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A Partnership Between the City of Mobile and the University of South Alabama for Implementation of Strategic Initiatives: An Innovative Just in time Method for Learning IS Development While Providing Critically Needed Service

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IS'96 defines *"Computer based information systems as complex sociotechnical entities that have taken on critical roles in local, national and global organizations. Information systems provide support for the goals of the organization and its management strategic, tactical and operational in a timely and cost effective manner .."*. and that *"organizations of the 1990's will rely heavily on information systems to improve the performance of people through the use of information technology...where the ultimate objective is performance improvement...where the focus is the people who make up the organization..."* (Couger et al 1995; Longenecker et al 1996)

We have formed a partnership between the City of Mobile and the University of South Alabama School of Computer and Information Sciences for the purpose of providing an excellent realistic learning environment for the students of the Information Systems analysis and design classes, an opportunity for knowledgeable faculty to be involved in strategic enterprise level systems development, an opportunity for the City of Mobile to receive considerable service from large student teams, and an opportunity for the citizens of Mobile to benefit from the new services developed. Two projects are under simultaneous development:

Project 1 is a complete reworking of the procurement process and involves coordination of departmental requisitioning, budget processing and checking, electronic departmental and other official approval, generation of departmental purchasing, centralized bidding and purchasing, city store maintenance, electronic receiving, vendor performance analysis, through the computer auditing, and reporting. Several hundred employees from all departments of the city are directly involved by the system. The system will process about $10,000,000 of orders, contracts, rentals and check requests on an annual basis.

Project 2 represents a new concept in providing excellence in requested services from citizens. If the citizen dials "311" an operator will interact with an expert online decision support system. The systems are designed to provide accurate information or coordinate one of several hundred city services by gathering appropriate and correct information. This information is dependant on departmentally determined problem requirements. Essentially, "311, One Call to City Hall" invokes an intelligent service request and tracking system. This enables operators to take calls and generate a problemspecific service request order which is then distributed by the city information network. This

network links over 1000 terminals (a mix of PC's and dumb terminals) to an ORACLE database server.

Project Team Composition and Management

Both of these enterprise level projects involve large horizontal teams. Each project team is structured with an executive steering as well as a process component. The steering teams are comprised of related top management of the City as well as the university projects facilitator and student project managers. The process team manager serves both as a member of the executive steering team and as a coordinator for the process team. The process team consists of departmentheadlevel users or others who can represent the departments and who have decision making capacity. In general the process team meets weekly for several hours. Regular informal reporting to the executive steering team is done continuously. Formal reporting is accomplished on a 12 month interval. Occasionally members of the executive team attend the weekly process team meetings. There are occasional briefings for the Mayor.

Meeting agenda are planned in advance by the facilitator and project managers. Frequently, members of the executive steering team are consulted to review the agenda. During process team meetings, team member ideas are collected, and all ideas are considered relevant and important. Decisions are made by consensus. No one has been forced to agree. Controversial ideas have been discussed until synergistic approaches are found. Mission statements have been developed, and goals determined. A project plan has been developed, tentative schedules set, and progress made toward effective solution to project goals.

Meeting Curriculum Requirements

Students in the systems analysis and design sequences, both graduate and undergraduate have been involved in all phases and levels of the project. All of the objectives associated with the analysis and design life cycle as described within the learning units of IS'96.7,8,&9 have been studied, andreduced to project standards. Students are responsible for being involved in development of formal written standards for all phases of the life cycle. They must commit to being involved in each major life cycle phase as appropriate to the ongoing project. They must produce deliverables according to project requirements and standards. They are responsible to the student project managers for time accounting according to the standards. Adequacy of work is determined by the written standards. Students are expected to be involved in the equivalent of 7 productive hours (minimum) per week of rigorously defined and committed time. Class time is used to coordinate student involvement and to discuss each life cycle phases. All problems are discussed during class time. Sometimes other members of the functional and/or steering team attend class discussions.

Summary and Presentation Objectives

During the workshop representatives from each level will present the project organization, activities and outcomes in detail. Our presentation team will consist of the City of Mobile top management, City and student project managers, involved IS faculty, and the principle City IS analysts. Copies of the reengineering development methodology standards developed, as well as specific project documents, will be made available to participants. Participants will have access to sufficient detail so that they will be able to reproduce the process. The team will discuss problems and issues as well as the major successes of the endeavor.

References

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This submission was reviewed and discussed by the following members of the project teams:

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