

CARSA (Consultores de Automización y Robótica) Integrating distributed teams and supporting nomadic workers¹

The challenge

CARSA was originally established in 1987 in the Basque region of Spain. It provides services related to the management of innovation to both public and private sector clients. The private sector clients are mainly SMEs but the public sector clients include regional, national and European bodies. The services offered include advice on enterprise management, the management of innovative projects, the management of complex systems and the development of traditional industrial sectors or regional activities. CARSA today employs about 25 people, mostly engineers and lawyers, and as well as its headquarters in Bilbao, it now has offices in Barcelona, Madrid, the Canary Islands and Brussels.

CARSA wanted to use flexible working methods to integrate the staff in its various offices into distributed teams and make it possible for team members to carry out their jobs from home or wherever they happened to be. Its principal priorities were:

- improving access to the collective knowledge of the company's employees
- implementing distributed teamworking
- transparency of information
- better communications with partners, stakeholders and nomadic workers

The technical solution

CARSA upgraded its communications infrastructure with DSL, ISDN and videoconferencing facilities.

It also implemented an Intranet to help all of its employees share common databases and files. The Intranet could also provide them with corporate e-mail and conferencing services, along with secure access and virus protection.

The company's hardware (server, firewalls, routers, PCs, laptops etc) was upgraded to implement the flexible working platform and work efficiently as part of it.

The results

Staff working in any of the company's offices can now access all of the company's information, as can nomadic workers and people working from home. This makes it possible for the company to set up project teams, based on the skills of the individual team members rather than their geographic location.

Communications with team members, project partners and other stakeholders has been significantly improved. Groupware tools have proved particularly effective in improving the interaction with external partners.

Teleworkers say that the technology has offered them a better work-life balance. In particular they appreciate the reduced amount of time spent in traffic jams and the increased amount of time that they can spend with their families. Some office workers have expressed interest in becoming teleworkers. Managers say that the technology allows them to work in much more flexible ways - keeping up with the latest information wherever they happen to be.

CARSA's General Manager, Jesús de la Maza, thinks that flexible working has made it possible for the company's people to be independent of the 'traditional' office. He says 'It's great to know that that you can make use of all the knowledge generated in CARSA when you are not in the office!'

¹ A more detailed case study can be found on the website of the IST project 'PROTELEUSES' (www.cbt.es/proteleuses), which analysed the ambitions of a number of SMEs and implemented flexible working solutions addressing the principal bottlenecks preventing the achievement of those ambitions.



Conclusions

CARSA is basically a technology consultancy business with regional offices in a large country (Spain) and an external office in Brussels. The technical solution – common file server and a set of Groupware tools -could be relevant to any small business with several branch offices. The actual tools will depend on whether the branch offices offer a common set of products to all clients or whether the company needs to build short-lived teams to develop a solution to an individual client's problem.