Obtaining Decision Making Data Visibility

White Paper

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INTRODUCTION

If you're involved in management or executive-level decision-making, you already know that accurate and timely information about your projects and staff is critical when making decisions. You need to be able to see and evaluate potential risks, correct processes as needed, enforce best practices, and understand customer perspectives. Ultimately, you need to be able to answer a number of questions that tend to be challenging, such as:

- Is your team or organization successfully building or supporting their objective, or "widget"?

- How will you know if you are/will be successful?

- Is your staff complying with regulations or best practices?

- Do your customers and your staff share the same opinion of the objectives, scope, and status?

- What is your financial performance (on-budget or over-budget)?

- Will you deliver the right service or capability the right way, at the right time, for the right cost?

- Is your organization repeating past mistakes?

This lack of information and visibility keeps managers and executives awake at night. To maintain some level of visibility, management employs one or more oversight activity. Examples of oversight activities include:

- Team meetings and status reporting

- Review of metrics and trends generated from management tools

- Customer satisfaction surveys

- Internal quality and process reviews

- External audits or consulting assessments

While such oversight activities do provide some insight into the status of an organization's efforts, it can still be difficult to realize significant value. People have a tendency to downplay issues when providing status until a crisis ensues. Customer satisfaction surveys do not identify problems early enough to mitigate the impact on the project or service, and sometimes do not reveal known problems at all. Internal and external audits are time-consuming, disruptive, and costly.

Additionally, the sources of information needed to support oversight efforts are disconnected and must be manually integrated and interpreted. Perhaps most significant of all, the application of such efforts can vary greatly between (or even within) organizations, making it difficult to benchmark success or apply lessons learned from others' mistakes.

Oversight Process

We use terms like assessment, audit, analysis, and oversight to describe the activities associated with reviewing our current situation, identifying problems, and developing solutions. While each of these terms can be interpreted differently based on how they are applied, they each share the following common activities:

- Discovery - collecting information (facts and opinions) relevant to the current situation.

- Analysis - applying the knowledge and experience of the management team or consultant to interpret the information and develop findings and conclusions about risks or problems and their potential causes. Note: Risks are problems that have not yet occurred.

- Recommendation – developing and documenting proposed solutions for mitigating risks, resolving problems, and preventing future problems. This is accompanied by a report communicating the risks, problems, and plans to facilitate the decision-making process.

This process is used by managers, auditors, and consultants to evaluate problems and risks; it is very labor-intensive and time-consuming. As such it can have a large dollar value associated with it. Further, it can be disruptive to the staff that are critical to the actual delivery effort. The result: the critical oversight process is not conducted on a regular basis, ensuring that most problems or risks remain unknown or unaddressed until they become a crisis - a crisis potentially consisting of cost overruns, delayed delivery timelines, lack of business continuity, and/or unexpected results.

The Automated Project Office Solution

How do we systematically gain insight about potential risks, process adherence, best practices, and customer perspectives without disrupting progress and adding cost? Computer Aid, Inc. has created Automated Project Office to streamline the discovery, analysis, and recommendation processes to meet this need.

Automated Project Office provides the ability to:

- Configure the type of project or service that is being managed along with the key performance indicators (KPIs) that are used to define objectives and measure success.

- Collect data from various sources and link the data points to the KPIs. Metrics or "hard" data (such as performance statistics or budget) can be imported from external systems. Participants and stakeholders can provide information, or "soft" data, by responding to automated surveys that collect information by date, role, or phase.

- Interpret collected data, identify risks or problems, and adjust the KPIs to highlight which indicator(s) are at risk.

- Describe the results using flexible dashboards and reports.

- Log issues and track resolutions.

Automated Project Office's ability to support the oversight process make it ideal for automating any type of audit, assessment, or oversight effort. Examples include:

- Project Office Audits

- Process Compliance

- Financial Audits

- Performance Assessments

- Customer Satisfaction Surveys

- Risk or Business Recovery Assessments

The ability to collect data from a wide variety of sources, correlate and interpret the data, and report risks and issues against key performance indicators greatly reduces the effort and cost required to oversee activities and projects. Additionally, the system's ability to collect the same information from various sources helps to identify anomalies and to overcome the tendency of people to downplay issues when reporting status.

Managers and executives can make informed decisions when they have ready access to accurate information about their projects and staff. By being able to see and evaluate potential risks, correct processes and best practices, and understand customer perspectives, they can improve the delivered products or services, mitigate business disruptions, and improve customer satisfaction - all of which ultimately leads to improved ROI and a reduction in cost overruns.