Enterprise Business Systems Assessment

Summer 2011
Review Update Meeting

Meeting Format

• Introduction
• Presentation of report findings
• Observations and relation to other IT developments
• Next steps
Assignment

• In February 2011, in anticipation of the arrival of VPIT/CIO Reynolds, building upon work undertaken by the Enterprise Systems Steering Committee (ESSC), Provost Linzer and Senior VP for Business and Finance Sunshine asked that we evaluate the current delivery model of NU’s enterprise business systems
  – The scope of this review included those systems supporting student, HR, alumni/development, financial management, research, facilities, and reporting
Approach

• Our approach to this project consisted of three components:
  – An information gathering phase with the enterprise system implementers
  – A subsequent information gathering phase with the systems’ customers, users, and stakeholders, and
  – A review/analysis phase

• To gather the input that serves as the basis for this report we interviewed over 85 key NU stakeholders
Key Themes

As we reviewed the feedback gathered in our conversations, ten key themes emerged.

- Leadership
- Organization
- Strategy/Prioritization
- Project Management/Methodology
- Communication
- Data Access/Analysis/Integration
- 3rd Party Software Implementation/Integration
- Security
- Business Process/System Training
- Support/Help Desk
About Our Report

• In our detailed report, we have offered a series of observations and considerations about each of the ten themes
  – The considerations are intended to be informative in nature rather than decisive
  – Prioritization, implementation timeline, associated costs, etc. are intentionally absent from the report
• A summary of each of the ten themes follows in this presentation
Leadership

• Observations
  – Each of the enterprise systems ultimately reports through one or more VP/AVPs. These leaders have very full portfolios, of which the systems are only one component
  – ESEC’s leadership over recent top priority initiatives, including Project Café, FASIS, and Web-Based AIMS has proven effective
  – It is challenging to get traction using a “bottom up” approach, particularly if no single team is obviously tasked to take a lead role (e.g., document imaging, single sign-on)
Leadership

• Considerations
  – Clarify the assignments and expectations as it relates to the governance of the enterprise system functions
  – Declare strategic priorities, including areas where senior leadership wishes to pursue a “top down” decision
  – Include system implementers and considerations early on when planning programmatic changes
  – Evaluate the current funding model and budget planning approach for enterprise system priorities and investments
Organization

• Observations
  – The University’s enterprise system teams work in “silos,” both between (e.g., financials, student, and human resources) and within teams (e.g., functional, technical, reporting, infrastructure)
  – Often people don’t know to whom they should go with questions, nor from whom they should request support with so many groups performing systems-related functions
  – The distribution, reporting relationships, and role of business analysts are areas that should be explored further
Organization

• Considerations
  – Several considerations related to organization were offered by those interviewed. Potential models for organizing the enterprise systems:
    • A single unit with overall responsibility for all enterprise systems
    • Bringing the functional, technical, reporting, and infrastructure staffs of each enterprise system into consolidated teams
    • Establishment of a project management office (PMO) or a similar centralized project management team
Considerations (continued)

- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the individuals and groups supporting the University’s enterprise systems
- Co-locate the teams in a shared working space in close proximity to their key stakeholders
- Maintain flexibility to organize resources into project teams and other structures that support both:
  - Effective pursuit of our strategic priorities
  - Ongoing support and maintenance of our enterprise systems
Observations

- Having the ESSC looking at the “whole picture” for the University is effective for establishing expectations and priorities
  - Room for improvement, particularly on cross-system initiatives
- Need more transparency with regard to priority setting
  - There is a belief that the central administrative units are getting their needs met before those of the schools
- Need a way to get small projects completed more quickly
Strategy/Prioritization

• Considerations
  – Functionally-led governance is critical and can be strengthened in several regards:
    • Communicating themes/issues along which the enterprise system teams should prioritize their portfolios of planned projects
    • Establishing a standard project business case template, outlining investment required, benefits, risks, and audience(s)
    • Revising the charter of each advisory committee to note its linkage to the ESSC’s charter and corresponding planning calendar
    • Migrating to a longer planning horizon, particularly for large initiatives (e.g., upgrades, new system implementations)
Project Management/Methodology

• Observations
  – Each enterprise system devotes effort to projects (the capacity varies by team and by year)
    • Each team has a different methodological approach, which can create the effect of “speaking different languages”
    • Projects are increasingly cross-team in nature

• Considerations
  – Adoption of a standard project management methodology
  – Additional coordination for cross-system projects
    • A central project management office (PMO) may prove helpful in this capacity
Communication

• Observations
  – Users expressed some dissatisfaction regarding the methods used and how much notice is provided
    • System communications often are not read by the user community

• Considerations
  – Online systems and services inventory/directory
  – Annual summit for systems owners, users, and school technology staff
  – Allow individuals to set up/maintain their communication preferences
Data Access/Analysis/Integration

• Observations
  – Each system has means by which users can access its data; most have tools by which this data can be extracted for further analysis
    • All of the systems share the challenge that their users want additional capabilities in these areas
  – Broad demand for increased systems/data integration:
    • Bringing data from multiple sources together for analysis purposes
    • Interfacing data between systems so that data can support additional business processes without the need for manual duplication
• Considerations
  – This topic represents the top area in which improvements are desired, including priorities such as:
    • Establishing a shared set of strategic priorities for data access
    • Determining any requisite changes to data structures to enable increased data integration
    • Identifying (or developing via training/recruitment) the resources that will construct, implement, and support our data access tools
    • Building deep expertise within the Northwestern community to use our data access and analysis tools
    • Planning for future data access and analysis capabilities
3rd Party Software
Implementation/Integration

• Observations
  – Schools/units pursuing their own 3rd party applications at a high rate of frequency
  – Many of these 3rd party applications provide support for one or more critical areas of our student population

• Considerations
  – A strong process is needed to ensure that the solutions are selected, implemented, and supported
    • A well-known vetting process and an open forum for the relevant parties from both central offices and the school/unit seeking the new solution is of paramount importance
Security

• Observations
  – Security for each system is handled independently – separate forms, administrators, roles, data viewing privileges, etc. – adding complexity at multiple layers

• Considerations
  – Potential to simplify the process of gaining/granting access to the University’s enterprise system
    • A role-based access policy to enterprise systems, including an automated security access (and transfer/termination) process
    • A revisiting of our “row level” security practices will likely be necessary as we pursue increased data access/analysis
Business Process & System Training

• Observations
  – Each enterprise system team creates and delivers its own training offerings to its user community
    • The main suggestions for improvement voiced by users were to deepen the content and embed it into business process context

• Considerations
  – It is becoming more broadly expected that training will be available to users anytime they need it, anywhere they are
  – Users need to be taught how to use our enterprise systems in conjunction with one another, not in silos
Support/Help Desk

• Observations
  – Each of the University’s core enterprise systems has its own help desk function, sometimes more than one
    • Most were cited as very strong at answering basic inquiries, but less so at assisting users with underlying business issues

• Considerations
  – Numerous stakeholders expressed support to migrate to a single central help desk
    • Concerns about “generalists” rather than experts
    • In some cases, the best course may be to contact a central business office directly
Summary

• The following conclusions are evident from our work:
  – We have implemented market-leading applications for HR, student, finance, research, facilities and alumni/development
  – In the areas of making systems easier to use, data easier to access, and processes more efficient, there is much left to be done
  – Diverse models of organizing our teams, supporting our users, or even financing our investments have been employed
Summary

• This report strongly supports an integrated approach to our enterprise business systems
  – A similar concept is also prevalent in the initial planning work undertaken by the ESSC over the past two years
• Pursuing the considerations within this report will help the University to optimize its enterprise system functions, delivering positive outcomes for students, faculty, staff, and decision makers
Summary

• It may take several years (and perhaps investment in the short term) to realize the benefits of some of the ideas presented in this report
• Strong leadership, particularly in the prioritization and achievement of goals that are cross-system in nature, will enable the University to balance its improvement goals with available resources
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