

Active Manager™ brings lasting improvements at First Index

What needed doing

First Index Group had a real problem when they contacted us. They had got \$10.8 Venture Capital funding at the beginning of the year to develop a new business process. That business process relied on an e-commerce system called FFPro, which they were developing in-house. They had a ambitious development plan that called for a first release in June.

In July they had not achieved these goals, which in turn badly affected revenue. This combined with the classic problems of communication and management overload caused by the swift growth made First Index look for additional support. First Index contacted Three Steps Forward to see if we could help them.

The initial brief was enlightened as although the board wanted FFPro shipping in a reliable form as soon as possible they realised that the problem was not the software, but how they were organised. They wanted to improve the system and thereby design, ship and document FFPro and all subsequent releases in the best way possible. Oh, and by the way the sooner the better.

The process we used

This is a typical case where our Active Manager programme works best. With active manager we work with the client to both diagnose and then fix any problems that are holding them back. Think of it as a combination of interim management and non-executive Director role.

The first stage was for Three Steps Forward to understand the situation and look at how it could be improved. This was done in collaboration with the team and took approximately two weeks to complete. This was a useful review point for the board and staff to agree that the planned changes were reasonable and applicable. We could also show that we knew what we were doing before going forward.

The review highlighted three areas that needed work: **information flow**, **improved processes** and **organisational changes** (see diagram). We then split the work into three phases with review points after each phase. We did this because any process like this needs refinement in light of the changing situation and it gave the board good control over the process.

"Three Steps Forward changed our mindset to become more proactive. This they did by helping us improve our processes and catch up on our workload. From that base we could stop reacting and start planning.

Karl Wigart · IT Director · First Index Group

"Since Three Steps Forward worked with us the transformation has been immense. Before I felt a bit-player in the department, but now the whole department is integrated together. We all know who is responsible for what and how their particular product fits into the 'bigger picture'. I am also learning more and enjoying my job again."

Nathan Davis · Developer · First Index Group

The output from our work

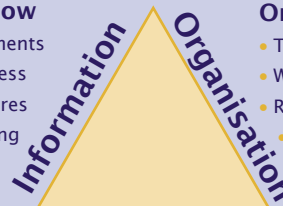
The work was definitely a combination of improving the working methods and tools used by the department coupled with practical, hands-on work to get the release of FFPro out as soon as possible.

Some of it was organising the people in a better way, some of it was installing new processes and some was getting people to talk more. Because our consultant had done this type of job many times before a lot of it was experience; knowing what works and spotting the pitfalls before they happen.

Three areas of change

Information Flow

- Business requirements
- Visibility of progress
- List product features
- Information sharing
- I.T. Director role



Organisation

- Team/Department Org.
- Work planning
- Roles/responsibilities
- Team analysis
- Staff Training

Process

Processes

- Improving existing processes
- Adding new processes
- Establishing processes
- Changing mindset

We were delighted when version 1 of FFPro went online exactly on the date that had been set by the I.T. Director. It also had been extensively tested with over 70 bugs found and fixed during our consultant's time there. Full documentation on feature changes, bugs fixed/remaining and product installation and support documentation were all available online. The development team was totally committed to delivery of a quality product and enjoyed the acclaim of the rest of the company for the excellent delivery.

The benefits to the client

The benefits to the client were many. Here is just a short list of the main items.

- We delivered a reliable release of FFPro as scheduled (to the exact day)
- We installed a set of tools and procedures which improve the I.T. departments efficiency and quality.
- We helped form a new I.T. team structure that improved information flow and productivity.

Overall everybody considered the three month engagement a real success. As well as getting the release out the I.T. department's quality and productivity increased significantly. This improved staff morale (see bottom quote) as the reputation of the department improved and the success continued.

Can we help you too?

If you have a similar need to this client then maybe we can help you too. Our web site has more details on our range of services for early stage technology companies. Please do contact us for a no obligation meeting to discuss your specific needs.