Nonprofit Devotes 5,000+ More Hours to Meaningful Work Using Automated Workflows

Employees at United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangladesh spent hours each week handling operational processes. To promote greater efficiency, the organization adopted Nintex Workflow 2010 and Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 so it could quickly develop customized workflows to automate its manual processes. UNDP Bangladesh now is making the most of its resources and estimates a savings of up to 5,000 hours a year, enabling it to better support its vital efforts to improve the social and economic development of Bangladesh.

In 2010, Jesime Tuli made history in Bangladesh, becoming the first woman ever to oversee a municipal election in that country. Although a nation on the rise, Bangladesh has faced—and continues to face—gender inequality,

> "Using programming tools would have taken six times longer to deploy than developing in Nintex Workflow" Shofiqul Islam, UNDP Bangladesh

poverty, and other critical issues. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangladesh aims to help Bangladeshis overcome their challenges and bring about positive change such as that seen in the recent election. The organization advocates for the country's people in areas including governance, poverty reduction,

environment, energy and climate change, disaster management, and achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

A nonprofit organization, UNDP Bangladesh established in 1972, strives to maximize its limited resources—both financial and workforce—to ensure that its efforts go toward helping the people of Bangladesh build better lives for themselves. However, operational circumstances made that difficult. "Throughout our organization's multiple office locations, employees had to deal with time-consuming manual processes that diverted their time and energy from their important program work," recalls Shofiqul Islam, Web Management Expert at UNDP Bangladesh. For instance, UNDP Bangladesh has approximately 4,000 vendors in its Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)

Company: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangladesh
Website: www.undp.org.bd
Country: Bangladesh
Industry: Nonprofit
Customer Profile: Since 1972, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangladesh has been working with numerous governmental agencies and partners to advance economic and social development in Bangladesh.
Business Situation: UNDP Bangladesh struggled with manual processes and sought to overhaul them so that employees could spend less time on process management and more time working to directly improve life in Bangladesh.
Solution: UNDP Bangladesh deployed Nintex Workflow 2010 and Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 to quickly and easily create automated workflow processes used successfully by procurement and vendor management teams.
Benefits:
  • Increased efficiency
  • Reduced costs
  • Accelerated processes
  • Enhanced service delivery for Bangladesh
Software: Nintex Workflow 2010, Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010.

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system. An average of 10 to 20 times each day, staff members had to make changes to a vendor's bank account information, mailing addresses, and other details, in order for that vendor to receive timely payments and continue to provide the goods or services necessary to UNDP Bangladesh programs. It took those staff members numerous hours to collect required reference documents, track down a manager authorized to approve each change on paper, manually enter that change and its approval code into the ERP system, and follow up to ensure that the vendor had been taken care of in a timely manner.

"It could take a day or more to gain approval for a vendor-information change, and it often entailed hours of travelling to the right office, waiting for the manager to be there and available, and eventually obtaining sign-off for the change," says Islam. "That took staff members away from more productive work and frustrated them at the inefficient use of their time."

Those involved in the organization's individual programs and in its procurement team also encountered process-related frustrations. Whenever the Program Associates needed particular goods or services, such as office supplies, they had to make official requests to the procurement team, which handled more than 1,000 requests each year, dealing with about 100 requests at any given time. From initiation to approval, each request could require up to 33 steps, which might include gathering and submitting numerous supporting documents, manually reviewing submittals, noting missing information, and so on.

"With no official method of communicating that a particular step had been problematic or if further information needed to be supplied, program associates often had no idea that their requests were stalled," says Islam. "The delays caused by our lack of a smooth process had an impact on program efficacy when the associates did not receive what they needed," says Islam. In addition, UNDP Bangladesh had no straightforward way to compile consolidated status reports, which prevented senior managers from basing their business decisions about strategic direction on the organization's actual procurement needs.

The organization noted that other UNDP country offices had begun to implement software solutions to improve their procurement processes, which prompted the UNDP Bangladesh to consider tools to increase its own overall efficiency. "We wanted to be able to serve the people of Bangladesh as quickly and comprehensively as possible, so we set out to determine the best technologies to use to streamline our operations," says Manjur-e-Khuda, IT Manager at UNDP Bangladesh.

UNDP Bangladesh evaluated its options and concluded that it needed to introduce automated workflow processes into the organization. Recog-

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nizing that UNDP Bangladesh lacked the internal expertise necessary to develop customized automated workflows using ASP.NET or other development tools, the organization looked into hiring staff dedicated to development. "We discovered that it

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would cost too much per month for an in-house developer, and we had to be careful not to divert necessary resources away from our programs," says Manjur-e-Khuda. "While we understood that operational improvements would ultimately benefit our programs, we balked at spending too much of our limited budget."

Next, UNDP Bangladesh investigated using Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 as the basis for creating customized workflows, but again, its existing staff did not have the specialized technical skills needed to make such a plan a success. After it could not find consultants with the necessary development expertise in Bangladesh, the organization decided it would have to bring in a technical consultant from another country, which was to cost $6,000 per month, with a projected duration of several months.

Before hiring an external developer, however, UNDP Bangladesh explored the possibility of using existing workflow products offered by Nintex and other third party software vendors—rather than developing its own code. Islam downloaded a free trial version of Nintex Workflow 2007 and tested it with Office SharePoint Server 2007. Within just a few days, he had built a workflow prototype and was able to demonstrate to senior managers how internal staff could successfully use Nintex Workflow to solve the organization's process problems. He determined that other ISV workflow products failed to provide the same rich, web-enabled functionality. "I evaluated similar offerings in the market, but I couldn't find any product available that was better or smarter than Nintex Workflow," explains Islam.

UNDP Bangladesh opted to implement Nintex Workflow 2010 in conjunction with Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010. The organization found it easy to install Nintex Workflow, relying solely on resources available on the Nintex website and the installation guide from the Nintex Connect self-service community website. "The process was completely intuitive—there were no barriers to acquiring Nintex Workflow or deploying it. We found it quite reasonably priced," says Islam.

Islam and two other IT staff mem-

bers immediately got to work on workflow development, using requirements supplied by UNDP Bangladesh business managers to ensure accurate, comprehensive workflows. They completed the first, vendor management solution within 15 days, and employees immediately began conducting the vendor change process using the new customized workflow. The IT team had had no trouble integrating Nintex Workflow with the organization's ERP system, which eliminated the time and risks associated with the former manual data entry. Today, rather than physically taking paper documents to managers for approval, staff members remain at their desks and electronically submit their vendor profile updates, including scanned reference documents. The solution automatically sends the requests for approval to the appropriate managers and instantly routes their responses back to the sender. In fact, those involved with a particular request can conduct all communication regarding that request through the workflow solution.

The IT team also quickly developed an automated procurement process using Nintex Workflow. More than 50 staff members now submit their procurement requests through a web interface from their own office locations. The SharePoint solution walks them through the process, prompting them to include scanned copies of all required documents and approval as attachments. When a program associate submits a request, the UNDP

Bangladesh procurement manager instantly receives email notification and assigns a buyer on the procurement team to handle the request. The solution then notifies both the associate and the buyer and initiates the next step in the process. The associate also will receive an automatic notification if the submitted materials are missing necessary documents or if the buyer denies the request. When a requested item has been procured, the buyer closes the request, which triggers an email alert to the requester. In addition, UNDP Bangladesh IT staff also developed an integrated dashboard to give the organization's senior managers a clear view of up-to-date consolidated procurement reports.

UNDP Bangladesh employees have found Nintex Workflow so valuable that the organization has gone on to automate business processes to support other areas of its operations. For example, the organization's Results and Resource Management Cluster uses a workflow to track program results and monitor partnerships. UNDP Bangladesh also has a workflow to alert independent workers about expiring contracts and also to automate the method by which employees change their SharePoint passwords, thus removing that burden from the organization's relatively small IT staff. UNDP Bangladesh plans to automate more business processes in the near future, including automating its Donor Fund Management System and its associated email request and approval processes.

UNDP Bangladesh now has the means to streamline operations in many facets of its business, which helps increase employee productivity and keep the focus on the valuable work to which the organization is dedicated. "Implementing Nintex Workflow has greatly saved time for our staff and money for UNDP Bangladesh," says Islam.

Increased Efficiency

Using Nintex Workflow has given UNDP Bangladesh the ability to shorten timelines both for workflow development and for all its operational processes. In terms of development, the organization was able to create workflows using Nintex Workflowfar faster than it could have with ASP.NET or other tools. "Using other programming tools would have taken six times longer than developing in Nintex Workflow," says Islam. "Plus, we were able to realize immediate benefits because short development timelines meant that UNDP staff could start saving time right away, rather than waiting months for a solution."

From an operations standpoint, UNDP Bangladesh estimates that it will save more than 5,000 work hours each year because program associates, managers, and other staff can get through operational processes quickly, without travel time and hassles. "Our vendor change process has gone from more than a day to just a few mouse clicks," says Islam. "Our procurement request process has significantly improved; requestors and procurement staff save at least one hour per day on manual tasks, and requesters can track their requests from their desks, without any phone calls or physical meetings with procurement staff."

"We're using technology wisely so that we can devote more of our resources to serving the people of Bangladesh"

Reduced Costs

UNDP Bangladesh saved time, money and resources with its decision to adopt Nintex Workflow rather than hire additional staff or contract with experts from abroad. "A SharePoint consultant would have cost up to $7,000 per month, and likely would have taken many months to develop a limited number of workflows," says Manjur-e-Khuda. "Hiring an in-house developer would have cost $1,200 per month, indefinitely. By choosing Nintex Workflow, we already have reached the break-even point less than one year in, and we strongly believe that we will see bigger returns as we continue to put our tools to good use. We're using technology wisely so that we can devote more of our resources to serving the people of Bangladesh."

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Accelerated Processes

The automatic routing in Nintex Workflow has eliminated the need for UNDP Bangladesh employees to hunt down specific people and/or information in person, whether they are program associates seeking necessary supporting documents, staff members seeking manager approvals for vendor changes, or senior managers seeking insight into organizational trends. "By using Nintex Workflow, we have been able to empower staff members to carry out process steps through the Internet from home and elsewhere—including via email on handheld devices—so they are not reliant on local, land-based Internet connections," says Islam. "By handling our processes more efficiently, we can do everything in a timelier manner, from quickly generating vendor payments to the proper bank accounts to satisfying procurement requests to renewing contracts."

Adds Md. Mominul Haque, Program Assistant at UNDP Bangladesh, "I appreciate the utility of automated workflows, which are effective in helping my day-to-day official work. Once I started using the automated workflows, my workload became lighter and my deliverable quantity and quality has increased. I can get so much more done in a day now because I don't have to spend hours running back and forth to try to get written approvals from managers."

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Enhanced Service Delivery for Bangladesh

Because UNDP Bangladesh employees are more efficient, they can concentrate on their more substantive work. The organization has greater transparency and speed-to-decision for procurement requests, so program associates promptly get the resources they need. Vendors receive payments in a more timely fashion, too, which enables them to supply goods and services more quickly to those who need them. Access to consolidated data through the integrated dashboard solution, allows senior managers to spend less time in meetings—and dealing with in-person interruptions for approvals—and instead can focus on meaningful, important work. "All in all, greater efficiency on the part of our staff helps further social and economic development of Bangladesh," concludes Islam. "Every day we do all that we can to contribute to our country's improvement. By adopting Nintex Workflow, we're able to do considerably more to keep Bangladesh headed in the right direction."

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