Purdue University Highlights the 'WHYS' Behind Business Policies

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ABSTRACT

In 2007, Purdue University replaced its decades-old legacy business software systems with a streamlined, integrated Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) approach. The implementation – the largest technology and business transformation in the University's history – meant the Financial and Human Resources systems would utilize a single, combined database run by modern updateable software. However, the newly integrated software system brought a complete overhaul in business processes and procedures, and consequently led to massive re-education and training of its staff. With the training entirely focused on the functional implementation, knowledge of University policies diminished.

Business Services Directors responded to its staff's newly identified needs by assigning a team of subject matter experts to design, create, and deliver a series of training sessions focused on the lifecycle of an account, from pre-award to account closings. The directors intended the series to expand staff's knowledge of Purdue University business with the emphasis on "why" these policies exist rather than "how to" implement them.

The project group spent three months planning and developing documents for the eleven-course series, which the team ultimately named "Policy Training Program for the Lifecycle of an Account – Pre-award through Closeout."

The "Lifecycle of an Account" program addressed policy issues, increased the level of online documentation and provided opportunities for discussion between all levels of staff in Business Services. When the series concluded, more than 85 Business Services staff members – including upper-level members of management – had collaborated in its preparation and delivery, and approximately 200 business staff members had completed the training.

"This project was an excellent example of Business Services coming together to develop and deliver mission essential training to our staff. Our plan is to continue this collaboration and cooperation as we move forward…." Jim Almond, Senior Vice President for Business Services and Assistant Treasurer

INTRODUCTION TO THE ORGANIZATION

Purdue University is a coeducational, state-assisted system in Indiana. Founded in 1869 and named after benefactor John Purdue, it is one of the nation's leading research institutions with a reputation for excellence and affordable education.

Purdue, one of the leading land-grant public universities in the nation, is a comprehensive educational and research institution and a member of the American Association of Universities (AAU). With a system budget in excess of $1.7 billion, Purdue University's main campus is located in West Lafayette, Indiana, with three regional campuses in Fort Wayne, Hammond, and Westville, Indiana. Located 65 miles northwest of Indianapolis and 125 miles southeast of Chicago, the greater Lafayette community of 125,000 people is known for its exceptional quality of life. The main campus offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees through its 10 colleges/schools. More than 40,000 students are currently enrolled at Purdue and are supported by 15,000 employees, including 3,000 faculty.

Within Purdue University, the Business Services areas are organized to enable, serve, and support others by providing timely and accurate information about University resources, giving clear direction, offering thoughtful guidance, and delivering quality services.

STATEMENT OF THE INITIATIVE

Business Services has a tradition of developing and delivering effective staff training on University policies and procedures. The Business Services training division had developed and presented a myriad of quality training sessions to lead the organization through its recent ERP implementation. However, Business Services Directors soon realized staff were losing sight of the "whys" behind business policies and procedures due to the focus on the "how-to's" of surviving the ERP implementation and keeping core operations functional. The Business Services Directors ascertained that staff needed to know the reasons behind University policies to increase the depth of policy knowledge regarding pre-award, account establishment and account management, information about the resources available, and a greater understanding of the risks of not following the University's policies.

The Policy Training for the Lifecycle of an Account—Pre-award through Closeout project began in the spring of 2008. Each session was designed to cover a critical piece of the lifecycle of an account and focus an understanding of why policies and procedures were in place. The project was directly related to strategies within the Business Services strategic plan, to "expand learning and professional development opportunities for Business Services staff" and to "enhance key business processes." The project also reinforced the primary goal of Business Services: "to assure financial integrity."

DESIGN

The Directors started with the appointment of a core project team and charged it with creating a charter and a training plan, followed by the facilitation, development and delivery of 11 training sessions. Business Services Directors served as sponsors for the project as well as resources for topics. The core team identified deliverables for the project as a detailed training plan and structure for training sessions, preparing and publishing training documentation, and conducting the training sessions.

The core project team was composed of a dozen administrators from many areas throughout Business Services including Business Management, Sponsored Program Services, Comptroller and Accounting Services. Each member of the core team led or co-led the development of at least one course in the program. Additional administrative staff from throughout the organization assisted the leaders in researching topics and putting together the training materials for their session following a predetermined course format. All sessions included interactive topic discussion opportunities to encourage participants to share success stories, ask questions or seek advice from presenters and other participants. Each working group identified two to three delivery resources.

One member of the core team served as committee chair and coordinated all logistics of training preparation and delivery, including scheduling, web posting of documentation, communication to the target audience, and timeline management.

All project resources were current University staff who performed their project tasks in addition to their normal duties. All sessions met on Purdue's West Lafayette campus, and required no additional equipment. Throughout the year long program, the team tested and implemented a series of University registration systems to streamline the process of managing attendance at the training sessions.

The 11 teams solicited assistance from more than 85 Business Services staff in the development and delivery of the course materials. The project team devoted more than 2,250 hours of effort. Demonstrating the commitment to the program by upper management, individuals at the Director/Assistant Director level presented a majority of the sessions.

Topics covered in the 11 training sessions include: Cost Principles for Educational Institutions, Pre-Award, Account Management-First Steps, Account Management-Day to Day Tasks, Signature Delegation, Management Reports, Cost Sharing, Account Management-

Corrections & Certifications, Pre-Auditor, Non Sponsored Program Accounts, and Account Management-Closings

IMPLEMENTATION

Project planning and preparation began in June 2008 and took approximately three months. The course topics were discussed and fine tuned, with each course focusing on a critical piece of the lifecycle of an account, after which the project teams went to work on their own developing their courses while the committee chair began securing rooms and a registration system. The committee chair also worked with Business Services communication staff to promote the upcoming courses to appropriate staff.

The timeline spread the courses over a 12 month period with one topic discussed per month. The first session was given in September 2008. Each session was delivered twice over a two week period to allow staff to coordinate schedules prior to registration for each session. All session materials were published to a Business Services Training web site and participants chose whether to print and bring their own copies of the materials to the session. Feedback was solicited after each session. The committee chair compiled feedback along with attendance records and provided a monthly status report to project sponsors and core team members.

At the end of the project, a final report was prepared by the project team and the entire effort handed over to the Business Services Training Group so it could be conducted annually.

Session participants in the first year of delivery included all levels of current Business Services employees and touched over 200 individuals. An estimated 2,900 hours of instruction were received by these participants in the first year of the program. The target audience for future sessions will include new Business Services staff and those wishing to have a refresher on specific topics.

BENEFITS

This series of training sessions resulted in the delivery of quality training material as well as staff learning more about University policies and processes. Project team members were able to enhance their own knowledge and skills during their research and preparation of materials. In addition, training resources were documented and shared online. Along with the program materials, many Business Services web sites were updated prior to session delivery. The courses provided opportunities for discussion between all levels of staff in Business Services.

The 11 courses will form the foundation for future, more detailed hands-on training to be developed and delivered over the next year. The preparation, delivery and participant interaction during the sessions has already produced a noticeable impact on Business Services staff members. The impact includes:

- Central offices and supervisors report a better quality of questions from staff after attendance at a session.
- Increased knowledge of Business Services staff on university policy and procedures.
- Increased networking and sharing through staff involvement.
- Development of staff knowledge as a result of active participation in creation and delivery of materials.
- Increased updating of resources (web and other training documentation) and identification of resources that still need to be updated.

- Identification of the need for 'hands-on' training for certain processes.
- Highlighted policy implementation issues which need clarifying.
- Highlighted disconnects between operations and policy.

Because much of the work has already been accomplished to put together the training documentation, subsequent years of training will not be as time intensive. Future session leaders will need to review the documentation and add any updated information.

RETROSPECT

In summary, most of the feedback from the sessions was very positive and indicated this was a much needed type of training. Although preparation for the training took the equivalent of one full time staff member, the core committee agrees this was a good use of resources. When asked what we could have done better, feedback from the courses identified one course (Management Reporting) that would serve its purpose better as a separate part of each session rather than being its own course. Other suggestions included different ways to set up the rooms for encouraging a more interactive environment and offering them via webcast. If funding becomes available, it would be advantageous to tape these courses for staff to view during the months they are not offered.

This project, according to Jim Almond, Senior Vice President for Business Service and Assistant Treasurer, "was an excellent example of Business Services coming together to develop and deliver mission essential training to our staff. Our plan is to continue this collaboration and cooperation as we move forward to develop the next phase of training and development opportunities."