From impossibility to reality - the **AFGRI** system split project

"The amazing thing was it took just 6 weeks from kick-off meeting to going live."

AFGRI is an integral part of South Africa's heritage having been in business in the country for more than 90 years. The group is the leading agricultural services and industrial food processing company in South Africa and has extended its operations to Australia and other parts of Africa.

AFGRI is involved in the entire grain production and storage value chain, offering financial support and solutions as well as inputs and hi-tech equipment through the John Deere brand supported by a large retail footprint. The company is further involved in the processing of poultry products, the manufacture of animal feeds, the processing of yellow maize and wheat and the extraction of oil and other materials into edible oils, fats and protein for human consumption.

To support their operations AFGRI implemented one of the most integrated SAP ERP systems in the country, all hosted in a private cloud by an external company. This fast, powerful system enables AFGRI to serve their approximately 4200 users.

The Situation

Legislative changes in the HCM space result in an unpredictable and often urgent stream of patches that have to be applied to the integrated ERP system. This presents a huge challenge to people like system owners and project managers, because patches affect the entire system. Here's the problem: you can't stop non-HCM projects to patch and test HCM, nor can you continue without patching HCM. There is also the possibility of more patches being released just as patch testing is completed. These recurring concerns have led to many organisations taking the step to separate HCM from other ERP operations.

The Challenge

Like all South African employers, AFGRI had to reconcile and submit IRP5 contributions for the tax year ended 28th February 2014. The deadline for their payroll division was 31st May 2014, but the system had to be up to date with all necessary PAYE legislation before performing the last payroll run for May 2014. This meant that all mandatory information be available in the SAP HCM system to avoid SARS e@syFile rejections and the concomitant late submission penalties.

The only way to comply with South African Revenue Service regulations was for AFGRI to load all the latest HCM patches. AFGRI became aware of this at the end of February, giving them very little time to react. The biggest challenge was the effect that the SAP HCM system upgrade would have on other SAP modules, and consequently on the whole of AFGRI. At that time there were many non-HCM projects going live, so an urgent decision was required. Two options were possible: halt all the other projects for a month (or longer) to patch the system, or strip out HCM to a separate instance. The first option required full integration testing plus a system freeze – considered very high risk. The second option would separate the HCM risk from the rest of the system and avoid similar occurrences in future – but there were only 4 to 6 weeks available to complete the separation - the average industry norm is 8 to 16 weeks.

"To be able to handle these changes, we had to update our HR systems from SP58 to SP71. We have a very integrated SAP solution, everything from Industry, Banking, Retail, Manufacturing, PP, SD, and so on … we have an all-in-one HR solution." – Cornelius Coetzer, Service Delivery Manager | AFGRI

The Solution

AFGRI had to find a way to split HCM off the ERP system, and do it fast. First-hand experience of Data Sync Manager led them straight to EPI-USE Labs for help.

The Project at a glance:

Start of project – 14 April 2014

Production cutover – 9 May 2014

Final testing – 12 May 2014

Go live – 13 May 2014

The DSM Client Sync™ statistics:

- Customising copy (34 million records)
  - Extraction time from production – 00:13:29
  - Insertion time on new system – 00:37:05
- HCM data copy (91 million records)
  - Extraction time from production – 02:14:28
  - Insertion time on new system – 00:51:47

The project involved six steps:

1. Create the target system using **DSM System Builder**.
2. Copy the customising from Current Production to new HCM Production using **DSM Client Sync.**
3. Copy individual master data objects and selected tables for the HCM system using **DSM Object Sync.**
4. Apply support packs for the new HCM system, as well as subsequent OSS notes, corrections and configuration.
5. Set up inter-system links to enable the now-separated HCM and FI systems to communicate via ALE.
6. Set up the user masters with the appropriate roles and unlock the user masters.

"We had total trust in EPI-USE Labs and Data Sync Manager."
– Cornelius Coetzer

EPI-USE Labs validated the decision to split HCM and gave AFGRI the assurance that the project could be delivered within the timeline. AFGRI then ran with the SAP Human Capital Management Separate Instance Project. The AFGRI IT team, together with EPI-USE Labs consulting services, delivered this project in a record time of just 4 weeks, without compromising any processes and with minimal risk.

"That was the best we could do within the time constraints. The amazing thing was it took 6 weeks from the kick-off meeting to go live. We had Dev up and running within a week, QA took two weeks and Production was completed in week four. We used DSM to get all the HCM data out of our ERP system." – Cornelius Coetzer

AFGRI and EPI-USE Labs together completed one full test cycle before the live cutover.

"We had a consultant on-site who helped us to set up and execute everything. This was the key to our success. The EPI-USE Labs consultants and support are wonderful." – Cornelius Coetzer

The Result

AFGRI achieved their goal by separating the SAP HCM module from the other SAP ERP modules. This opened the way to upgrade the separated HCM system without impacting upon other areas and ensured that HCM met with all the legislative requirements before the deadline.

The AFGRI Payroll department confidently announced submission to SARS e@syFile on time and without rejections for 2014. There were no late submission penalties.

"We are now even more thankful for the decision to remove HCM from the ERP system. This means we can patch HCM at any time now, without impacting the rest of the system. We can test the HCM patches with a focused testing team and their own time schedule; there is no risk to the rest of the ERP system and other projects can still continue." – Cornelius Coetzer | AFGRI

About Data Sync Manager™

The Data Sync Manager (DSM) is a flexible, powerful SAP® data copying instrument that ensures access to production data in non-production systems for testing, training and support. The suite is made up of four complementary products, namely Client Sync™ for high performance client data copying; Object Sync™ for reliable test data as needed; Data Secure™ for the protection of sensitive data and System Builder™ for building a new system shell quickly.

About EPI-USE Labs

Our passion at EPI-USE Labs is to innovate and deliver: our solutions and consultants will enhance any SAP landscape and project. To do this we employ highly-skilled individuals whose technical know-how and experience is capable of making our goal a reality. Over the last thirty years hundreds of companies across the globe have discovered the difference our solutions make to their day-to-day operations. Our solutions are primarily aimed at Client and Data Copying, Reporting, Variance analysis, Time, Payroll and Tax.

To find out more about EPI-USE Labs' solutions and services, please visit www.epiuselabs.com or contact us at info@labs.epiuse.com