Chapter XVI

Designing and Implementing an E-Government Application

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ABSTRACT

Today, citizens have grown accustomed to highly customized products and services from private sector firms. As a result, they have begun to demand that government agencies become similarly responsive as well. In order to address the ever-increasing expectations of its citizens, governments will need to become more customer-centric. Some government agencies have begun to do this through such IT-enabled initiatives as e-commerce and e-government. This chapter presents a case study of a successful IT project, MACROS, designed to help implement a new vision of business for state agencies within New York State. This new vision requires greater organizational and system transparency, and a culture of collaboration and sharing that is essential to learning how to better serve citizens. The discussion of the methodology employed in the
implementation of this e-government application and the lessons learned lends itself to both traditional and virtual educational processes.

INTRODUCTION

The statistics concerning IT project implementation are discouraging. Forty-five percent of all systems that are begun are never completed and of those that are, over 55% take twice as long to complete and cost twice as much as originally planned. While it is good to learn what not to do, it is perhaps more important to learn what should be done in order to ensure success. In this chapter we will report on a successful effort to implement systems in a governmental organization. This case is important because it discusses many ideas that are currently being taught in systems courses at universities.

This case examines the successful initiation, adoption and diffusion of IT within the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC, 2001b) of New York State that is intended to support a new vision of business for government. In particular, we focus on the Multi-purpose Access for Customer Relations and Operational Support (MACROS) project within OSC’s Division of Municipal Affairs (OSC-MA). The MACROS project reflects a unique vision of what, why and how one government agency has been able to prepare for business success in the turbulent new economy where constituents demand more responsive customization of service1 at ever-decreasing costs.

The OSC provides services to the population of New York State through a program of regulation designed to control government agencies (OSC, 2001d). Because of this role, there has been an adversarial relationship between OSC and other state agencies. In mid-1993, a new vision was established at OSC that emphasized the need for new concepts of partnership and quality management. At the heart of this new vision is the use of information technology (IT) to help facilitate the changes needed to better serve the citizens of New York State.

The MACROS project was the first effort designed to improve the quality of OSC-MA services. What used to be, up until the late ’90s, a mammoth semi-automated operating environment is now fully automated. Thanks to MACROS, municipalities can now receive, complete and file annual financial reports (AFRs) and/or annual update documents (AUDs) electronically. Today, MACROS has evolved to serve as the cornerstone of an operational enterprise network in OSC-MA that links all employees, helps OSC-MA respond to most requests for information and facilitates communication among OSC-MA’s far-flung offices and personnel. It is a highly customized adaptation of the InterTrac software suite from the vendor, ComputerWorks (2001), that is based on the Lotus Notes/Domino architecture. It employs 13 integrated databases designed to fit OSC-MA’s needs.

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