Educause “Presidential Leadership for Information Technology” Summary

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Topics

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1. How Much Should We Spend?
2. Which Processes Should Receive I.T. Funds?
3. Which IT Capabilities Need to be Company-Wide?
4. How Good Do Our I.T. Services Need to Be?
5. What Security/Privacy Risks Should We Accept?
6. Whom Do We Blame If an I.T. Initiative Fails?
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* Educause May/June 2003 David Ward and Brian Hawkins
Introductory Points

- Information Technology is—without question—one of the limited number of internal issues that must remain on the president and provost’s agenda.
- It is essential that ALL senior management to be directly involved with IT decision making because information technology is a critical enabler of institutional strategy.
- Unfortunately, hands off executive oversight of I.T. has many ramifications – abdication of I.T. responsibilities to the technology leaders causes them to become both the strategists and ultimate target for blame and culpability for failed business processes.
- Today, I.T. is inextricably woven throughout the fabric of higher education and has assumed a strategic role in the fulfillment of the campus mission.
- The pace of change is too great and the consequences of decisions too significant to simply delegate to others such as faculty committees or the CIO – the road ahead is littered with land mines and tipping points that require the informed attention by the executive leadership. Leadership on technology issues must come from the president and the provost, with the encouragement and support of the governing board.
1. How Much Should We Spend on Information Technology (I.T.)?

- IT spending needs to be linked with institutional objectives and priorities in the strategic plan (SCSP, in our case).
- Technology costs should not be treated as a cost center becoming a source of frustration or anger for competing campus interests.
- Can not define quality solely on input measures – “output measures” more accurate.
- Executive team focusing on the strategic plan’s goals and outcomes should collectively make a decision on the amount spent on IT.
2. What Processes Should Receive I.T. Funds?

- Political allocation of some IT resources to all constituencies, satisfying everyone a little and no one completely, is understandable but not strategic.

- When making distribution decisions, it is naïve to assume that powerful new technologies can be introduced w/o making major changes in organizational conventions, processes, and structures (change management is the real issue).

- Various functional areas should not develop own IT support structures but decisions should be made in concert with strategies that are efficient, cost-effective, and consistent with campus architectures & standards (IMO strategy is great way to do this).
3. Which I.T. Capabilities Need to be University-Wide?

- Initially controversial, standardization is now accepted as an advantage for communication.
- Standardization & efficiency is most important in the network strategy.
- There is ample evidence on college campuses that standardizing on specific hardware configurations creates greater compatibility while increasing efficiency of IT service and support.
- There are certain few areas which flexibility is appropriate, i.e., research or improved student service, but it should be for a disciplinary/academic need rather than personal preference.
3. I.T. Capabilities Company-Wide (cont)

- Standards are necessary if costs are to be contained
- Decisions for exceptions to standards need to be made in the framework of entire university
4. How Good Do Our I.T. Services Need to Be?

- ALL users need and expect reliable equipment & software, regular system checks & maintenance, adequate training, and strong support

- Level needs to be determined of uninterrupted service, reliability, and backups

- Disruption to online courses are serious, but delayed emails or administrative functions are less compelling. We are not a bank.

- Decisions of service levels need to be examined in light of trade-offs between costs & goals by senior officers with trade-offs, costs, options identified by CIO

- Decisions need to fit institutional objectives and not the most vocal member of the community
5. What Security/Privacy Risks Should We Accept?

- Need to strive for sensitive balance between openness & security, access & control, and privacy & academic freedom. All are needed and critical to campus culture.

- Faculty need to be well represented for development of protocols and standards but these standards should be authorized by the administration & campus reps.

- Security in Higher Education is increasing, requiring new procedures, while growing in complexity.

- Issues relate not only to the home campus but other connected constituents.

- Ramifications could include: Computer & network attacks, exposure to student/donor credit card numbers & social security numbers.
6. Who Do You Blame If an I.T. Initiative Fails?

• Important for the President/Provost and members of executive team to understand and own IT issues

• Costs and risks are too high to safely delegate all technology–related decisions to the CIO

• Most so-called IT failures result from the organization's inability to cope with the operational and structural changes introduced by the technology

• IT will increasingly become more critical in its role in achieving institutional goals

• Functional-area managers need to “own” IT initiatives and decide whether some business practices need to reengineered along with redefining staff roles
6. Blame for I.T. Initiative Failures (cont)

• CIO is responsible for on-time and on-budget delivery of information systems

• IT is responsible for identifying pitfalls, options, and directions

• The CIO does not own the functional area business processes – but rather owns the I.T. infrastructure for running them
Conclusions

• If educational institutional leaders fail to engage in the IT decision making process, colleges will miss countless opportunities to make strategic use of technology, make unwise investments, and bleed institutional budgets.

• Low satisfaction and wasted energies result.

• The focus can not be on the technology per se, but the goals of institution and their relation to IT initiatives.

• Senior officers should not create separate IT units but work in harmony with the CIO to ensure adequate resources for their area.

• Shared ownership of IT is essential to move ahead strategically and economically.
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