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During late May, June and early July 2009, I conducted 35 extensive interviews with officials from Statewide Administration, UAF, UAA and UAS who are involved in or impacted by IT automation projects. Interviewees included Statewide Vice Presidents, MAU Vice Chancellors for Administrative Services; Registrars; Campus Human Resource Directors; Finance, Budget and Records Officers; IT Directors and others who are charged with overseeing automation projects.

As a UAF Professor of Applied Business and an expert in Organizational Behavior (without expertise in Information Technology), I acquired information on how automation projects receive IT support within System departments. I discovered through these interviews and by my own observations and experiences a number of inefficiencies in the current system of prioritizing and executing IT automation project. I have identified and articulated below six (6) strong recommendations for improvement in both IT automation efficiency and effectiveness.

The objectives of this review are as follows:

- Review how automation (technology) is supported within the University of Alaska System (Statewide MAU) located in Fairbanks.
- Review how business needs are identified and solutions determined for business problems (Business Analysis).
- Comment on the current organizational effectiveness and efficiencies, identify existing inter relationships and duplication of effort, and provide results of interviews. Also identify any areas/structures working well.
- Recommend changes to improve organizational effectiveness and forward ideas on ways in which costs could be reduced.

Current Situation:

There are currently 3 unique processes for prioritizing and implementing automation projects in Statewide Administration. Finance has dedicated programmers who work in the Finance department under the supervision of Raye Ann Robinson, Associate VP of Financial Development and Operations. She establishes priorities, manages all finance-related automation projects and supervises the four finance programmers. Vickie Gilligan, Director of HR Operations, with guidance from HRC, establishes priorities and supervises Human Resource related automation projects with a combination of dedicated HR systems-knowledgeable staff as well as one full-time dedicated IT programmer from the Statewide OIT Department. Student Services and Enrollment Management related projects are coordinated by Mary Gower, Director of Enrollment Services, who exclusively uses OIT programmers.

Each of these three UA System functional areas takes advantage of committees comprised of Campus clients and users of automation services. These business process committees are in the process of augmentation by a Statewide ITEC Group and Project Management Team (PMT). It is important to note that no one interviewed at Statewide recommended changing any of the three automation support structures in place at the System office. As with any structure and system there are “upsides” and “downsides.” There are also significant unintended consequences to undertaking any change to the status quo.

Upsides:

Automation Project Leaders in Finance, HR, and OIT are widely viewed as extremely strong, competent and dedicated with many, many years of experience. These departments’ current structures allow for pools of expertise within the functional areas of the Banner System.

Current structures in Statewide Finance and HR allow for development of depth of business process expertise. Both Finance and HR are areas in which uniform procedures and automation solutions are needed for compliance reasons; UA is one employer. SW Finance and HR perform ongoing functional processing and administrative roles for the entire UA system in addition to project management. For example, the functions in HR support consistency in processing and reporting, compliance to regulatory agencies, centralized benefits plan and tax administration. The majority of Finance or HR projects will affect the respective SW functional processes significantly as well as the MAU processes. The SW HR and Finance staff’s advanced functional knowledge enhances and expedites accurate and complete processes. Automation projects for Student Services and Enrollment Management, unlike Finance and HR, tend to be driven up from the Campuses to Statewide and a variation in campus solutions has been permitted to a considerable extent. To implement prioritized automation projects, Mary Gower, Statewide Director of Enrollment Services, draws programming expertise for IT automation projects from pooled resources in the Statewide OIT department located adjacent to her office.

Downsides:

Timely completion of projects requires effective project management leadership, coordination and decisionmaking. Business process expertise in each area is necessary, as well as an adequate level of IT programmer support to support projects undertaken. Without well trained back-up leadership, particularly in Finance and HR, there is a strong likelihood of bottlenecks, particularly if leaders are on leave or programmer vacancies exist.

Current structures are based on the concept of reaching consensus and receiving collaboration to accomplish system automation projects. However, there is no direct reporting line between System project managers and individuals at the campus level who participate in project work. When short-handed in staffing, UA System departments do not have the ability to draw on campus functional area or campus IT expertise to lend support. Further, when consensus is not reached at various decision points, projects may be delayed while more effort is spent trying to reach decisions. This is problematic, given differing views of options and the fact that not all

solutions work equally well at the multiple locations that have different needs or perceptions of their needs. No one involved in the work of project management has the authority to demand adherence to a project decision or solution that is not achieved through consensus. (This appears to be an issue that the PMT and ITEC structure will be dealing with, but that structure has not yet corrected the numerous areas in which this has caused difficulty and inefficiency.) Such collaboration as does exist between OIT departments, Finance, HR, Student Services and their respective campus customers is primarily a function of personal relationships rather than a structured system. The Banner Coordinating Team (BCT) and the General Functional Council (GFC) both meet regularly to communicate and coordinate cross functional issues/processes, and have for many years. Project leaders for Statewide Finance, HR and Student Services automation projects report to various functional Vice Presidents rather than to the System CITO, or his project management designee. The System departments have authority over their area of responsibility throughout the system, e.g. Finance matters are overseen by CFO Joe Trubacz. However, project management at a minimum not only involves a particular functional area, but also relies on OIT and the campus departments who need to be involved as customers and participants in implementing projects and testing their effectiveness. Frequently, cross departmental implementations occur, in which more than one functional area is involved at the UA System level. Given this level of complexity, the different preferences and interests of participants and the lack of clear authority to make project decisions when differences can't be resolved, current system project prioritization and management has been difficult if not impossible.

Whether, or not it is a reality, there is a strong sentiment at Statewide and at the Campuses that Automation Projects are not ranked and selected based on identified and established UA priorities, but are prioritized and implemented on an adhoc basis or based upon power and influence of individuals.

In another area of concern, the benefits of IT resource economies-of-scale are diminished by separate non-collaborative structures and the existence of duplicate solutions where one solution for the entire UA system could and should be used. The Banner Coordinating Team and the General Functional Council provide collaboration and communication within their own members on automation matters. But there is inadequate integration of the role of the BCT and the GFC with University leaders or groups who have authority to make ultimate decisions for the entire enterprise. That is what is needed to correct the problems that exist.

Perceptions:

Whether true or not, the following observations were made by two or more interviewees. C - indicates comments primarily from campus leaders; S from statewide leaders; B from both campus and statewide leaders. The following list comprises perceptions, not necessarily statements of fact and an attempt has been made to group similar topics, some in a point-counterpoint fashion.

- C - When it comes to automation projects, statewide administration has a hard time focusing and getting one thing done. “They do involve everyone, but then we focus more on form rather than function. We let people argue in endless meetings over trivia like whether to use an alpha or numeric code.”
 - Campus example: We have been looking for time and effort reporting since 2003. It jumped to the top of the list last week. But it dropped HR’s automated timesheets off the list.
 - SW reaction: Timesheets have always been on the list after grant effort reporting due to their cross dependencies. The automated timesheet project remains on the project list. However, due to the request by Vice Chancellors that grant effort reporting be moved up in priority, two other HR automation projects in progress were bumped and will not be completed in the timeframe planned. This is the result of responding to a new campus request for changing the priority of projects.
 - Campus example: Success story in 2005 – UAKjobs. Can apply online; everyone has access. System now on the cusp of actually generating form for new hire to set up pay. Cool workflow, but it’s taken a long time to implement. State’s system brought up 5 years earlier. From proposal to implementation was a year or so for assessment.
 - SW Reaction: The implementation of UAKjobs was split into multiple phases so that portions would be up and running and to make sure they were working before the next phase was built and implemented. There was a one year delay in starting Phase II because of staff turnover. Phase II took 3 times longer than it should have because of changes in features desired, followed by further development and required retesting. Because of the added functionality this would provide, the MAU representatives chose to delay in order to obtain the new features.
- C – It seems that there is no one person in charge of following projects. This creates accountability problems.
 - S - It is correct that no single person monitors automation projects for the UA System. Each project manager is in charge of leading his/her particular project. In each System functional area, there is a different method of monitoring projects, e.g. in HR, one person follows HR automation projects, provides regular updates to the Human Resources Council, Business Council and ITEC (formerly APEG) with documentation, and updates the HR website with project information.
- 1. C - There is no system-wide prioritization of projects between functional departments.

- S - It is true that prior to the creation of the IT governance plan using the portfolio management team (PMT) and the ITEC, there was no organized method in the UA system for prioritizing and making decisions regarding automation projects.
2. C - There is a general lack of project management and accountability. The worst example cited was the 1996-97 classification project with one person that turned into a department of seven which is perpetually redoing. On the other hand, it was noted that benefits was up and running with only two people in a couple months.
- S - The UA Job Family project included the classification, placement and classification structure of all staff positions in the system and was not primarily an automation project. Currently, there are 4 positions in the compensation and classification unit; duties include much more than position classification, The benefits staff members are responsible for plan design and communication, not project work. The implementation of all new benefit programs is done by the HR Operations staff in conjunction with the MAUs.
3. C - It is impossible to pin down dates for project completion. Examples include a process for credit cards/ecommerce, registration shopping cart, travel, data browser, and automated timesheets.
- S - Each System functional area currently determines its own projected dates for project completion. This information is communicated to the GFC and is now available for review by the PMT and ITEC. Currently, for HR, anticipated completion dates are listed for all projects in progress. Completion dates are not projected for automation projects that have not been resourced, as executive priorities change and executives themselves change. However, a priority level is assigned to each project.
4. C - UA purchases too many non-banner software packages and then spends too much time modifying them. Several interviewees believe that there are banner modules we are not using that should be implemented.
- S - To date, UA has not had consistent rules or system oversight regarding a department's request to purchase non-Banner software applications. The continued implementation of IT governance through the PMT and ITEC groups should correct this. Criteria could be adopted, for example, that would provide that the use of Banner functionality is automatically preferred when available, and non-Banner applications will be purchased and implemented only upon determination that Banner cannot accommodate UA's needs. The question of further implementation of Banner modules is a complex area; there are many features of Banner that we may choose to implement, but each decision of this type creates a project that itself must be reviewed through an examination of its value to our system compared to the resources that need to be expended to get it up and running. Just as with external applications, new features of Banner must

undergo a prioritization process, as well as a dedication of needed resources and planning for implementation.

- B - UA spends huge funds and effort to bring programs on line and then does not require system wide implementation. Examples include OnBase, Degree Works, EMAS, housing project. FSA Atlas spent supposed to be a short project but took 3 years. Asked to have Degree Works, but SW wouldn't pay for even though it would have benefit every student because they were burned. Now we have MyUA portal, but no one is using it. So we are thinking about a Strategic Enrollment program....
 - When new projects are commissioned there needs to be a better process of identifying total costs and resources necessary to support.
- 5. B - There are not enough programmers.
- 6. B - Lack of centralization of IT is problematic. Examples of programming challenges include non-standardized email, calendaring, blackboard courseware programs, levels of security. Examples of personnel challenges caused by decentralization cause "silos", inefficient and inconsistent utilization of programmers for highest priority projects.
- 7. C - There is a general disconnect between the corporate culture of Statewide and the Campuses' mission to serve students. Campus leaders stated that IT should be a utility which makes the mission of the University easier to accomplish rather than being driven by technology.
- 8. S - Statewide project managers do not believe the campuses understand the realities of the workloads undertaken by the system office. Statewide staff emphasized that they must continually try to reach consensus and harmonize approaches for the good of the entire university, whereas campus interests frequently are based on their own needs to the exclusion of other MAUs' interests or the goals of the system. Statewide project managers feel frustrated by the conflict inherent in the current structure and the lack of authority or established methods for reaching decisions on projects.
- 9. C - Campuses believe that they are "meeting'd to death" rather than listened to and served as customers.
 - S – Statewide project managers believe they are tasked with providing information to their counterparts at the campuses who are involved in or affected by automation projects. Detailed documentation and information are provided in a multitude of meetings and on the web. Each department has processes and holds meetings to gain input and guidance from the MAUs, however, it is up to the MAUs whether their representatives actively participate, whether they represent the interests of others at their MAU, and whether they actively communicate to others at their campus regarding the status of projects.

Recommendations:

The "law-of-unintended-consequences" should guide implementation of any recommendations to change the current system of prioritizing and implementing automation projects. The current systems have evolved over a number of years. These decentralized IT related systems clearly do not maximize efficiency, nor do they encourage innovation and actually cause bottlenecks. Nevertheless, any move to further decentralize, or to conversely centralize all automation resources will probably fail to achieve intended results unless roles, controls and reporting lines between Statewide Administration and the Campus MAUs are clearly delineated and agreed upon.

Change should be carefully planned and clearly communicated to all concerned. With that in mind, I propose six recommendations in a three step 2-3 year plan to improve IT automation efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness to opportunities afforded by the technological resources of the University of Alaska System comprised of three Campus MAUs and the Statewide office:

Step #1 - To be implemented immediately:

One of the reasons projects are not completed in a reasonable time is related to the sheer volume of projects in queue from Finance, HR, Student Services, and other stakeholders. The automation projects include both Banner and non-Banner applications. By attempting to take on so many projects, priorities come into conflict and efficiency is sacrificed. As part of this review I received the June 4, 2009 OIT-ITS line item project status report. The report (attached) is 68 pages. The report is written in 9 or 10 point font.

A stronger communication process, project prioritization and management processes must be put in place immediately.

1. By making a concerted effort to regularly communicate project status to stakeholders, and by being accessible to answer questions and address issues raised, Statewide Administration should be able to resolve many of the current misunderstandings between SW and the Campuses. This responsibility could be assigned to OIT Project Management. Statewide staff in OIT, Finance, HR and Student Services should recognize themselves as service providers, responding to the customer base and rolling out best practices of customer service. MAU representatives should recognize that to make project implementation successful, collaboration is needed within the system. Designated individuals at the campus level must make the time to participate on projects, to be a conduit for communication and input-gathering at their locations.

2. Each project currently in queue and all future projects (including upgrades), should be inventoried and reprioritized against each other as a group, based upon PMT and ITEC prioritization process.
 - o Those projects of highest production priority should be assigned to a responsible project manager who is charged with expediting his/her assigned automation project through the system. (S)he regularly reports project status, projected completion, delays and progress to the PMT.

To be implemented immediately with a 6 month or less deadline as recommended in the MacTaggart/Rogers report:

3. System and Campus IT leaders should develop a complete service catalog to identify all service lines and services offered across the entire system. Upon completion of the service catalog, in consultation with senior statewide and campus administrators, it would need to be determined on a service-by-service basis which IT office will be the provider of the service to the other IT customers. The goals are to improve efficiency, reduce redundancies, and promote standardization across the UA Statewide System. For example, the Anchorage Campus currently is the provider of Eluminate Live to UAA, UAS and UAF. Likewise, Statewide provides standardized Banner programming service to each MAU. Conversely, all campuses are running different versions of Blackboard courseware and every MAU has different email and calendaring systems, creating difficulties, inefficiencies and waste.
 - o Prior to commencing this exercise there must be agreed rules and procedures for arbitrating disagreements on service provider vs. service customer roles.
 - o A copy of the UAA Service Catalog is attached for reference.
4. ITEC should clearly articulate the requirements for future projects and the problems they are designed to serve: they should solicit ideas and practices from campuses before developing new solutions. The ITEC should clearly communicate priorities and timelines for IT system improvements. There was consensus among individuals interviewed during this review that UA has an abundance of projects on its wish-lists and needs to do a better job of targeting its priorities. The current system of prioritizing projects involves squeezing them in where they can fit (with timeframes and completion dates that are unsatisfactory to all) because the university does not enough functional experts, programmers and money to target the ambitious list of projects all at once. Once the UA's new system of IT governance, led by ITEC, determines priorities, University leaders should be asked to address the issue of resources, or should consider outsourcing when necessary to accomplish key automation improvements.

Step #2 - To be implemented upon completion of the UA System IT Service Catalog:

5. Centralize all Statewide automation project management resources (currently decentralized in SW Finance, HR, and Student Services), under the command of a newly created position of Executive Director of Information Technology. (*see Chronicle of*

Higher Education article in attachment #1). This person should report to the CITO and coordinate closely with ITEC, PMT and user councils. (S)he must have authority to hire/fire/supervise project management staff and control automation related budgets.

Once ITEC, (*strategic*), prioritizes an automation project this new Executive Director, (*operational*) will be responsible and accountable for deploying in-house resources, or contracting with an outside vendor to accomplish each automation mission.

Currently, the responsible project management personnel in Finance, HR, Student Services, and OIT report independently to their respective Statewide Administration Vice Presidents. Although this review did not examine the other functions of the current positions, the current departmental project managers located in SWHR, Finance and at the MAUs also have other regular work demands outside of their project management roles. Therefore, this recommendation presupposes the separation of the functional expertise and the project lead role. The functional work will remain in a reporting line located in the department, whereas the project lead activities will report to OIT. Communication and collaboration will thus be essential between the functional department and OIT in the centralized project management structure being recommended, to ensure the OIT project managers have an adequate awareness of the business processes at the heart of the automation project. As noted earlier, an adequate staffing level of both IT programmers and IT project managers is essential or there will be difficulty in juggling the workload. However, the centralized project management structure, with authority located in OIT, will provide needed decision making, as well as the accountability for the progress of project management and the justification of expenditures at a system level. Centralizing automation project resources makes sound business sense, but should occur only after agreement on the system wide service catalog and delineation of campus/statewide responsibilities.

Step #3 - To be implemented 1 year after employment of Executive Director of IT and the centralization of IT automation project operational resources:

6. Contract with a neutral outside IT consulting firm to do a thorough efficiency study of the UA System's IT service catalog and the various SW/MAU IT related department operations. This consulting group should be charge with the dual responsibility of identifying 10-15% cost savings (\$6-10 million per annum) while improving responsiveness and innovation.

Attachments:

- I. Excerpts from The Chronicle of Higher Education, (2007) –“Managing IT from the Top Down” comments by Phillip Long, CIO Yale University. Documentation of Vanderbilt University Enterprise Information Technology Organization and Key Roles, (2006).
- II. FY 2008 identified system wide IT expenditures.
- III. Current Organization charts for UA IT Governance Model, Statewide OIT and HR Process Review and Project Coordination Flow.
- IV. June 4, 2009 OIT-ITS project status report.
- V. Statewide Administration interview questions.
- VI. Campus interview questions.
- VII. UAA IT Service Catalog and recommendation for IT functional alignment.