NHS Blood and Transplant transforms HR function: Partners in IT tailor ServiceNow to support HR service delivery

In a nutshell:

- NHS Blood & Transplant employ c.6,000 staff across UK
- This project formed part of modernising the HR function
- Creates a “single point of contact” to HR for all managers and staff
- System ready to go live within six weeks of starting on-site
- All targets hit or exceeded within first two weeks of operation
- 3 key success factors: people, process and technology
- PiIT chosen for experience with other NHS clients & ServiceNow experience

“ServiceNow represents the future of how we want to deliver business applications”

Mike Potter
NHS BT Business Transformation Director

NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) has a core purpose to save and improve lives through the provision of a safe and reliable supply of blood components, diagnostic services and stem cell services to hospitals in England and North Wales, and tissues and solid organs to hospitals across the UK. In 2012/13 NHSBT donors contributed 1.9 million units of blood, 4,208 organs, 5,800 tissue donations, 2,000 banked cord blood units, and 188 adult stem cell donations, helping save and improve thousands of lives.

NHSBT is a Special Health Authority employing approx 6,000 staff, based at a variety of sites throughout the UK and within a wide variety of healthcare roles. Following a major reorganisation of its human resources function in 2013, Partners in IT came on board to provide IT support for the organisational changes using the ServiceNow software as a platform.

Originally developed as a tool for managing IT services, ServiceNow’s functionality is well suited to a function like HR where there is potential for a high level of workflow and process automation, and PiIT has been at the forefront of a number of such HR implementations in the UK.

HR restructure drives need for improved technology

In 2012/13 David Evans, Director of Workforce at NHSBT, instigated a project to restructure and modernise the HR function. Following research and analysis in the private and public sectors, and consultation with staff and customers, a strategy was devised to improve the HR service offering in a way that would free up the regionally-based HR teams to focus on value-added HR delivery while providing greater consistency of advice and approach to line managers and staff across the range of NHSBT services and locations.
Historically, according to Katherine Robinson, Deputy Director of Human Resources, the HR function at NHSBT had not exploited the advantages of technology solutions to support either HR delivery or to improve the experience of the customer when interacting with HR services. Katherine explains “Although we operate in an environment where we need to be conscious of cost control, we became convinced from our research that the best-performing HR organisations succeed because of two key factors: first, having dedicated resource within the HR function to focus on the experience of the end-user, i.e. ‘to make it easier to do things around here’ and, second, making use of technology to underpin our service and how it is delivered.”

The top level objectives for the IT strategy for NHSBT HR were to support the development of a ‘single point of contact’, known as HR Direct, for all managers and staff to use to access HR advice and support from wherever they are located in the UK. In addition, to automate and improve the systems for managing queries and HR cases, which range from the provision of straightforward advice through to managing more complex matters such as disciplinary or grievance cases.

Shane White, HR Business Partner – Organ Donation & Transplantation and HR Strategy Development, who was the business/project lead recalls that “one of our challenges with a dispersed team was that we had a very limited picture at the centre of what cases were in progress, the workload of the team overall and the caseload of individuals in a way that was live and meaningful and not retrospective. We also had little data on which to understand the quality and timeliness of the customer experience. This was largely because we had archaic systems based on a spreadsheet record updated by 60 or 70 people on an inconsistent and retrospective basis, and this was supplemented by information held in email trails or Word documents. As a result it took a lot of time and effort to get a clear picture of what was going on either collectively or on individual cases. We summed it up by saying ‘things worked but we knew it could be so much better!’”

ServiceNow plus Partners in IT selected as solution

By coincidence, the review of HR’s IT needs was taking place at the same time as the IT function’s review of its service desk platform, and it made sense to consider the two issues together. As Shane White comments, “if you strip away the content, the functionality needed to support IT and HR is very similar: essentially you are handling an incoming query or request for help, providing advice or resolution, following up and then documenting what’s been done”.

Having created a joint specification, and following a tender and selection process, NHSBT chose ServiceNow, a Software as a Service (SaaS) platform, to be implemented with support from Partners in IT (PiIT), the only Preferred Service Partner for ServiceNow in the UK. PiIT’s experience with other NHS clients, its experience of non IT process and application design, and its knowledge of the software, were important because the HR team were aware that at that point ServiceNow’s HR functionality was less developed than its IT service management features, so they knew that there would be a degree of customisation needed.

Aggressive targets met in implementation

When it came to implementation the combined experience and knowledge of the HR team and PiIT, plus the flexibility of ServiceNow and the support of the in-house IT team, meant that within six weeks of commencing the on-site work the system was ready to go live and could be handed over for training to HR users.
Shane White is full of praise for Partners in IT’s approach to implementation: “It was a very aggressive target, but there was a lot of flexibility on both sides and we took a very iterative approach. As an HR function our requirements from the system developed throughout the implementation process as we understood better the capabilities of ServiceNow and as Partners in IT got to understand the HR and NHSBT environment. There was a lot of mutual respect and learning, and their experience of process consulting was incredibly helpful to us.

“The ability to customise ServiceNow to meet our HR needs was impressive and fast and this helped to build a very good working relationship which was very positive, interactive and responsive. However, Partners in IT weren’t afraid to challenge us where necessary and that external perspective on our organisation was highly valuable.”

**Launch generates ‘tremendous’ response and results exceed expectations**

NHSBT launched the HR Direct service (the single point of contact for all initial HR queries) in November 2013 following a period of testing and training. The launch was supported by a very robust communications plan, using multiple comms channels, over the month before the launch to make sure staff and managers were aware of the new service, and the resulting levels of awareness meant the launch was very successful: the platform went live at 9am, and by 9.10am most of the HR department had accessed it and were using the system to capture their cases.

“The feedback has been tremendous,” says Shane White. “The system is very user friendly which has encouraged people to use it more than we predicted.”

For example, the team had allowed four weeks to upload all the existing HR cases to the system but it only took two weeks because it was so easy to do, and people could see the benefits the system would bring.

The results have continued to be impressive, although it is still relatively early days. The team has hit or exceeded all of its targets relating to usage, closure rates and satisfaction within the first two weeks of operation and has maintained these consistently since. Targets included for example the percentage of queries that were logged via HR Direct (rather than with local HR teams), the percentage of queries that were closed within one day, and the percentage that could be closed without escalation to more senior HR staff. Another indicator of the success of the HR Direct service has been the high level of unsolicited positive feedback from service users and the absence of concerns or issues being raised about the service. The service has quickly established itself as the first place to go to for HR advice in NHSBT.

Shane White attributes the success of the HR Direct service to three factors: process, people and technology. He comments that the work that they did with PiIT in mapping processes was incredibly valuable. Second, the HR Direct team were recruited with all having had experience of working with similar concepts in their previous organisations. They were able to bring this experience into the planning and delivery of our project. They were highly focussed and motivated at being able to be part of the project from the beginning which created a perfect environment to succeed. And third, the technology provided by ServiceNow was highly functional, user-friendly and entirely tailored to NHSBT’s needs. Although HR processes aren’t always completely linear – for example a disciplinary process can jump around or branch – we were able to map them much more than we’d done previously and that helped us to identify where we could improve our process.

Shane White adds: “One advantage of the system we have set up is that we have a data link to staff information stored in the NHS ESR (Electronic Staff Record): the national NHS database of employee details, and ServiceNow is automatically populated with required data which saves HR staff considerable time and provides the convenience of not having to switch between systems when responding to cases and queries.”
Next steps for HR

The next stage in the programme for the NHSBT and PiIT team is to complete and launch another module based on ServiceNow called HR Knowledge. This is an online portal to access HR advice that will directly support managers and staff by providing specifically tailored information accessible via the intranet 24 hours a day. This is important because NHSBT functions round the clock and although the HR function operates a normal working day managers will now be able to access information on HR issues or raise a query with the HR Direct, whenever they need it.

After that, the team is working on the launch of a self-service function which will enable managers to download and submit paperwork automatically for job evaluations, for example, rather than having to request the form by phone or email and then send it to HR by post or email. The manager will then be able to monitor the progress of his or her submission online.

Meanwhile the IT service management project is also progressing well and is due to go live soon.

“The future of business applications” says head of IT

Overall the project has been perceived as a significant success in NHSBT. Mike Potter Business Transformation Director at NHSBT comments: “ServiceNow represents the future of how we want to deliver business applications - fast to deploy, flexible to meet our needs and capable of delivering what our customers want”.

About Partners in IT

Partners in IT specialises in implementing and supporting IT Service Management solutions for corporate IT departments and service providers.

Over 15 years working in the ITSM industry has given us the depth and breadth of experience to implement and support customers of any size. We work with ServiceNow to implement, train and support customers with anything from 5 users to many thousands.

We have developed a number of unique services that enhance the value of a ServiceNow solution.

Working with leading technologies from ServiceNow, and a range of other complementary technologies, Partners in IT design, build and support world class IT Service Management systems and processes.

AdminIT
A unique cost effective service to help optimise your IT Service Management solution to keep it up to date and in the best condition for your business.

PerformIT
An online dashboard, scorecard and mobile reporting solution for ServiceNow customers.

GovernIT
A portal for accessing all of your IT Service Management process documentation accessed seamlessly from the ServiceNow.

ServiceIT
Based on ServiceNow, a full process driven service desk that provides you with all the functionality you will ever need at a cost that makes financial sense.