporting the Americas in its live use of the system. This had a knock-on effect on the roll-out across Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA), which started to fall behind plan, putting it at risk of missing a go-live date postponed from three months earlier. Also, there wasn't yet a detailed plan or team for the Asia Pacific (APAC) implementation.

With this in mind, in December 2018, JLL asked us to assess the programme and advise how to turn it round.

The first six weeks: probing the past

Our review confirmed JLL's belief the programme needed an overhaul to get back on track. The scale and spread of the programme itself had made it disjointed. The project team included employees, contractors, vendors and consulting firms, and the project leadership team was made up mostly of contractors and consultants. Few were insiders who knew the workings of JLL first hand or who could provide business direction. Many workstreams didn't have clear scope or accountability boundaries – meaning that, in turn, roles and responsibilities often lacked clarity. This made it hard to see at a glance, for example, what had to be done and when, and which activities relied on others. Despite a good basic plan, it was too high level. To give the business control, oversight and ownership, the plan needed detail.

We guided the programme leadership team to increase the business's involvement. The UK Chief Financial Officer (now EMEA Chief Financial Officer), swapped his main role to work full-time on the programme. We led a project-planning exercise and set up rigorous controls to manage a range of areas – from project financial management to status reporting to risk and issue management. And we had tough conversations with JLL's existing main consulting firm about the failings to date. These changes, among others, enabled us to give stakeholders an honest and transparent view of the programme: where it was, the changes needed and how to implement them.

JLL had engaged us to assess the programme and report back. Within four weeks, we were retained to see it through.

How we worked: on side and on site

EMEA was about to start user acceptance testing (UAT) for the second time, but at this point, the requirements were often unclear or not formally approved. In January 2019, tasked to turnaround and implement the programme with a deadline to go live in April 2019, we stepped in. To achieve this, one of our consultants acted as global programme director and another as EMEA deployment lead. We worked as integral members of JLL, accountable for programme delivery, rather than distant third parties acting as advisers. Being part of the teams meant we had a stake in the programme's success.

Sharing know-how and experience, we brought much-needed discipline to how the programme was managed. With our opposite numbers, we instilled changes to get the programme on the right footing. Based in the finance centre for EMEA in Warsaw, Poland, our deployment lead bridged the gap between the project and the business by working directly with the Finance function. In the US, our global programme director worked with the senior team and UK Chief Financial Officer to run the project and manage delivery across all workstreams.

We reset and restructured the programme – redefined workstreams, roles and responsibilities, as well as durations and dependencies – and put in place tight governance. Working with the workstream leads, we brought the Finance function into the programme. In a major change, we formalised status meetings with finance leaders from each affected country, using their Finance Council forum, and they liaised with their finance teams on the ground. This gave us ties to the people who would use the new systems. It made sure they knew both what we would need from them and what they would get from the programme, and it helped both sides understand whether there were any red flags. Here, our transparency made a big difference.

At the same time, the global programme leadership did a similar task for the design and technology delivery teams. We divided the EMEA requirements into essential and non-essential and agreed these with the business. The essentials made up a Minimum Viable Product (MVP), and we set aside the non-essentials for future releases. The MVP formed the basis for sign off on the scope, for starting UAT and for UAT coverage. We worked with each region to design and define manual workarounds to fill gaps created by requirements that didn't make it into the MVP. We also prioritised a backlog of changes to make after go-live, to enhance the solution. Turning the programme around while working on delivery made it possible to sign off UAT, launch the solution on time and make sure the business was ready for go-live.

With the programme under way in EMEA and meeting its milestones, we split our attention between EMEA and APAC.

Next steps: how we built on success in EMEA

The senior leadership team began to feel more confident about progress in EMEA and wanted to press ahead in APAC, to go live by the end of 2019. Given we were still turning around the project in EMEA, this raised another challenge. We articulated the risks associated with turning attention to APAC in parallel with the EMEA delivery and clarified what would be needed to meet the deadline. Then, we set about planning how we'd deliver.

First, we took lessons from JLL's two earlier deployments in EMEA and the Americas. There, for example, one of the big four systems integrators had a 'coach and assist' contract to support the programme, but without accountability for delivery. We expanded that firm's role to take on other workstreams, including data and testing. We revised and renegotiated their contract, ensuring clear accountabilities and building in financial incentives and penalties to encourage on-time and on-budget delivery. To deliver in parallel, a larger project team would be needed. We defined resource requirements, revised and got approval for a new project budget and recruited extra team members.

This time round, we limited the scope to an MVP from the start and engaged with the business to make sure that scope was acceptable. We also defined clear stage gates and readiness criteria for each. This gave the Governance committee transparency on status and the ability to make informed decisions about whether the project should proceed through each of these gates.

As we neared go-live in EMEA, our deployment lead focused on launch there, enabling our global programme director to focus on the APAC delivery. We added a third Berkeley consultant to the APAC team for a few weeks before go-live. This was to check the support organisation was fully tested. It was also to make sure the people, processes and tools were ready to support users once they were using the system.

Order restored

A third successful month-end close in July 2019 marked the end of the programme in EMEA. APAC went live on time in October 2019. Similarly, it had three successful month-end closes and the first year-end close before the programme was formally closed and moved to business as usual.

This was a large, complex programme with 200 project team members at peak and 40,000 users to be trained across thousands of business units. Safe delivery in the regions by the end of 2019 against the odds gave JLL the consistency it desired. It has a solid foundation for future transformation, and it has confidence in its ability to accurately generate in excess of US$18 billion of invoices a year.

To find out more

If you'd like to hear how we can help you and your business through a transformation, feel free to get in touch with **Christian Ingram** or **Dave Machin.**