



Nonprofit Room to Read Uses Adaptive Insights to Foster Cross-Functional Collaboration and Boost Efficiency

CASE STUDY

armanino 

At A Glance

Customer Profile:

Founded in 2000 on the belief that World Change Starts with Educated Children®, Room to Read's innovative model focuses on deep, systemic transformation within schools in low-income countries during two time periods that are most critical in a child's schooling: early primary school for literacy acquisition and secondary school for girls' education. Room to Read works in collaboration with local communities, partner organizations and governments to develop literacy skills and a habit of reading among primary school children and ensure girls can complete secondary school with the skills necessary to negotiate key life decisions. Room to Read has benefited 11.5 million children across more than 20,000 communities in 14 countries and aims to reach 15 million children by 2020. Replacing Excel with Adaptive has given Room to Read greater visibility and control of its budgeting process and overall program costs, as well as easier collaboration and better transparency.

Software & Services

- Adaptive Insights
- Armanino consulting and implementation services

Benefits

- Provides greater transparency into the budgeting and planning process
- Enables deeper collaboration across business units
- Boosts finance department's confidence in taking on challenging goals, managing risks and leveraging important learnings

Challenge

Room to Read is a nonprofit organization focused on transforming the lives of millions of children living in low-income countries through literacy and gender equality in education. The nonprofit is consistently recognized for its transparency, operational efficiency and overall financial excellence. The organization previously used an Excel-based approach to planning, which it was quickly outgrowing.

"We recently migrated to new accounting software, Intacct, and that upgrade prepared us for addressing the budgeting and planning parts of the business," says Stephanie Wei, finance manager at Room to Read. "We wanted to invest in infrastructure that would enable us to scale without growing employee headcounts, and transition away from the Excel-based approach that fostered a siloed working style."

In looking for an enterprise performance management solution, the nonprofit also required functionality such as multi-country and multi-currency support, intuitive reporting capabilities and seamless integration with its new general ledger in Intacct. Using a cloud-based solution that provided flexible collaboration from any location was also a top priority, so the organization began searching for a solution that met these diverse needs.

Solution

After evaluating software from a variety of vendors, Room to Read chose Adaptive Insights, a cloud-based corporate performance management solution, for its ability to deliver on the nonprofit's priorities. After weighing the costs and benefits, the nonprofit also decided to engage with an implementation partner. "We created an initial short list and Armanino quickly rose to the top," says Nancy Shyer, director of finance at Room to Read. "Armanino has deep experience working with nonprofits, understands the unique challenges that we face, and could work within our budget and implementation schedule."

Once the decision was made, Armanino helped Room to Read deploy the new solution within a short timeframe, spanning only six months. Because of the desire to implement the new solution quickly, Armanino guided Room to Read to focus on deploying the subset of functionality that would best serve the organization in its first year, and then adopt other capabilities in a phased approach.

"Adaptive has incredible functionality, and it would have been easy to get caught up in all the features instead of staying laser-focused on what we needed to be successful the first year," says Wei. "Armanino really helped us prioritize. The Armanino consultants saw the big picture, which saved us a lot of time and frustration."

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-Nancy Shyer

Armanino also provided assistance in getting employees trained on the new software. While Room to Read led the hands-on training, Armanino served as a resource, attending training calls during implementation and rollout. “Having experts available to answer questions during training calls was important because our team was still learning the system themselves,” says Wei.

Results

Room to Read is thrilled with the results of the Adaptive deployment. “We now have a highly collaborative, transparent planning model,” says Shyer. “In our first rounds of budgeting with Adaptive, we were able to accomplish things we couldn’t do before, like changing assignments and assumptions without having to redo everything.”

Among the top benefits cited by Shyer and Wei are greater transparency and seamless collaboration among business units. “Collaboration between our finance, operations and human resources teams is now greatly improved,” says Shyer. “For instance, through the HR/Finance collaboration, a new approach to fringe benefits planning introduced welcome efficiencies and has been shown to improve the accuracy of the budget.”

The successful Adaptive implementation also added to the organization’s confidence in taking on challenging goals, managing risk and leveraging important learnings along the way. Staff has shifted the budgeting conversation from discussing better ways to manage spreadsheet logistics to discussing ways they can get more information and value out of the budgets. This greater efficiency allows the nonprofit to devote more of its precious resources to programs that benefit children.

Capping its first year of success, Room to Read was named the winner of Adaptive Insights’ Torchie Award for Business Partnering and Collaborative Planning, which recognizes customers that have achieved excellence in strategic financial planning and accounting. And Room to Read staff around the world give the new Adaptive system a thumbs up, as well. “We surveyed employees after the implementation phase of the project and the response was overwhelmingly positive,” says Wei. “A tool of this caliber together with the immediacy of seeing results in a cloud-based system is very exciting for our team.”

Next Steps

The nonprofit is already working on further plans for enhancing its use of Adaptive. Management has listened to employee feedback, and staff report that they want the ability to refine cost drivers to make them more appropriate for each country. “Teams also want the ability to pull actuals into the system,” says Wei. “And while the reports we created last year were good, we’re excited about providing employees with the ability to generate powerful reports on their own in the coming year.”

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-Stephanie Wei

Room to Read also plans to continue to focus on training to ensure that employees become increasingly proficient using the system and new hires get up to speed quickly. Shyer points out that this type of project is a long-term investment that requires ongoing management. “You can’t simply implement and walk away. It’s an ongoing process to keep the project reflective of how your organization works. Understand your vision, prioritize and continue to focus,” she says.

About Armanino

Armanino provides an integrated set of accounting services—audit, tax, consulting and technology solutions—to a wide range of organizations operating both in the US and globally. You can count on Armanino to think strategically, to provide the sound insights that lead to positive action. We address not just your compliance issues, but your underlying business challenges, as well—assessing opportunities, weighing risks, and exploring the practical implications of both your short- and long-term decisions. When you work with us, we give you options that are fully aligned with your business strategy. If you need to do more with less, we will implement the technology to automate your business processes. If it’s financial, we can show you proven benchmarks and best practices that can add value company-wide. If the issue is operational, we’ll consult with your people about workflow efficiencies. If it’s compliance, we’ll ensure you meet the requirements and proactively plan to take full advantage of the changes at hand. At every stage in your company’s lifecycle, we’ll help you find the right balance of people, processes, and technology.

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