Tax Department Administration

BAKER TILLY GREENWOODS

" I give it 10/10 and would definitely recommend it to others! "

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Why do you use WorkPool?

For workflow management and status reports. In my environment WorkPool is more of a reporting tool. We have various levels of users and they all want to know different things. The clerk knows what they must do, the managers can see how long a job has been active for and the partner just wants to see a broad overview of where in the process a job is and what the run rate of completion is. WorkPool makes this easy and the reporting is fantastic.

We use WorkPool to report on tax lists per partner and per client and the data is available immediately. We also use WorkPool for filing, checking in and checking out of files. It is really what you make of it as it has unlimited potential.

What were you looking for?

- **Accountability**
  To determine who was responsible for completing a task and where it is at any point in the process. We need to be able to assign tasks and processes to specific resources and hold them accountable.

- **Quality and Control**
  To ensure tasks are completed and in the correct sequence. The bigger the company the further apart the employees are. Documents flow from A to B to C to D and, if you have to track this with Excel, it is terrible and there is no guarantee things will happen. In the real world things don't always start at point A or end at point D. So it was important that we could impose security levels, track who did something and make sure people put the correct information in by making it mandatory.

- **Reporting**
  Instant reporting on tasks, progress and each task's current status. This includes real time age analysis which allows us to see the average time taken to complete a task or process.

Most accounting software vendors have some kind of workflow or task-tracking component. Or you can cobble one together using Outlook or Excel. But we were looking for a highly customizable workflow and task management system that could work in our environment and which wouldn't force us to change our rules or adopt rules imposed by the software. If you are small or a young firm you can still build your company around these rules and work with it. But we needed software that would match what we do now and something that could change with us. It was important that we could control things ourselves. Without a system you have to rely on people to remember what they must do and that does not always work.

Why did you choose WorkPool?

One of the things I like most about WorkPool is that it is highly customizable, for me that is the beauty of it. WorkPool provides a permanent audit trail of all actions as well as security levels, so we can see who did something and when. Before, in Excel, we could delete something or forget to save it. Now everyone can see what information is mandatory and we cannot skip something if the rule does not allow it. This ensures people put the correct information in. In the past, if we didn't have the right information we just left it out, which wasn't right. Now we can't do this as we can see who entered the information.

Initially our focus was all about the tracking of tasks. Now that WorkPool has matured or come into its own with all the information we have in it - including historical information - the reporting is now most valuable. Other systems don't have the same flexibility. A vendor would put in what they thought was best but as they are not accountants, they don't get what we need. With WorkPool we can customize it to what our firm needs. Not all companies have the same staff levels or processes, so the ability to set things up in our own way and get it out again is very valuable.

What were the implementation challenges?

It's been years but I remember it like it was yesterday, I was very excited about it! Our challenges were more practical ones. We did not foresee the information we would need or want to get out of the system so we didn't take into account the level of data that the user may require to complete a task. Originally our tasks were quite rudimentary; we researched what we were doing internally and what we should be doing, but didn't consider small things such as if you don't add the yearend value to a process then you cannot, at a glance, spot one case between several other cases in the list for the same client. As the volumes increased it was important that we could quickly identify what needed to be done and for whom.

We also had change management issues with people not wanting to use the system, but that is a universal problem. People over a certain age are not always comfortable with electronic processes and don't even want to use Excel. The initial training was very good and WorkPool is a very intuitive system. There is nothing difficult about the interface. The search engine is also good if you are searching on keywords. People did not always update WorkPool initially. It's just one of those things, a management issue, but it was a challenge.

I think our biggest issue was making the physical flow of actions in the business match what was configured as per our rules and steps on WorkPool. It took a while for us to sync what was supposed to happen as per WorkPool with what was actually happening in the real world. For example, some primary users like partners do not always work on WorkPool so their assistants will update the system for them. As far as managers and clerks go, I think people do the best they can and things get better over time.

A lot of useful data is entered into WorkPool, but reports have to be developed to extract it. The development time on custom reports for each new process can be a deterrent. This needs to be planned carefully and you have to think what you need to put in to get out what you need. Sometimes you only know what you want afterwards. We created an "all tasks" report that provides us with a lot of source information that we can then export and manipulate further in Excel ourselves. This helps a lot.

How has WorkPool changed the way you work?

We did not even use Excel properly. We had a manual flip file with control sheets. A document would come in, then we would write "I received this document on this date", before passing it on to the next person. Now that it is all electronic, we can get rid of and automate the very manual systems. Any remaining paper or Excel systems are now regulated with a process or a task on WorkPool. The benefit of doing things electronically is that the information can be re-used for reporting instead of having to capture it separately and compile reports manually. If something is quantifiable we can pick it up. We can see how many tasks someone has completed on WorkPool and … *Continued …*

How has WorkPool changed the way you work? (continued)

… if it is in line with what he's actually done, it is a progress marker. We can also compare people's "run rate" e.g. one person does 3 tax returns in 3 weeks and another does 3 tax returns in 3 days. We can compare things objectively – which is why I say WorkPool is more of a reporting tool for us.

To be honest, I don't think we are doing less work now or that we are less busy. The time we saved with WorkPool on doing manual entries is not spent on policing people. But we are not doing more work so I would say it is about the same effort. The information we get as a result of WorkPool saves us a lot of time especially when compiling reports. The manual capturing, filtering and validation of information took a lot of time in the past. Now we see the reports in real time or very quickly.

Clients have very high expectations. They almost expect you to be able to tell them exactly where something is and who is busy with it. We cannot pat ourselves on the back for being able to do that, it is the bare minimum we can do. There are many cases where WorkPool has prevented us from dropping the ball because it is also serves as your backup. WorkPool tells us when we are supposed to be doing something right now or if we should have received a file but didn't. Now, when we ask the previous person where it is, we pick up mistakes such as putting it in the wrong place or sending it to another person. If WorkPool says there is an urgent tax return that needs to be done with the due date being tomorrow, and the file isn't with me, it prompts me to go and find it.

What benefits have you derived through the process?

- Excellence and control is expected of a firm of this size. WorkPool has prevented tasks from being forgotten or overlooked which has certainly had a positive effect on client retention. We make a lot less mistakes and it is easier to trace and prevent things from going wrong.
- We can extract tax lists and various activity reports per partner in real-time, which helps them with their planning and helps us manage deadlines and prioritise work.
- It is nice to be able to see all the tasks per client, e.g. if we have a client that leaves us (client resignation) we can see what work is still in progress or money is outstanding. It makes the exit easier to manage.
- It simplified training and helped us manage risks. If we missed something in training, or we didn't explain it in enough detail e.g. why a dormant process only works for companies and not individuals, WorkPool's process can fill that gap as we can set up a rule to deal with it. A clerk's lifespan is typically short. We get new ones every year and they are with us for only 3 years. The reality is we don't want to invest a lot of time and effort to train someone and then they leave.
- Real-time reporting saves us a considerable amount of time. We can use information derived through the reports to either improve our processes further or to spot trends and compare for example year-on-year, see if we are making progress, are we going backwards, is it still the same? We can pick up and ask questions like, "Why is this task 300 days overdue?" and see immediately it is because of a delay on the client's side. Or if something new pops up that we never considered before, we can build in a catch for this on the process to control it the next time.
- Departments learn from each other. We often check reports used by other departments and then copy their ideas. We don't always have someone with the drive or insight to design reports, so this helps us and saves time. It often gives us a good starting point and then we can just add our requirements to it.
- Consolidated or single view of information across multiple systems. We also pull information from another system called Greatsoft into WorkPool, which we can then use in our WorkPool reports. This is nice as we receive information from both systems in a single view. We can also use information from Greatsoft in our WorkPool processes. For example if an entity is flagged as dormant in Greatsoft, then WorkPool will follow a different path on the process and we don't have to check it manually.

What do you like most?

The fact that WorkPool is highly customizable. The firm can dictate how, when and by whom tasks are performed instead of forcing our systems to follow a path set by the software provider. I like that we can force data completion. By making the completion of certain fields mandatory the quality control and completeness is ensured. In turn this ensures data is accurate and saves time on reporting.

I like the manual tasks the most. We have lots of new processes coming in, so as a pilot project we will typically create a structure of tasks (parent and child tasks) to see all the steps we need to do. The same applies for ad hoc tasks or special projects that are short lived. We can still use WorkPool for this and keep a record of our actions and link it to the client's folder. WorkPool really has unlimited potential. The way we use it is still limited, but that will probably be true for most accounting firms.

The way forward?

Speed and access to accurate information is becoming more and more important and we need to be able to respond faster to changes. The electronic age has been with us for a while now so companies and systems should have caught up. Competitors and clients are now more intelligent and faster and you have to keep up or fall behind. WorkPool as a diagnostic tool is invaluable to us in determining trends, speeding up reporting and managing change.

Would you recommend WorkPool?

Yes, WorkPool is user-friendly, intuitive and secure. I give it 10/10 and would definitely recommend it to others!