

CASE STUDY

NATS

Resource management takes off at NATS
with TPG TeamManager

Improving resource transparency

NATS is the UK's leading provider of air traffic control (ATC) services. It handles over 2.5 million flights and 250 million passengers travelling over the UK and across the North Atlantic. That equates to 6000-7000 flights a day. In 2022, the company's programme management office (PMO) noticed a significant lack of transparency in terms of which resources were over- or under-used. Work Centre Managers were using individual Excel spreadsheets to plan their resources, but these were not always shared with other team managers.

Following an extensive and rigorous proof-of-concept phase, NATS and TPG rolled out **TPG TeamManager** to five key work centres. It met with immediate acceptance and, today, 95% of project delivery work centres are using it to manage their teams. The intuitive, browser-based solution delivers transparency, efficiency and time savings for Work Centre Managers, line managers and teams throughout the business.

Industry	Air Traffic Control
Department	Programme Management Office
Solution	TPG TeamManager (TPG CoReSuite)

THE NATS PMO

NATS has a programme management office (PMO) that supports a wide variety of projects throughout the company. Notes Principal PMO Manager Chris Coombs: “We currently have 7 PMO managers, 30 project planners and about 60 project managers. So there’s a lot going on at any one time.” Some of these projects involve the development or introduction of new technologies, while others are aimed at enhancing the efficiency of NATS’ existing services.

CHALLENGE: USING EXCEL SPREADSHEETS TO MANAGE RESOURCES

To monitor these projects, NATS has a Portfolio Approvals Review Board (PARB) that meets once a month to evaluate project progress and approve business cases. In October 2022, the board noticed resource risks arising for some projects, with certain resources being over- or under-used.

“The issue was that we had no single source of the truth,” comments Coombs. “Most of our Work Centre Managers were using Excel spreadsheets to manage their resources, but these weren’t always visible to the delivery Project Managers.” The resource risk arose as nobody had a clear overview of the resources available to complete certain tasks in certain projects.

POC PHASE COVERING ALL STAKEHOLDERS

As a result, the PARB tasked Chris Coombs with finding a solution that could deliver resource transparency to all the project managers. As NATS has been working with TPG since 2011 and having previously seen a demo of TPG Team Manager a couple of years earlier, Chris contacted TPG for another demo of the functionality.

To test the features and functions with stakeholders a Proof of Concept (PoC) phase was stood up to test two key requirements. “The first requirement was that our stakeholders wanted to be able to see everything at a glance – in other words, all resource requests and availabilities across all projects. The second requirement was an intuitive interface to facilitate user acceptance.” The PoC phase ran for two months to ensure all relevant stakeholders had time to test the tool.

ADDITIONAL FEATURES FOR THE OPTIMAL SOLUTION

An interesting aspect of the way TPG works is that it sometimes develops additional features for a particular customer, then includes it in the standard product. This is often the case if the feature is likely to be something other customers will need. Feedback from NATS indicated that the solution would be even better if users were able to see actuals for each project and team member. TPG subsequently developed it and integrated it into the standard product.



“Discussing its features and functions with stakeholders, it soon became clear that TPG TeamManager would meet the key criteria of usability and a cross-project overview of resource requests and availabilities.”

Chris Coombs: Principal PMO Manager, NATS

TPG TEAMMANAGER IN DETAIL

TPG TeamManager is an intuitive, browser-based product that enables managers and team members to see their project and line workloads at a glance (assuming the relevant permissions have been granted). The tool also shows planned absences, such as vacation days and training courses. Resource managers can immediately identify where and when resources are available and quickly respond to requests from project leaders. The solution covers all types of resources, whether full-time, part-time or external workers.

Name	2023												2024		
	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
Team Service	422,00	232,00	256,00	304,00	312,00	304,00	336,00	320,00	368,00	260,00	344,00	365,00	320,00	312,00	280,00
Absences		120,00	120,00	80,00	80,00	80,00	80,00	40,00		80,00					
Operations	186,00	112,00	112,00	112,00	112,00	112,00	112,00	112,00	112,00	92,00	104,00	104,00	104,00	104,00	104,00
Individual Operations	114,00	40,00	40,00	40,00	40,00	40,00	40,00	40,00	40,00	20,00	16,00	16,00			
Project Availability	918,00	728,00	728,00	816,00	816,00	884,00	816,00	856,00	896,00	740,00	952,00				
Sally	2,00	22,00	2,00	-26,00	2,00	2,00	10,00	14,00	6,00	10,00	74,00				
Sam	76,00	-4,00	-32,00	-20,00	12,00	-4,00	4,00	4,00		-12,00	34,00				
Sean	-28,00	12,00	-16,00	28,00	-20,00	-4,00	12,00		60,00	-4,00	18,00				



“To work efficiently, any resource management solution needs accurate supply and demand data as well as smooth underlying processes. Chris Coombs and his team have really worked hard to make that happen and today NATS is exemplary in data quality terms.”

Peter O’Neill, Managing Director, TPG The Project Group UK & Ireland

For NATS, TPG TeamManager resolved many of the issues managers had around resource transparency. Today, it enables them to:

- » See demand created in Microsoft Project as well as in other tools
- » View a resource’s exact line and project workload, plus planned leave and non-working days
- » Simulate “what-ifs” to see how changing resource headcount would affect their project
- » Commit resources based on project demand, non-project demand and resource availability
- » Benefit from an easy-to-use interface to quickly and easily manage their resources

VIEWING ACTUALS AND ADDITIONAL FEATURES DELIVER THE OPTIMAL SOLUTION

TPG made further enhancements to TPG TeamManager for NATS that have since been integrated into the standard product. These include:

- » The ability to view up-to-date, actual resource figures as well as planned
- » Automation of several administrative functions
- » Performance improvement
- » An overview of resources who will be moving to a different team in the future

PHASED DEPLOYMENT, INITIALLY TO 5 WORK CENTRES

Working with TPG, Coombs and his team agreed to initiate a limited implementation in five work centres by March 2023. As NATS’ work centres are typically very busy with reporting at the end of each month, the Work Centre Managers were asked to review their resource requests, as well as the resource availabilities within their teams, within a specified period mid-month. This information was then rolled up to management to update project timelines and resources, which in turn reduced the risk of “project creep” and delays.

ENTHUSIASTIC RECEPTION BY USERS

The first five Work Centre Managers underwent training by TPG on the new resource management solution and started using it – and the reaction was nothing short of elated. “Our five Work Centre Managers absolutely loved it,” notes Coombs. “We soon had the rest of them knocking on our door asking when they could get it too!” But first, Coombs and his team wanted to ensure the quality of the data provided by the first five Work Centre Managers was going to add the required benefits to project delivery.



“Our five Work Centre Managers absolutely loved it, we soon had the rest of them knocking on our door asking when they could get it too!”

Chris Coombs

“It’s great that they loved the solution and found it easy to use, but we wanted to ensure that the work centre data was accurate enough prior to full deployment. After all, the whole point of the exercise was to have a precise overview of resources at all times,” adds Coombs. Another priority was to test the solution on the largest team as well as the smallest – 60 and 4 participants respectively.

WIDER ROLL-OUT TO ADDITIONAL WORK CENTRES

Following on from the three-month test with the initial Work Centre Managers, NATS and TPG gradually deployed the resource management solution to the remaining work centres. Today, 95% of project delivery work centres – about 700 staff in total – are using it regularly. It supports them in maintaining existing business operations as well as initiating new projects. “I’m a Work Centre Manager myself and use the solution regularly, as does my team of 7 people,” comments Coombs.

BENEFITS: FEWER BOTTLENECKS AND OPTIMAL RESOURCE UTILISATION

As noted by Chris Coombs, the most obvious benefit to NATS of TPG TeamManager is the huge increase in resource data transparency for Work Centre Managers and staff. This minimises bottlenecks and overloaded resources. All work centre managers and teams are on the same page – there is now just one version of the truth.

The solution saves a significant amount of time for everyone involved in projects. Work Centre Managers and project managers can always see what their staff are working on and for how long, making it easier to respond to requests and assign resources to other activities without overloading them.

As the solution has been in operation for less than a year, Coombs is observing its usage before quantifying its concrete benefits. However, he expects these to include improved forecasting accuracy, time savings, and better project planning efficiency.

FUTURE PPM-SOLUTIONS IN SIGHT

NATS is currently looking at the deployment of advanced project and portfolio management (PPM), along with resource and team management, at NSL, a part of the business that provides services to airports and other airspace users. This will begin with an appraisal of where NSL is in terms of its PPM journey, followed by the deployment of the solutions required. These could include Microsoft PPM as well as TPG ProjectPowerPack.

TPG ProjectPowerPack is an off-the-shelf product for project management based on the Microsoft 365 Power Platform. It serves as a centralised hub for accessing and collaborating on all of a company’s work and project management data. Once these solutions are implemented, Coombs and his team are keen to add resource management to the mix and, specifically, the proven TPG TeamManager.



SHORT PROJECT PROFILE

THE COMPANY:

National Air Traffic Services (NATS) is the UK's leading provider of air traffic control (ATC) services provided through two principle operating subsidiaries. It handles over 2.5 million flights and 250 million passengers travelling over the UK and across the North Atlantic. That equates to 6000-7000 flights a day.

THE CHALLENGE:

Work Centre Managers were planning their resources using Excel spreadsheets resulting in no single source of truth. The consequence was a significant lack of transparency in terms of which resources were over- or under-used. This led to bottlenecks and a lack of visibility when planning new projects.

THE SOLUTION:

NATS selected TPG TeamManager in late 2022 to resolve its resource planning issues. Along with a clear overview of all resources, managers can also see planned absences. For NATS, TPG added an overview of actuals and other enhancements and these are now available in the standard product.

THE BENEFITS:

The most obvious benefit to NATS of TPG TeamManager is the huge increase in resource data transparency for Work Centre Managers and staff. This transparency leads to fewer incidences of over- or underworked resource, provides clarity and gets all Work Centre Managers and teams on the same page.

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