

Small Budget Big Outcome: Express Project Delivery at Yorkshire Building Society



Adopting Agile techniques to deliver maximum business value from software development.

Yorkshire Building Society wanted to change the way it approached software development projects in order to create greater business value. Answer used Mindswap®, their knowledge transfer programme alongside their best practice Agile approach, UPCO® engage, to introduce Express Project Delivery - a more dynamic, flexible and cost effective method of implementation using Agile tools and techniques.

Making change happen

The Group Projects and Information Technology (GP&IT) division of Yorkshire Building Society is responsible for delivering technology services within the organisation. The business needed to react more quickly and more effectively to changing market conditions ensuring projects satisfied real business needs.

CIO David Henderson recruited Agile specialist Jayne Cockill as Head of Project Delivery, to bring significant change and create a more Agile environment within the organisation that historically favoured the highly ordered sequential Waterfall approach to software development. The demands for reduced time-to-market meant Waterfall was no longer suitable for Yorkshire Building Society. *"In the past we have relied on the business knowing precisely what it wants at the start of a project and assumed that those requirements won't change whilst IT is busy building the solution,"* David explains, *"Agile works on the premise that if the business has a real need, IT needs to deliver it as soon as possible!"* Jayne turned to Answer to make sure her mission was a success.

The Question

From the outset David and Jayne knew that the biggest challenge would be the cultural change. Agile hasn't been widely adopted within the financial services sector. *"There were pockets of nervousness towards Agile but the trepidation was misplaced. People simply didn't know enough about it or were misinformed,"* Jayne explains. Jayne wanted her team to work more closely with the business. They needed to prioritise the business' requirements to deliver the greatest and most immediate business value. There were also some fundamental technology and budget challenges. Legacy code and duplication issues were not going to make implementing Agile the easy option and Yorkshire Building Society also needed a very cost effective approach.

The Answer

The first job was to break down the internal barriers to encourage knowledge sharing across teams. Yorkshire Building Society selected Answer to introduce Agile because of their fresh perspective, experience of Agile environments and their cost effective approach. *"The Answer team has a flexible attitude, they are approachable and, critically, they really know Agile,"* says Jayne. Answer was able to help Yorkshire Building Society find a way to adopt Agile tools and techniques within the Society's budget. Their Mindswap® knowledge transfer workshop programme was designed to ensure Yorkshire Building Society's objectives were achieved. *"Answer rose to the challenge and responded with a solution that was fit for purpose and within budget,"* explains Jayne. *"We used Mindswap® to transfer the knowledge to a wide audience of project managers, developers, testers and representatives from within the business."*



A pilot project, a review of Yorkshire Building Society's "terms into retirement" process, was chosen to define and implement the initial use of Agile tools and techniques. This included coaching the project team in the importance of business value. *"We needed to change the habit that the business would approach us with an array of requirements - demanding lots of bells and whistles."* The fundamental premise of MoSCoW - i.e. what 'we' must, should, could and won't do - was very important. *"Answer worked well with my team. They listened and collaborated and that was a crucial part of making Agile a success within Yorkshire Building Society."*

Answer sought to understand the technical constraints and found ways to work around them yet still adopt as much Agile working as possible.

Delivering Business Value

"For a big consultancy firm this major change programme would have been expensive. Yorkshire Building Society and Answer worked as a team, pooling skills and expertise. With the Mindswap® programme, Answer gave us a creative solution and we achieved the results and business value at a fraction of the cost," explains David

"We have gone on to embed Agile project delivery techniques in another six successful, cost effective projects using the Agile tools and technologies introduced by the Answer team," enthuses David.

GP&IT has built real trust throughout the business. By continually collaborating with the business and working in a more Agile way IT can now assess which requirements will actually benefit the business. *"The business understands that we can deliver better business value by bringing our knowledge and expertise to bear,"* Jayne explains. *"We have saved a great deal of 'delivery money', by pushing back and only delivering what is needed. Budgets now stretch a lot further!"*

"Answer worked with us to overcome the concerns some had towards Agile. They are great evangelists." For any big cultural change the critical success factors are making the change clear, providing understanding and working as a team. This means constant collaboration and is the only way to implement Agile, as Jayne recalls, *"One originally sceptical project manager said to me 'I feel more in control because projects are broken down into meaningful chunks and the constant collaboration means you know exactly where you are.' Now that's a fantastic turnaround!"* David adds, *"Answer knows how to get the best out of their clients. Helping us to find our own answer and enabling us to do it ourselves in the future."*

The process has highlighted certain hotspots within Yorkshire Building Society legacy technology that prevent it from being truly Agile, *"Now we can start to address them,"* Jayne explains. *"The IT teams are more motivated and keen to get going on projects as they start making a difference and adding value immediately, which obviously improves our service down the line,"* says Jayne.

"We didn't rush with this change but after laying solid foundations we have seen significant benefits, even from our very first project," says David. Jayne adds, *"The Answer team knows its stuff but crucially they are not text book. They looked at our specific challenges, technical, cultural and economic and gave us an answer. The whole business is now engaged in the Agile way of working, not just the project delivery part of IT."*

Jayne and David would both work with Answer again and can see how Answer's skills and approach might be useful as they merge with Chelsea Building Society. Jayne concludes, *"Answer is different because they take up the challenge. There are always challenges; it is never an ideal scenario. I always need to find the 'work around' and I need a supplier that will help me do just that."*



Customer name: Yorkshire Building Society
Industry: Banking and Finance
URL: www.ybs.co.uk

Key Challenges:

- Implementing significant cultural change
- Accommodating legacy technology
- Delivering on a small budget

Benefits:

- Small budget big outcomes
- Increased business value
- Faster delivery
- Reduced project costs
- IT seen as business focused advisors
- Improved motivation within IT



“The Answer team know their stuff but crucially they are not text book. They looked at our specific challenges, technical, cultural and economic and gave us an answer.”
Jayne Cockill, Head of Project Delivery, Yorkshire Building Society

“For a big consultancy firm this major change programme would have been expensive. Yorkshire Building Society and Answer worked as a team and we pooled our skills and expertise. With the Mindswap® programme, Answer gave us a creative solution and we achieved the results and business value at a fraction of the cost.”
David Henderson, Chief Information Officer, Yorkshire Building Society.

Yorkshire Building Society Profile:

Created in 1864 Yorkshire Building Society is now the 2nd largest building society in the UK with 2 million members, 178 branches and assets of £23billion. Its Head Office is in West Yorkshire on the southern outskirts of Bradford and is home to over 800 staff. For many years Yorkshire Building Society has been one of the most cost-effective building societies in the industry. Its management expense ratio is one of the lowest in the sector and is central to the Society’s policy of growing the business as efficiently as possible in order to generate enhanced benefits for members.

Answer Profile:

Answer, formerly UPCO, are a creator of business solutions for some of the world’s leading companies. Creators of bottom-line benefits for all sorts of big and small businesses in every sector, for a decade. It’s not a simple thing, it’s not a straightforward process, there’s an art to it. From global telecommunication gateways to applying white lines on motorways, Answer understands that each business challenge is unique.

