Interdivisional Technology Collaboration

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The Challenge

Information technologies such as computers, mobile devices and telecommunications have become the principle change agents associated with the reshaping of higher education. As these technologies advance and evolve, end-user’s expectations continue to increase as they expect ubiquitous and reliable access to those technologies. At the same time many university technology support operations have struggled to keep pace with the needed infrastructure upgrades as well as maintaining the qualified support staff with expertise to meet these issues head on.

This challenge has been compounded over the years by the fracturing and decentralization of technology services and support along divisional and academic college lines. Decentralization often creates a culture where duplication of efforts abound and often results in added costs and inefficient use of human capital, it can also result in silos of communication and isolated pockets of expertise.

Survey of Information Technology Personnel at WMU

In March of 2019 the OIT’s Project Management Office surveyed IT personnel at WMU. This survey focused on gathering information of perceived risks and opportunities relating to tech support and delivery now and into the future. 3 consistent themes emerged from the data:

1. WMU technology personnel are highly talented and valued but distributed.
2. Technology services, software and hardware are empowering and vast, but becoming increasingly expensive, burdening individual units experiencing decreasing budgets.
3. Change control is common and enhanced collaborative planning and communication opportunities exist.

Of the 46 risks that were identified in the report, 19.5% fell into the category of Communications, Governance and Education. This was higher than any other category. In addition this category comprised 5 of the top 10 risks.

Run the Experiment

In November 2017 the Student Affairs Information Systems (SAIS) department moved from the Faunce Student Services building to the 3rd floor of the Sindecuse Health Center. In April 2019 due to programmatic changes happening at Sindecuse, SAIS was once again asked to relocate. During this time conversations began between SAIS and OIT on how to better collaborate on many tech issues and an offer was made by Tom Wolf, CIO at WMU to provide office space for SAIS staff in the University Computing Center.

With hundreds of technology personnel spread across 7 divisions, effective collaborative communication and strategic planning can be quite difficult. Student Affairs Information Systems and OIT are taking this opportunity to work together to address this issue and provide a cooperative framework for other divisions that may be interested in participating.

SAIS / OIT Collaboration

“SAIS OIT Collaboration -” started with relocation of SAIS staff and over the next year plan to address large projects such as using the same helpdesk ticketing system and co-locating the SAIS helpdesk staff with the OIT desktop support group to encourage knowledge transfer and support of one another. Other projects being discussed are:

- Print Services
- Mobile Device Management
- Call Center
- Directory Services
- VMware Infrastructure support
- Shared Strategic Planning

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“IF HP knew what HP knows, we would be three times more productive” – Lew Platt, former Hewlett Packard CEO

Conclusion

Culture change is difficult, but in order to survive organizations must remain fluid and begin to act proactively which lends itself to efficiency, as opposed to reactively which is expensive, especially in terms of human capital.

With this collaborative effort specifically designed as a proactive measure, we hope to show that shared planning, governance and cooperative leadership can be a transformative influence on us all.

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