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Creating Efficiencies Through Process Improvement
Stephanie Radant
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Introduction
As a college, our primary mission is to serve students enrolled in our programs. To ensure our students are receiving a quality education complete with rewarding research opportunities, we need to hire exceptional faculty and provide those faculty members with the resources they need. Our college funds are allocated annually; these funds provide for: graduate assistantships, part-time instructors, research expenses as well as new faculty start-up packages. As the largest of the seven colleges which comprise Western Michigan University, the College of Arts and Sciences must make decisions strategically, with regard to the allocation of resources among our twenty-six departments and schools. These resources, once allocated, must be accurately and efficiently monitored to ensure fiscal responsibility and program sustainability.

State of Michigan allocations are limited, often resulting in budget reductions for our college, which makes tracking our budgets increasingly more important.

When I arrived in the college, I saw an opportunity for process improvement in the way we were tracking our resources and I used the total performance system to initiate those improvements.

Goals

- Revise department planning templates to ensure user-friendliness while capturing the data required to create a comprehensive summary for the college.
- Department planning templates are spreadsheets used by each department to manage graduate, part-time and additional faculty appointments. These spreadsheets reside on our server, allowing for simultaneous communication between departments and the college.
- Create a summary to allow for quick reporting to the dean and university partners.
- Perform quick review of data from university partners.

Internal (Process) Feedback: Internal information about the internal performance (efficiency and quality) of individuals, work groups or processes.

- We met as a budget team and determined the following would create efficiencies within our office and allow business managers to quickly and accurately communicate with the deans about the usage and availability of funds.
- Consistency of data across departments.
- A tab for each appointment type within the spreadsheet rather than multiple tabs based on funding source.
- Drop down menus for: department, appointment type, semester and funding source.
- Summary tab for each department.
- Automatic updates of data in the college-level spreadsheet.
- Creation of a new master for EUP reimbursements.
- Changes to the grant information to capture data needed by grants and contracts.

External (Outcome) Feedback: External information about service outcomes and quality from customers and other external sources.

- When we reviewed the new documents with the department administrative assistants, we received positive feedback to the updates we had made and requests for changes.
  - Ability to sort each of the tabs by appointment type and semester.
  - Ability to highlight rows.
  - Addition to credit hour drop down.
  - Additional options for graduate assistantship appointments.
  - An area for detailed notes.

Methodology

Total Performance System
Peter Dams; Dams & Associates, Inc.

Goals/Mission

- Student enrollment.
- Graduate College Allocation.
- Provost Part-Time Allocation.
- EUP Reimbursement.
- Summer Revenue.
- External funding.

Internal Processes: Processes that use resources to generate outputs valued by customers.

- Faculty salary.
- Graduate Assistantships.
- Part-time instruction.
- Summer additional appointments.
- Research appointments.
- Student appointments.

Outputs: Tangible products or intangible services produced by the internal processes.

- Updated department planning template.
- Summary of the college accounts.
- Updated detailed accounts that were easier to read.

External (Outcome) Feedback (continued)

- Through facilitated discussions between administrative assistants in each unit and our budget team, we were able to discuss and incorporate modifications. These templates were linked to a master spreadsheet for the college, which is utilized for reporting purposes.
- Throughout the year we requested feedback from our administrative assistants, and incorporated their suggestions and improvements into the templates for the following fiscal year. This process for improvement continues.

Conclusion

The Total Performance System method, one of implementing process improvement by establishing a system which seeks constant feedback and making adjustments, was well received by our departments. Taking time to listen to our users also strengthened our relationships and we were able to gain efficiencies within the system. We gained better reporting and projection capabilities. We will continue to seek feedback from our budget team (internal) as well as the dean, departments and university partners (external) to ensure our system is optimal.

Continuous improvement becomes even more important as we move to the Strategic Resource Management budget model in the near future.

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