



Sheffield Hallam: Adapting to change

As the pace of change in the world of IT accelerates, one thing that has not changed is Sheffield Hallam University's commitment to close partnerships with business, industry, the professions and commerce. There are strong parallels in the development of the University and Advanced e5. Both have grown successfully together and developed a sound business partner relationship.

A major landmark in the educational history of one of England's largest cities was the decision to designate it as the home of one of the very first polytechnics in 1969. Several colleges were amalgamated to bring together their wide-ranging expertise in one establishment. Part of the evolution of the institution was the acquisition and commissioning of its own computer systems, independent of the City Council. It was felt that without having its own systems, true independent corporate and University status could not be achieved.

Long term commitment

A project team headed by John Smith, the former Financial Controller (Treasury) and David Kelsey, Head of Business Systems Services was created to evaluate, select and implement the new systems. *"We already had an IBM mainframe with associated skills, and so it made sense to look for package based solutions from mainstream IBM financial systems vendors in view of the time-scales we had set ourselves,"* said David Kelsey.

Although speed was important, great care was taken with the evaluations. Of all the potential vendors, e5 demonstrated a clear technological vision that the project team felt would allow the University to make a long-term commitment to its products.

The University looked for four modules: General Ledger, Accounts Payable, Purchase Order Processing and Commitment Accounting. Commitment Accounting was not then available in the e5 suite, but the University simply provided the specification and asked the e5 team to develop the product. Thus began the partnership.

The General Ledger and Accounts Payable modules were implemented for corporate status. With the need to collect income more efficiently, an Accounts Receivable module was next to be implemented along with its integration with satellite billing systems.

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The major five-year development plan was completed and the University continued to grow, with a structure resembling a large multi-company group. The decision to go with e5 was vindicated with the way the software could be easily altered to reflect the many internal changes and outside influences.

In 1992, a review of what was required in the second phase took place. The nature of computing was changing rapidly with greater emphasis on desktop solutions, and more open and integrated systems.

One solution was to upgrade the existing mainframe and take advantage of more functional and technically powerful e5 releases. This approach did not fit in with a highly innovative strategy initiated by David Kelsey as early as 1991 when the principle of right-sizing to open systems environments was still in its infancy. However, e5 had also launched a multi-platform version of its software at about the same time.

The University had just embarked on its Project Office whose aim was for every member of staff to have a networked PC on their desk. *"To enable full integration between office automation and decision support systems, we needed to be able to take advantage of the benefits offered by new technologies," explained Kelsey.*

"There were numerous choices in, for example, workstations, graphical user interfaces and relational databases", said Ian Peel, Systems Development Manager, Finance Department. *"We wanted to be free to take these opportunities as they arose without sacrificing future investment*

in hardware, software and application knowledge. e5 product functionality and the technical openness delivered by MXPE, its advanced technology base, fitted our strategy perfectly, as did its scalability and portability."

"The common look and feel available across multiple platforms meant our investment in both people and capital was fully protected. The fit between e5's product development and our own IT needs was perfect and continued the evolutionary process that began in 1988. Moving on with e5 was a natural thing to do."

Sheffield Hallam University became a beta test site for e5's new solution based on the IBM RS/6000 machine using Oracle's relational database. The general ledger, accounts payable and accounts receivable modules that the University used were implemented, as well as QED, the new multi dimensional reporting module. The system was accessed across the corporate network based on the University's Windows strategy.

The system went live in the first week of January 1995 and since then the pace of change has not slowed, even though the original strategy altered. Phase 2 was to be the implementation of Procurement Management and Commitment Accounting modules over the next 12 months. However, this was postponed due to other priorities: feeder systems were changed, and further functionality within the existing ledgers was developed. The greater use of desktop integration using Microsoft Access, Excel and Word was implemented to provide better reporting from the huge amount of data held.

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Ian Peel >
Systems Development
Manager >
Sheffield Hallam University

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