

Alliander improves quality with Runbook

Our Customer

Alliander

The Solution

Shared Service Center

The Results

Quality Improvement

For Alliander, the network company that originates from the unbundling of NUON into an electricity supplier/producer and a network company, the main reason to choose Runbook was the aim to increase the quality. “Though they were not deciding factors in the business case, improved efficiency and cost savings are the result”, emphasizes Bart Blokland, director of Alliander Shared Services, the shared service center that works for Alliander and its three subsidiaries, Liander, Liandon and Liandyn. “First and foremost we want to improve the quality.”

In Blokland’s view the major benefit for Alliander is the fact that Runbook matches perfectly with the strategic themes of Shared Services. “Our strategic themes are: concentrate, standardize, innovate and excel. We concentrate more activities at shared services and processes are being standardized. Runbook also is an innovative step. The right combination of standardization and innovation leads to excellence.”

In control

Maybe even more so than for finance functions at other businesses, it is very important for a shared service company to be ‘in control’. “For us it is crucial to build up confidence in shared services. The finance function doesn’t reside with us, but is an inherent part of the business. We are entrusted with keeping the accounts, because the finance function has insight into the processes and the substance behind it. They have the confidence to let go.”

SAP



The fact that everyone at Alliander is convinced that Runbook is an important factor in creating a professional organization was an important reason for the implementation of Runbook, says Blokland. “The people at Alliander are very much involved. Because of our history with NUON, they are familiar with Runbook and dream about what else is possible with the system. It’s also a matter of vision on the future. And we can count on excellent support from Runbook, I might add.”

Runbook is an important cornerstone of Alliander’s finance shared services. The commitment of the employees is the success factor behind the very fast and smooth Runbook implementation. “So far it has been very successful, we’re very ambitious and move really fast. At the end of 2008 we concluded negotiations regarding a license and when it was time for the half-year closing we were able to send the audit trails to the auditors on CD! Having an ambition is one thing, but realizing it is another. We succeeded in doing so”, says Blokland.

Currently, Alliander uses Runbook for period-end close and the digital audit trail, whereas work on the creation of a Tax Control Framework is in progress. “We’re doing a pilot on Horizontal Monitoring with the Dutch Tax Administration”, says Blokland.

New functionalities

Alliander not only focuses on what Runbook can offer for the financial processes. “We see opportunities outside the closing process, such as the monthly salary process for instance. This also involves many mutations, calculations and other data that have to be included. We’re investigating if we can use Runbook for this as well.” Blokland also points to the American Sarbanes-Oxley Act, which focuses on being in control of financial reporting. “It truly concerns the enterprise in its entirety, though. You must be in control of all processes within a company.”

Although efficiency improvements can be made in the long run by using Runbook, Blokland wants to make clear that this was not the main motivation for choosing Runbook. “As a result of standardization and a concentration towards shared services the efficiency can be increased, but that was not what drove us in the first place. It is about improving the quality of the processes and service. Better efficiency is an additional advantage, but more so because it improves processes. In this respect, Runbook is helpful.”

Auditing

Lower audit costs because auditors have to spend less time on gathering information are not a reality yet for Alliander at this stage, says Blokland. “We’ve had our first talks with the auditor. The digital audit trail sounds fantastic, but so far only very few companies do it. The accountancy firms also have to adapt to it. They are used to getting stacks of paper files that can fill cabinets and now they receive everything in electronic form. They want to know if everything is really there. In the long run I’m sure it will help. I hope that accountancy firms will also implement intelligent software to link the data. In the end it will result in lower costs, but it will still take some effort.”

An important advantage, however, is the speed at which figures become available. This is due to the standardization amongst the companies, according to Blokland. Not much time is gained, though, when it comes to the period-end closing. “Our closing schedule was very ambitious to begin with, so it’s hard to improve on that. The improvement you see is more in the extra analyses that can be done and in the improved quality and insight.”

Finally, Blokland points out that it’s very important to him that Runbook is really committed to think along with the employees about the next step. “Currently the ‘in control’ process of period closing is really focused on finance and the auditor, but it can also be applied in other areas. Runbook helps with this thinking process and is very open to hearing these things.”