



- DWIGHT KAYTO -

Ensuring IT Customer Excellence Through Sound Business Processes

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The Organization

In Saskatchewan, health care is provided via twelve Regional Health Authorities. A re-organization of the health care system created these Authorities by amalgamating 32 health districts. One of the new Authorities, Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region (RQHR), includes the former Pipestone, Regina and Touchwood Qu'Appelle health districts.

RQHR's Information Technology is led by Executive Director David Wilson, Directors Virginia Elliott and Randy Knapp and Managers Don Wilson, Sandy From and Len Arguin, collectively known as the IMT (Information Management Team). IMT coordinates the delivery Information Technology and Telecommunications services to the new authority comprising over 8,000 employees.

Customer Commitment and Continuous Improvement

Commitment to quality is crucial in the health care industry. Where budgets are constrained, implementing the newest technology is rarely an option for improvement. IT must make the most of the available resources in order to deliver consistent, responsive, reliable, continuously improving IT Services, as well as focusing on process improvements.

IMT considers service delivery excellence a key to maintaining customer satisfaction. This approach is part of their long-standing commitment to ensuring that the customer is first and foremost the department's focus. This focus has paid off. IT staff and management alike are clearly and demonstrably committed to providing service excellence to their customers.

The Project

In order to manage a program of continuous quality improvement and essentially do more with less, a project was initiated to document, examine and continuously improve IT processes. Paradigm Consulting Group of Regina was hired to assist. The project began with the selection of a strategic framework. Workshops were held and a framework based on the IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL, see below) was selected as the starting point. Interviews and discussions were then used to gather information and create a document describing both the current situation and best practice of all IT processes: business, administrative and technical.

Workflow models were developed depicting the processes that had been documented. The Quality Assurance part of this step ensured that the processes were accurately depicted. Both the drawings and the document were refined until they reflected how processes were performed within IT.

Throughout the modeling phase, refinements were made to the descriptions of the processes and to the framework. The challenge was to keep a cohesive framework that included and described all processes. As work on the project progressed processes were modified and new ones were identified, defined and added. These were carefully placed within the strategic framework to align and flow properly. Linkages among processes had to be maintained and all inputs and outputs had to be connected and represented on all relevant diagrams. A significant challenge was to avoid structuring the framework like an organization chart.

Upon completion the IT Service Management Strategic framework represented all of IT's processes and provided the foundation for current and future process improvement plans.

Auditing our work

Prior to launching the project, a comprehensive list had been made of IT's main business processes. Once the models and framework were complete, it was time to put them to the test. Several IT processes were chosen at random and used to audit the new framework. The hypothesis was that one should be able to take any major process and find all the steps within the framework. When this was tested it was found that the framework described the processes perfectly!

The Bigger picture - ITIL, BSI and ISO

As the development of the framework and the models progressed, another small, but key part of the project was completed. IMT wanted an understanding of what the IT industry was doing in the way of process management. A short research document was written describing how ITIL (IT Infrastructure Library) had become a widely accepted approach to IT Service Management around the world and is considered the standard for "Best Practice" in IT.

ITIL provides a comprehensive and consistent set of best practices for IT service management, promoting a quality approach to achieving business effectiveness and efficiency in the use of information systems. ITIL is based on the collective experience of commercial and government practitioners worldwide. (Courtesy OGC - Office of Government Commerce, the UK government department that founded ITIL in the 1980s)

Firms worldwide are using ITIL in order to stabilize and improve their IT services. Corporations that have created a strategic IT framework most often structure it following this Best Practice guidance. This approach also supports IMT's mandate of ensuring that everything is done for a customer reason or purpose.

ITIL provides overall guidance and specific details regarding the

processes necessary to run an IT department or organization. The British Standards Institute (BSI) provides content for various codes of practice. (e.g. BSI 15000- code of practice for service management). Together they support ISO and can enable a fast track towards ISO certification. ITIL also supports many of the TQM (Total Quality Management) approaches familiar to most business people.

Customers First!

Another aspect of ITIL that organizations find invaluable is the guidance on building customer relationships. IMT already had some relationships with key client executives. ITIL provided a structure and guidance which helped to make that more formal. As a first initiative in this area of Service Management, Director Virginia Elliott engaged Paradigm to help create the IT Service Catalogue which describes all of IT's services. After testing it with several customers and with a few minor changes, the catalogue was ready for distribution to all of the organization's managers. Over time, the service definitions will expand and become more detailed.

A strategic plan to go with the strategic framework

Regardless of how good an organization's processes are, there is always room for improvement. With the framework and customer relationships processes established, IT can focus on making improvements that are required for business and are cost justified. Business-IT alignment ensures that IT projects and service enhancements are undertaken as an organization decision. This is a key benefit of ITIL.

ITIL provides the following structure to achieve continuous quality improvements. IT's projects were structured this way:

- Where are we now - Phase 1
- Where do we want to be - Phase 2
- How will we get there - Phase 3
- How are we progressing - Phase 4

During Phase 1 the project focused on understanding and documenting all of IT's processes and determining the strength and maturity of those processes. To do this, IMT completed a Paradigm Advantage assessment.

During Phase 2 the results were analyzed and IMT agreed upon the direction and course of action. IMT developed a deeper understanding of each other's areas and collectively established priorities governing action plans.

Phase 3 focused upon creating project plans to improve process capabilities. For each process deemed to require at least some attention, a project template was drawn up and a project initiated by the responsible manager. Some of the resulting process projects involve very little effort while others are much larger in scope, but each ties back to individual manager performance and to departmental performance.

Technology change can occur quickly, however the human element must be considered most carefully when implementing change. This takes time and in fact, must be handled carefully and thoughtfully in order to be positively viewed and permanent. Thus, a good long-range plan will cover at least two and often as many as four years. This allows an orderly transition, which includes and considers staff needs, training and acceptance.

Finally, Phase 4 asks, "Are we making progress?" As part of the

plans developed by IMT, future targets are agreed for each project, thus allowing measurement of progress against the baseline established by the first assessment. A future assessment will indicate progress made. Perhaps more importantly, IMT advocates developing and enhancing customer relationships. IMT plans to rely on their customers to be the final word on positive improvements. This links very nicely back to IMT's focus of "Excelling at Customer Service."

Supporting Projects

Performance Measurements

To assist the IMT in measuring progress on an ongoing basis, the department turned to the "balanced score card" approach. Metrics for the four traditional components of the balanced score card - financial, customer, learning and growth, internal process - are being developed. These data will track a variety of indicators ranging from overtime and sick leave to staff training and network capacity. A fifth component, innovation, is thought to be particularly important in the IT environment and will be included in the balanced score card.

The database of indicators underpinning the score card is currently under development; the first quarterly indicator report will be available in 2003.

Security

RQHR/IT also launched a Security project in conjunction with the overall process review initiative. An external Security expert was selected to lead this effort and specific objectives were established. The project was synchronized with the Strategic Framework since within the framework, two of the key central, or shared, processes are Configuration Management and Security Management. This project delivered a review of the policies and updating of the policy manual. Within the health care sector, privacy of information is very important and is governed by various legislation. To support this, a Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) model was created.

Conclusion

As with most IT Organizations, RQHR IT has the task of balancing fiscal responsibility with customer wants and needs. The department has maintained a customer first focus and adopted industry accepted Best Practices in order to improve delivery capability and to continue to achieve their goals. As the projects are completed, no doubt IT and the RQHR will enjoy the benefits of implementing process improvements to meet the needs of the organization.

