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Brent London Borough Council Hyperautomates Its Back-End System for Better Experiences

How a London City Council Geared Up to Provide Better Employee and Constituent Experience by Upgrading Its HCM to Oracle Fusion Cloud HCM

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AT A GLANCE

This case study describes Brent London Borough Council's journey in upgrading its enterprise resource planning (ERP) landscape from Oracle E-Business Suite Release 12 to Oracle Fusion Cloud ERP and Oracle Fusion Cloud Human Capital Management (HCM), with a particular focus on the upgrades of its people processes. After outlining the initial challenges the council experienced, it describes the upgrade to Oracle Cloud HCM, the benefits realized from the newly implemented automation, and the lessons learned. The case study concludes with a set of tangible recommendations for leaders planning to upgrade their ERP/HCM automation.

AT A GLANCE	
Challenges	• Disjointed systems • Manual, error-prone work • Subpar employee experience
Solutions	• Redesign processes and digitize them • Implement with a proven system integrator • Upgrade to automation with the latest vendor version: Oracle Cloud HCM in this case
Benefits	• Increased HR professional productivity • Higher payroll processing efficiency • Reduction in integration effort

BUSINESS THEMES

Future of Work   Marketing Transformation   Next-Generation Customer Experience   Technology Optimization

THE ORGANIZATION

Brent London Borough Council, a local authority based in Wembley, Middlesex, is one of the 32 London borough councils. It sets planning policies in combination with Greater London Authority and national policies; sets council tax; serves as a tax collector and billing authority; is a local education authority; and is in charge of council housing, libraries, waste collection and disposal traffic, most roads, and environmental health.

The council delivers these services to its constituents with a workforce of approximately 3,000 people. On the system side, Brent Council has been a longtime Oracle customer, running Oracle E-Business Suite Release 12.

Figure 1. Brent London Borough Council Logo

Source: Wikipedia

About Oracle Applications at Brent Council

Brent Council went live on Oracle E-Business Suite in 2013, as part of a shared project with six other London boroughs. The project included upgrading the Oracle E-Business Suite systems all the way to Release 12 in subsequent years, at which point Brent Council decided to run its own version of the Oracle system, enabling it to drive a more independent IT strategy.

In 2019, faced with end-of-support challenges with Release 12, the council decided to look for a new platform and settled on Oracle Cloud HCM as its preferred choice. Functionality, efficiencies, cost, and familiarity were key drivers for the decision. The choice was further supported by an internal selection process and business case; ultimately it was return on investment (ROI) that led Brent Council to remain an Oracle Applications customer.

Figure 2. Brent Civic Centre

Source: Wikipedia

Having made the system decision, the council selected Infosys as its partner for the implementation in late 2019, based on Infosys's expertise in the UK with Oracle in public sector, as well as on cost. It helped that Brent Council was familiar with Infosys, which already was providing support services for Release 12. Familiarity with Brent Council also helped Infosys make the best business case for partnering on the upgrade project.

THE CHALLENGES

The council's Release 12 implementation was workable but relied on many manual interactions to operate the council's people processes. For instance, managers would use Microsoft Word documents or Excel spreadsheets to collect information and then email the documents to their HR partners for system entry. Obviously, incomplete, erroneous information made the process even more cumbersome.

> "Redesigning our processes before implementing Oracle Cloud HCM was critical to reap tangible benefits from a more complete integrated system. By doing this the organisation was able to achieve efficiencies by automating key business processes. Today, we have a better employee experience for our new hires, HR colleagues, managers and employees, enabling us to deliver better constituent services."
>
> *— Vik Kapoor,*
> *Head of Oracle Cloud Support,*
> *Brent London Borough Council*

The manual work was particularly prominent in the new-hire process, which required duplicate data entry from the recruiting/applicant tracking system (ATS) into the Oracle HCM system. Similarly, any employee promotions or grade changes were done manually and thus were slow, tedious, and error-prone, resulting in further requests for clarification.

HR processes were not standardized either but instead were highly dependent on a high degree of manual processing and the individuals who were operating any HR process. That lack of standardization hurt Brent Council, because processes were not transferable, knowledge would vanish in case of attrition, and vacation and sick leave coverage was cumbersome.

The result was a highly manual HR processing system that was not only expensive and nonscalable but also created the risk of treating people differently for the same HR event. Brent Council therefore sought to standardize and automate its HR processes.

THE SOLUTION

Having made the decision to stay with Oracle and having selected Infosys as its system integrator, Brent Council concluded the tendering process during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, in spring 2020. The contract was awarded to Infosys in June 2020, and the project kicked off with requirements gathering in July 2020.

Brent Council went live on October 6, 2021, with HR core, HR self-service, and payroll on the HCM side and a parallel go-live on the finance and supply chain management (SCM) side—a 15-month process whose speed was especially impressive in light of its scope and the ongoing COVID pandemic.

Brent Council had used Oracle Taleo for its recruiting automation and replaced that with the new Oracle Fusion Cloud Recruiting (Oracle Recruiting), with a go-live in December 2021. Sticking to a quarterly go-live schedule, the council then went live with Oracle Cloud HCM's Oracle Performance Management system in spring 2022 and added Oracle HR Help Desk capabilities in July 2022.

The benefits of the unified HCM system are best illustrated by the integration of new hires into the new Brent Council HCM system. Previously new hires had to be entered twice into both the recruiting and the Oracle HCM system; now the successful hire's record is automatically transferred into Oracle Cloud HCM. This reduces the burden on hiring managers and HR, smooths and accelerates the onboarding process, and eliminates manual work and management of sensitive documents—creating a better experience for candidates, employees, managers, and HR professionals.

The introduction of Oracle Cloud HCM's Manager Self Service (MSS) and Employee Self Service (ESS) capabilities substantially reduced manual work and error-prone data entries. With the new system, managers directly enter employee record changes—such as contract changes, position changes, changes in employee grades, and changes in salary—into the Oracle Cloud HCM system, which then automatically routes the changes through the appropriate approval workflow.

Brent Council also took the opportunity to improve its internal process—harmonizing the contract variation across different employment types so that it can be managed in a single contract transaction, for example. It also harmonized the integration between HCM and finance, making the position management and HCM system the leading system for feeding cost center allocation for employee salaries.

New positions can be created via MSS and, after the appropriate approval process is successfully executed, are automatically associated with their corresponding cost center. The result is better establishment management and associated budgets, which is important in the era of constituent efficiencies.

Because Brent Council hires numerous agency workers, it integrated Oracle Cloud HCM with its primary recruiting agency. When changes are made to agency worker records in the recruiting agency system, these are reflected directly in the Oracle system. All agency workers are integrated with the Oracle HCM system, enabling people leaders to manage their mixed employee/agency worker teams in a consistent and harmonized fashion.

Furthermore, Brent Council not only made the HCM system the leading system for cost center allocation of personnel but it also made it the leading system for systems access, feeding the Active Directory system in IT. Starters and leavers are also managed in the HCM system, which then updates the Active Directory system and, with that, provides or removes

access to systems. Further automation of the starters and leavers process is planned in the coming months.

These developments greatly simplify the work of people leaders, who predominantly have mixed teams of permanent employees and agency workers. The full visibility into both worker types makes managers' work significantly easier, freeing up capacity for more high-value tasks.

THE IMPACT

Overall, Brent Council has seen positive ROI with the rollout of Oracle Cloud HCM in the following areas:

- **Improved employee experience.** The 3,000 users of the Brent Council HCM system can now enjoy the advantages of one unified user interface and benefit from the acceleration of standardized processes.

- **Improved manager experience.** Managers are experiencing significant efficiency improvement with the new system. For instance, the time to create an employee record is reduced and the wait time for approval processes to complete is shorter.

- **Improved HR professional experience.** A unified system pays off dramatically for HR professionals, as witnessed at Brent Council, whose system unification has resulted in productivity improvements overall for its HR professionals. Brent has also introduced a HR case management module (HR Helpdesk), which has led to a more consistent approach to managers' being able to log HR cases via self-service and enables compliance with HR policies as well as improved capability for HR professionals' being able to monitor and report on case progress.

- **Greater transparency and better cost control.** Better integration with other systems, most prominently finance, has dramatically paid off for Brent Council, by providing greater transparency

and better cost control. For instance, integration with third-party systems is increased, resulting in faster information sharing and reduced wait times.

- **Accelerated recruiting with HR core integration.** Brent Council was able to accelerate the recruiting process by integrating its recruiting system with its HR system, creating a single Oracle system. With close to 800 hires in 2022 out of an employee base of close to 3,000, this time savings results in a significant acceleration in the hiring process.

- **Improved payroll performance and accuracy.** On the payroll side, Brent Council increased its payroll processing efficiency, significantly improving the speed and quality of paper processing.

- **Attainment of Enterprise Acceleration.**[1] Across all key performance indicators (KPIs), Brent Council has achieved tremendous Enterprise Acceleration, with a prominent example being the reduction in wait time for HR transactions. Equally impressive is the improved productivity of HR professionals. And finally, being able to accelerate the hiring of new candidates is a key contribution to filling open positions faster, which then enables the council to operate at better capacity and thus deliver better constituent services.

THE TAKEAWAYS

Lessons Learned

The following lessons can be gleaned from the go-live of Oracle at Brent Council:

1. **Involve the relevant parties in the system requirements process.** Brent Council learned that bringing in the right decision-makers early and getting the process right from the get-go is a key accelerator for projects.

2. **Have the fortitude to pause when necessary.** During the implementation, Brent Council learned that when the best practice process is no longer certain, it is better to delay the rollout and make sure that users have defined the process correctly. The later in the implementation that wrong processes are identified and fixed, the more expensive it is.

3. **Integrated systems pay off.** The more tightly systems are integrated and the more automated their interfaces are, the better the resulting data quality and, with that, decision quality will be.

ROI

Among the several improvements Brent Council achieved, the following are the most prominent:

- **Improved HR productivity.** Brent Council has experienced an increase in HR professionals' productivity, thanks to the Oracle HCM system, because its processes are better implemented from an automation and digitization perspective.

- **Improved payroll processing.** Payroll processing efficiency has been increased with the new system, and, in turn, the monthly payroll cycle has been reduced. The result is higher pay accuracy and more time available for payroll professionals to focus on other critical activities.

- **A more agile system landscape.** Better integration with Finance has created better cost transparency, and better integrations of agency systems have fostered a better employee and manager experience.

Best Practices

The following best practices can be derived from Brent Council's Oracle implementation:

- **It is all about communication.** Communicate early, often, and consistently to make sure that everyone is working toward the common goal of go-live. Especially during COVID, it has been a challenge to keep everybody pulling in the right direction, which the council has addressed via overcommunication to ensure that all members of the implementation project are on the same page.

- **Get the UAT capacity and competence right.** Getting users to spend time on user acceptance testing (UAT) always means taking them away from their day job, which still needs to be performed.

Making sure to have competent end users available for the testing and allowing them to balance their daily workload with the testing effort is key.

- **Manage expectations for reporting.** When systems are being unified, expectations related to reporting are typically high, but that does not mean that every report for every question will be run on day 1 or for go-live. So understanding requirements and managing expectations related to the reporting scope are critical.

What to Avoid

Even when time pressure and tight project deadlines are challenging implementation teams, it is important to take enough time to revisit potential design changes. Making design changes on a whim rarely pays off, usually delaying implementations. Establishing a proper governance process to understand any deviation from the initial requirements effort is a good best practice for controlling design changes.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the Brent Council/Oracle/Infosys success, Constellation has the following key recommendations for CxOs:

- **Implement, pushing integration to its fullest.** With the hand-to-machine ratio in enterprises declining over the coming decades, implementations should err on the side of more integration. Brent Council shows the significant savings and efficiency gains and additional Enterprise Acceleration benefits of this strategy in an impressive way.

- **Trust that digitization delivers.** Moving from manual to digital processes always creates an upside if those processes are designed correctly. Using all integrated automation as provided in enterprise suites always beats manual work with emails and documents, as Brent Council has impressively demonstrated.

- **Select your system integrator wisely.** Selecting the right system integrator is an important factor in the success of a project, with experience in the industry, experience with the products being implemented, expertise with local legislation, and a skilled bench of professionals being the key success criteria.

ENDNOTE

[1] Mueller uses the term Enterprise Acceleration to refer to the need for enterprises to move faster and become more agile. For more, see: Holger Mueller, "Why the C-Suite Must Embrace Enterprise Acceleration," May 2, 2019. https://www.constellationr.com/research/why-c-suite-must-embrace-enterprise-acceleration

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· Founders of Constellation Executive Network, a membership organization for digital leaders seeking to learn from market leaders and fast followers.

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