

Modernising finance systems with Microsoft Dynamics 365



Wesleyan, a mutual organisation based in Birmingham, England, had a goal of modernising its 20-year-old finance system. Wesleyan, along with technology partner KPMG, kicked off an upgrade project from its outdated system to Microsoft Dynamics 365 Finance.

UK mutual organisation Wesleyan's strap line is We are all about you, which refers to the financial services organisation's customer-centric drive: it's all about its customers and target markets. Whilst the 181-year-old organisation works with customers from all backgrounds, its core markets are teachers, doctors, and dentists—and its strategy targets those core segments. "We really understand our customer base and have built a deep understanding of what it's like for those customers in their specific industry," says Kevin Clarke, Program Manager at Wesleyan.

"Wesleyan was operating on an outdated system that was not aligned to the technology of today; this meant inefficiencies in day-to-day operations," says Launa Herne, Head of Finance Transformation at Wesleyan. "Implementing a new Finance System was required to start the journey to transform our Finance function."

Herne adds that the organisation needed a modern finance system with the flexibility to scale to its needs and requirements without relying on customisations; this would make upgrades easier and allow for business growth. The solution had to align with the firm's technology strategy.

Microsoft Dynamics 365 Finance clicked all the boxes. In February 2020, Wesleyan and Microsoft Gold Partner [KPMG](#) kicked off implementation of Dynamics 365 Finance. Fifteen months later, the platform went live—on time and according to budget—despite a major complication.

Remobilising on Teams to stay on schedule

Wesleyan's technology strategy aims to be efficient, maintain cost base, and deliver business value. "The key thing is making sure that all the applications and technologies we buy fit together and link into our tech strategy. We don't just buy all new shiny stuff we can't support. We make sure we've got the right cost base," says Gary Johnson, Enterprise Architect at Wesleyan.

Wesleyan decided on Dynamics 365 Finance and planned accordingly. When the project kicked off in February 2020, Wesleyan collaborated with its implementation partner and was prepared for all outcomes except the one that occurred a month later in March 2020: the COVID-19 pandemic.

Wesleyan remobilised the team by shifting to [Microsoft Teams](#) and working remotely to keep the project moving along the proposed 15-month timeline. "You've got a number of things to manage—the logistics of remobilising a team that's now remote and establishing new ways of working whilst trying to maintain the planned end date despite these obstacles," says Clarke. "The key focus was ensuring we supported the team throughout this."

Following KPMG's powered approach that applies best practices with already established roles, Wesleyan allowed very few customisations. "As soon as you customise, you've increased your testing. When you use tried and proven entities like Dynamics 365 Finance, it doesn't mean you haven't got to test, but it limits the amount you have to do. As soon as you customise, you've got to write more specs, implementation cost goes up, and you've created ambiguity. By using out-of-the-box technology with trusted processes, you're limiting customisations, keeping the cost down, and minimising the risk," says Johnson.

Generating efficient outcomes

Today, Wesleyan has approximately 200 users on Dynamics 365 Finance. The cloud-based application platform is used to manage general ledger (GL) accounts and fixed assets and to raise manual payments or purchase ledger payments. The legacy manual sub-ledgers once used in Excel have been brought under one system, removing manual intervention and risk and giving Wesleyan a sustainable basis for growth.

The new system created efficiencies that allow users to pull reports, perform reconciliations, and look after bank accounts. "Working within a modern finance system like Dynamics 365 Finance, allows us to import bank information into the ledger rather than the previous manual approach we had to take due to system limitations; the process now is improved significantly" says Herne.

"We have moved from many manual processes to a system-improved integrated environment, not only from introducing more efficient sub-ledgers but also workflow approvals."

Financial Analyst Supervisor Christine Perry says,

"Bank reconciliations are a lot more user friendly and save us time because we used to have to do a lot manually. We used a lot of spreadsheets, downloaded reports from one system, and added them into other spreadsheets. You had to remember all the different formulas, and for many tasks there were two or three spreadsheets."

Because Dynamics 365 Finance replaced Wesleyan's purchase ledger system, employees outside of Finance, such as Philip Degg, Supplier Relationship Manager, use the platform to check and oversee invoices and purchase orders (POs). "With real-time access in Dynamics 365 Finance to look at invoices, POs, and requisitions, I can put the picture together. It's useful at the individual supplier level and at a wider procurement level with spend reporting and by category. It's helped us make data-driven decisions about our supply chain strategy as well," adds Degg.

Dynamics 365 Finance updates regularly. "This forces us to stay up to date and keeps us out of a technical debt situation where we're X years out of date," says Degg. "It's one headache less for me."

Considering what's next

As the Wesleyan teams move forward, they won't soon forget how much they achieved. "Landing a project of this scale and complexity on time in any normal circumstances would be a great success. Doing so with the challenges we faced...I'd like to think everyone sees it as a great sense of achievement," says Clarke.

In the aftermath of Wesleyan's finance transformation journey, employees learned new skills and ways of working. Some have moved on to slightly different roles.

"At the start of the pandemic, even though we'd gone to full virtual work, people wondered whether we'd be able to do it. The fact that we did is credit to the commitment, determination and collaboration of the overall team," he says. "It's a testament to everyone's efforts and support that we were able to implement the project on time, despite having had considerable disruption at the start of the project."

Johnson also attests to the successful collaboration. "It worked really well. Launa was the business lead, Kevin was the PM, and I acted as lead solution architect. We worked closely with the KPMG leads, and that made a difference," he adds. We were singing from the same hymn sheet. We formed quite a close relationship, which was key to success."

For the future, the company will look at profitability, scenario analysis, better budgeting, and forecasting. "We know more functionality is available to hold multiple budgets in Dynamics 365 Finance. We know we have the flexibility for reporting," says Herne. "How can we have better reporting and more flexibility with that reporting? That's something we would look at going forward. It's not on the roadmap yet, but it's where we would like to go to next."

Having only just scratched the surface of Dynamics 365 Finance features and what the application can do, financial analyst Perry looks forward to learning more. "It's been a year since we went live and I'm still learning," she says.

In the procurement and supplier management space, the team is considering a supplier portal where suppliers can register in Dynamics 365 Finance and, once approved, share PO info and possibly even create it as a self-service portal. "It's a journey we're still developing," says Degg.