



Using Agile to Migrate OST's Accounting System to Business Central in Azure Cloud



CONVERGING MISSION,
INNOVATION, AND TECHNOLOGY

Background

Migrating an accounting system requires organization and commitment from many stakeholders. Our existing accounting system software was running a 10 year-old version. Also, multiple silo systems were being used to provide comprehensive accounting and financial services. This resulted in many performance challenges as the company expanded.

To enhance management financial goals, and bring operational efficiencies, OST migrated from its on-premises Microsoft Dynamics NAV 2009 financial system to Microsoft Dynamics 365 Business Central (BC) in the Azure Cloud.

Given the challenge of consolidating and migrating our existing systems into one streamlined, cloud-based platform, we needed the right organizational framework. A framework to ensure this goal was accomplished, on schedule, with minimal service hiccups.

To do so, we applied agile fundamentals to provide us with an overarching framework. Using agile enabled us to plan and execute a seamless transition from our legacy on-premises accounting system to a cloud-based solution.

Why We Chose the Agile Framework to Initiate Our Accounting System Migration

Using agile for this task was a unique approach. This methodology typically lends itself to software development tasks. To be precise, each discrete step required collaboration and transparency amongst all stakeholders. We chose the agile framework as it met this criteria.

Using this organization tool helped to make this journey successful.



How We Used Agile to Execute Our Accounting System Migration

Since our requirements were both technical and administrative, we had to tailor them to fit our needs. Here's how we applied the agile framework to each stage of our Accounting System migration:

Pre-Migration

The pre-migration stage encompassed the planning necessary to migrate OST's accounting functions. This step entailed documenting our existing infrastructure, mapping requirements to the prospective new system, and understanding what adaptations were necessary to move from on-premises to cloud-based.

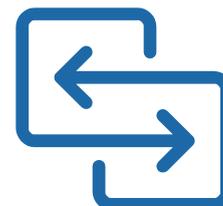
The agile framework provided the right methodology to execute this challenge. Also, this step included training on agile fundamentals, providing sufficient background in order to utilize agile in subsequent stages.

What Happened During This Step?

- Documentation of existing components across multiple systems
- Mapping these components to the new software, analyzing the differences
- Understanding infrastructure requirements in the cloud

How We Applied Agile to Execute This Step

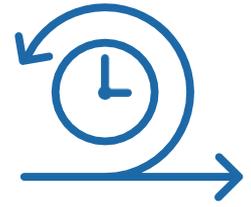
- Trained on agile methodology
- Defined the Epic, breaking it into multiple features/components
- With features/components separated into discrete tasks, we could assign ownership to specific individuals/teams



Migration

The migration stage entailed organization, setup/implementation, and validation of data from the prior system over to Business Central.

The largest stage of the process, the agile framework was key in the seamless completion of this portion. Through each segment of this stage, we utilized agile principles.



What Happened During This Step?

Migration encompassed setup and implementation of the new accounting system, along with porting of past transactional data.

Setup and Implementation Activities:

- Setup of direct/indirect expense categories, benefit plan information, and job account groups
- Implementation of Dynamic 365 Business Central features, including time entry, accounts payable, accounts receivable, general ledger, labor distribution, payroll, and expense/requisition reports

Transactional Data Validation:

- Migration of past transaction data into the new system included cumulative cost and labor hour information for active contracts
- Validation of migrated transaction data to check for errors/missing information
- Testing of historical general ledger (G/L) and job ledger (project-based ledger) entries migrated from NAV 2009 to Business Central

How We Applied Agile to Execute This Step

- Created 4 Sprints, or goals, to keep track and measure progress/success
- Developed a backlog of user stories using JIRA
- Used JIRA's Kanban feature to manage the workflow across multiple segments of the accounting team
- Held daily standup meetings to address roadblocks and determine progress



Post Migration/Training/Go-Live

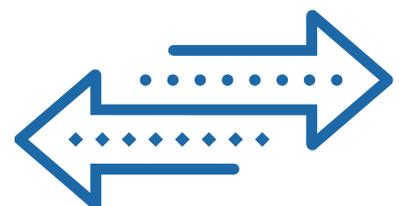
Once we completed data migration/system setup, the next step was post migration testing and training activities. This included testing of migrated data, extensive training on Business Central, and pilot testing prior to our go-live date.

What Happened During This Step?

- Tested all aspects of migrated data (customer, vendor, job, resource, G/L, bank account)
- Also tested time entry, labor distribution, A/P, A/R, and purchase orders
- Hands-on Business Central training with outside vendor
- Training of OST employees on Business Central by accounting staff (becoming the trainers)
- Pilot testing of the new system using several project teams of varying size and project type

How We Applied Agile to Execute This Step

- Cross-trained in each segment of Business Central
- Assigned ownership of issue resolution to relevant personnel
- Utilized an issue tracker to determine and troubleshoot roadblocks
- Quickly resolved any issues encountered during the initial launch



Why the Agile Framework Was Effective

The agile framework was effective for many reasons. Agile provides a strong sense of accountability. Each member of the team was assigned ownership of discrete tasks. With the daily standup meeting, each team member understood their respective accountability. This enabled tasks to be completed on schedule and for issues to be clearly communicated/addressed.

Agile helps identify specific needs. While we had a broad objective (move OST’s accounting functions to Business Central), there were a lot of moving parts. By using agile, we were able to check off every box, ensuring smooth transition between the old and new systems. Utilizing agile for this project also served as a pilot program itself. Our success using agile for this task could be translated to other company-wide initiatives.



OST’s Success Using Agile for Accounting System Migration

By the completion of our project, we all saw the value in utilizing this framework to execute large-scale movement of data, from over 40 active projects. Using the agile framework factored positively in the implementation and operation of Business Central with this methodology. But success from implementation planning to go-live for Business Central was not the only end result.

Our collective work on this initiative strengthened overall efficiency and teamwork. Working through each stage enabled collaboration between various teams. With more hands on deck playing an active role, we raised the enthusiasm of the team. We brainstormed new ideas to create more effective solutions. Working in a team, everyone is aware of each other’s efforts. Conversely, this success can be carried on by each team member to better conduct their day-to-day functions with their home team.

Key Lessons Learned

As with any large initiative, hindsight is 20/20. There are many “lessons learned” from our experience.

Benefits:

By moving our accounting functions to one system and with all aspects of accounting (timesheets, invoicing, A/R, A/P and reporting) in one place, we save time by eliminating cumbersome processes. Instead of storing financial data across multiple silos, we can view financial reports at the click of a button.

Moving to a cloud-based solution provides greater flexibility, cost efficiencies, as well as organizational efficiencies. Furthermore, with the capacity to store labor transactions, expenses, invoicing, and A/R and A/P in one place, activities that took days can be completed in a matter of hours.



Resolutions to Issues We Experienced:

- Using agile helps to enhance collaboration among multiple stakeholders. This framework could be of benefit for future company-wide implementations.
- We have learned the importance of creating a suitable timeframe. This can help prevent disruptions post go-live that could be resolved during pre-launch phase.
- Adding more training to the pre-launch stage would have reduced these post-go live disruptions. It would have also created a smoother transition for end users.
- In future company-wide implementations, we would use a wider sample of active projects during pilot testing. This would help mitigate hiccups during the go-live stage.
- Maintaining continuity; when moving large-scale transactional data to the new system, certain existing features of the prior system no longer applied in Business Central. This created unease among users and other stakeholders.
- To resolve this and many other issues we have learned that by using agile as a tool, we can address these concerns. Utilizing our issue tracker, and employing daily stand-up meetings post-migration, we quickly resolved these concerns, ensuring smooth sailing going forward.

Conclusion

With migration from our legacy accounting systems to cloud-based Business Central, our goal was to enhance OST's operational efficiencies, as well as facilitate management financial goals. Thanks to the collaboration of our respective teams, as well as the tools provided by the agile framework, we are starting to see tangible results company-wide.

Implementation of Business Central brought numerous benefits to OST. Firstly, Business Central improved the efficiency of our accounting/finance operations. One central system is more time-saving and cost-effective. With a single data repository, we can take that data, and utilize it for other benefits.

For example, through the use of Microsoft PowerBI, we can export Business Central data, and use it to create dashboards for OST Executives, Business Unit Leads, and other decision-makers.

With agile in our toolkit, OST successfully met its go-live date with Business Central on schedule. Our success gives us a framework in which to use in future company-wide initiatives.

With a forward-looking perspective, as a team we can better address/troubleshoot challenges, execute plans per requirements, and effectively go-live with other organizational changes.

We look forward to applying the experience from this endeavor on future OST-wide initiatives.



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