University of Western Cape advances its academic mission with Smartsheet

From managing budgeting to mitigating risks, Smartsheet provided the University with one centralised platform to standardise procedures and build team cohesion.

" **Smartsheet gave us the ability to really see what people did and when, which gave our team a unified vision and elevated how we deliver our work.** "

Raymond Crown, ICT Director,
The University of Western Cape

Customer:
The University of Western Cape

Industry:
Education

Organization Size:
Large (1,000–9,999 Employees)

Region:
EMEA

Website:
uwc.ac.za

Situated in Cape Town, South Africa, The University of Western Cape (UWC) was founded in 1960. Drawing on its proud experience in the liberation struggle, the University is committed to fighting against oppression and promoting access and equity through higher education.

Background:
The University of the Western Cape has a proud history in South Africa's liberation struggle. It was founded 60 years ago and has continued its fight against oppression, discrimination and disadvantage through its academic and community engagement endeavours ever since.

UWC's key concerns with access, equity and quality in higher education arise from extensive practical engagement in helping the historically marginalised participate fully in the South African society. The institution houses approximately 25,000 students across multiple campuses, with around 4,500-5,000 new students joining each year.

The University has had a significant churn of IT directors over a short period, resulting in disruptive structural changes impacting staff morale. Staff were reluctant to be transparent, as they were concerned about exposing themselves to potential repercussions. This created not only a lack of cohesion between the teams but also a lack of transparency, which ultimately limited accountability.

Solution:
When ICT Director Raymond Crown joined, he struggled to get a complete overview of the IT system, as each team had been working as independent units. To gain the clarity he needed, he started looking for a single, centralised mechanism to consolidate processes and improve reporting.

Having previously used Excel for organisational tasks, Raymond wanted something that wouldn't require additional skills or resources, but that would drive accountability — both for the University, and its employees.

Upon discussing this with his colleagues, a University researcher showed Raymond a demo of Smartsheet. Seeing the software in action piqued his interest, and a trial soon revealed that Smartsheet met all of his requirements: a centralised source of information, an intuitive way to track activity, and a platform to easily visualise processes.

Customer:

Using the Smartsheet planning function, Raymond not only fully automated the system, but also created an easy-to-use form for submitting budget requests. With an easier way to keep track of these requests, the team was able to simplify their reporting. And visualising this information during meetings via the dashboard offered the transparency they so desperately needed.

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Raymond Crown, ICT Director,
The University of Western Cape

Raymond first started using Smartsheet on a personal level, before introducing it to his Operations managers, who immediately recognised and embraced the benefits. Together, they explored how Smartsheet could deliver better project visibility and improve reporting.

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Streamlined financial reporting

Yearly budgeting for the University is a mammoth task, taking roughly six months to complete. The previous process used by the IT team was clunky and inefficient, and so Raymond turned to Smartsheet to improve it.

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Smartsheet has also transformed the process by keeping the discussion consistent. With no need to go back repeatedly for review, the team has freed up time to focus on other tasks. And with the majority of budget work previously done outside office hours, the reduction of effort required has had an immediate impact on team morale.

Taking late payments out of the pipeline

Not having a centralised system for tracking the approvals of procurement requests has often resulted in payments being made late. In some cases, this has resulted in the University having to pay interest on missed or late payments to software providers. Smartsheet helps staff avoid these penalties by providing an overview of all the relevant information. This has now been extended to include submission of documents, signatures, and payment processing — all of which proved crucial while staff were working remotely and were unable to sign in person.

In a Nutshell:

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smartsheet

Now, Raymond is alerted via automation and now knows immediately when there has been a late payment, making it much easier to resolve quickly. And because he can trace which team was responsible for the late payment, he can take the charges from their assigned budgets, helping to drive accountability.

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Mitigating risks

Another benefit of total transparency over processes is the ability to manage risk successfully, an essential requirement for the University. Using Smartsheet dashboards, Raymond can confidently demonstrate tracking progress and subsequent resolution, reassuring stakeholders that the environment is in good shape.

Thanks to Smartsheet, Raymond now has full transparency across the board. He has been able to standardise processes such as budgeting and procurement, improving efficiency and streamlining the day-to-day.

Smartsheet has also enhanced collaboration and communication between teams. Since using Smartsheet, productivity has increased by around 20% within the processes that have been automated, reducing the need for overtime and leading to a happier workforce.

On top of this, the financial benefits of implementing Smartsheet are tangible. *"We currently have no open audit findings,"* says Raymond. *"Since I joined, we have closed close to 170 audit findings. If Smartsheet wasn't here allowing us to track and keep an eye on things, we would still be in the same place."*

Overall, general administration has been streamlined and improved to such an extent that the team is able to do much more, with less.

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