Leading tech company improves productivity and introduces scalability to match its growing project portfolio management needs

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—Simon Scott-Priestley, Senior Director of the Project Management Office, Arm

Leading chip developer Arm had an aging on-premises Microsoft Project Server solution that reduced productivity and couldn't scale to meet the company's rapid growth. Adopting Microsoft Project Online, the company increased its project portfolio insights and met the needs of a workforce that recently doubled in size. Arm can now deliver more precise data to governmental bodies, resulting in larger research and development tax credits. And with Power BI, it can deliver more actionable insights to company leadership in real time.

Spread across more than 50 locations worldwide, Arm develops the chips at the core of over 90 percent of the world's premium smartphones. Established 28 years ago, Arm began its existence in a barn outside Cambridge, England, with 12 employees. Today, more than 7,000 talented individuals make their living working for the company, developing high powered, energy-efficient chips for use in a wide variety of industries.

In 2010, Arm implemented a heavily customized instance of Microsoft Project Server. At the time, the solution fit the company's needs perfectly. But even before the recent surge in growth, the high level of customization struggled to keep up with changing business needs. With more and more data to manage, the server slowed, negatively affecting productivity.

Two years ago, Arm employed half the professionals it does today. After being procured by SoftBank, Arm reinvested its profits into its business and established a foothold in numerous new markets, including the automotive industry, the cloud, networking devices, and the Internet of Things (IoT). This rapid expansion brought with it new ways of working, but as Arm forged ahead, some of its infrastructure lagged behind.

Upgrading the system could have helped alleviate the strain, but the complexity of these upgrades reduced their impact enough that employees began to look for different ways of working, including solutions not monitored or controlled directly by Arm.

Outlining the company's needs, Simon Scott-Priestley, Senior Director of the Project Management Office at Arm, decided that Microsoft Project Online was the best solution for the company's growing needs. With Project Online, Arm could address each of the performance, scalability, resilience, supportability, adaptability, and usability limitations that had been impediments in the past.

Regaining lost ground

"We decided early on to approach the deployment and adoption of Project Online in the most agile way possible," says Scott-Priestley. "We worked with a community of internal change champions who helped us prioritize the rollout of functionalities most important to our workforce." Through a series of deployment sprints, Project Online functionalities were first released to these champions. They gave feedback and built their own expertise with the solution before introducing it to the greater user base, taking active roles in adoption among their peers. Since this system's inception, over 50 new updates have been released to the Arm environment, broadening functionality more than was ever possible with the previous solution.

After migrating to Project Online, Arm's performance woes were quickly alleviated. Previously, larger project plans that were thousands of lines long effectively locked hardware as they were uploaded to the company's customized servers. This process took hours to complete and drastically reduced productivity among project managers and any employees who attempted to extract information from related servers at the same time. With Project Online, Arm regained all this lost productivity.

Adapting in step with growth

The dramatic growth Arm experienced in the last two years wasn't unforeseen, and the scalability of Project Online was key to adapting to that impending change. "We anticipated that Arm would evolve as it grew, reshaping and restructuring into a form we couldn't anticipate but needed to plan for," says Scott-Priestley. "By implementing Project Online, we don't need to worry about whether our solution can scale to meet our needs. We can focus on growth itself."

The adaptability and usability of Project Online has been crucial during this time of growth at Arm. The schedule-driven project management of the company's past has given way to a more agile progress-driven model. The increased insight Arm has into each stage of its projects encourages more agile ways of working. "We have a finite resource pool and a product roadmap that underpins a number of different marketplaces," says Scott-Priestley. "We now have the ability to prioritize the demand for our internal resources and allocate them to the individual projects and marketplaces that will best help Arm achieve its business objectives. Before Project Online, we didn't have visibility into that issue— today, we have the tools to address it."

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Microsoft

Finding the business impact

Arm completes over 700 projects every year. Nearly 450 of these are in some stage of simultaneous development, and it's highly important for the company to be able to report on the status of these projects—both internally to its numerous lines of business and externally to governmental entities—at any given time.

"We can now better determine the cost of researching and developing our products, and we can better report these costs," says Scott-Priestley. This improved reporting doesn't simply function to refine the company's ongoing project portfolio management practices—it also directly affects the company's finances. Governments around the world, including those in the United Kingdom and the United

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States, allow companies that are undertaking substantial research and development work to claim tax credits for the hours spent focusing on these areas. Because employee time sheets are now incorporated into Project Online, Arm has highly detailed, real-time data concerning project progress, hours worked, and completion percentages to share with governmental entities, which validates the company's assessments and helps assure accurate claims during tax season.

In Arm's reach

Arm is still finding new ways to use Project Online, including integration with Power BI. "The data we collect from our project portfolio management system is the lifeblood of that system," says Scott-Priestley. "Power BI gives us richer visualizations of those reports, and it does it right out of the box." These reports, populated with data from Project Online and delivered on demand through Power BI, have already begun to support the agile decision-making environment that Arm sought to create at the beginning of its modernization process.

Arm reports a 300 percent increase in the use of its reviews and assessments since moving to Project Online. Because the data in these reports can quickly be

adapted to the needs of a wide array of stakeholders, Arm now has broader input into its project pipeline and its organizational structure. Resource management has become a priority, which can reduce the overutilization of assets as the company's workload continues to grow. For example, the IT team used to be responsible for the maintenance of physical infrastructure, but it's now been shifted to the development and delivery of expanded functionality in the cloud.

"Our organization doubled in size since we deployed Project Online, so we're using more of its functionality than ever before. We've never found a flaw in its ability to scale to meet our needs," says Scott-Priestley. "That was one of the reasons we chose it as our solution in the first place—the reassurance that it could grow with us without missing a step."

Software

- Microsoft Project Online
- Microsoft Power BI
- Microsoft SharePoint Online

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