

Collaborative Tools Strategy

University of California, Berkeley

Spotlight: Business Process Analysis Skills

In the Campus Collaborative Tools Strategy for UC Berkeley, Goal 5 is to "Train our workforce to work with and support new collaborative technologies and architectures, while protecting privacy and keeping data secure."

Among the recommendations related to this goal, as described in Goal 5c, are that the campus grow skills in business process analysis and user-centered design among its workforce, in order to better support the development of online workflows that are integral to many collaborative processes. This Spotlight document provides more in-depth discussion regarding those recommendations.

Too often, in the course of our research, we heard campus members describe with frustration the processes required to complete their university business. Requirements and policies are often difficult to discern, leaving users dependent upon the prior experience of colleagues to navigate the process. Some campus business processes have also been divorced from other related processes through system design, increasing the burden on individuals to navigate and often, as well, to connect multiple procedures on their own, and rendering service providers unable to take complete responsibility for satisfying their users' needs.

Tools for designing and deploying online workflows, whether via standalone tools or embedded in other collaborative systems and tools, offer considerable potential to address this problem. Not only can online interactive workflows facilitate collaborative business processes, both in the administrative and academic realms, but they can also document those processes, making them transparent and amenable to further improvement over time.

However without experience in business process analysis and design – and a related field, user-centered design – online interactive workflows may simply encapsulate current practices, which are occasionally unnecessary or inefficient. Or worse, they may develop new processes that represent a regression from those currently in use.

Rather than focusing solely on technology, savvy CIOs have ... staffed their organizations with business-process experts to work with technologists to deliver solutions that address well-defined needs. ... IT demand organizations [also] require expert business-process analysts who have proficiency in appropriate domains and who also have a deep knowledge of the key drivers that affect designs, including security, policy, architecture, and regulatory compliance.

— Excerpts from "The evolution of the IT organization," Shel Waggener, Chief Information Officer, Berkeley Computing & Communications, Spring 2008

Moreover, business process analysis and design skills are widely needed, not just to analyze and re-engineer campus business processes, but in a broad range of work with IT providers and others: from helping the campus make choices among competing IT investment opportunities, to participating in the development of IT solutions.

Promoting business process analysis and design skills and expertise within the campus workforce involves two complementary processes: finding ways of growing the campus's skills over time, and making expertise in this area available more broadly than to just a few select campus departments. Some ways to approach this:

1. Incorporating skill and experience in business process analysis into relevant campus job standards, as well as prioritizing it in new hiring for positions incorporating those standards.
2. Providing ongoing training in these concepts and techniques to significant numbers of campus staff within relevant job roles or classifications. This training can be reinforced by incorporating it into professional development plans, and by making it a necessary prerequisite to receiving additional training in the use of campus-provided workflow tools.

An example of this type of training are the campus's recent set of Business Process Analysis Workshops, offered under the aegis of the Center for Organization and Workforce Effectiveness. These three-month workshops allow staff teams to engage in "action learning" through real work: by recommending specific improvements to actual business processes in selected campus units.

3. Allowing departments with reservoirs of expertise to contract out their staff to other departments, while also considering the feasibility of a central service to provide these skills on a recharge basis.
4. Reach out to and incorporate ongoing feedback in this area from relevant communities of practice, such as campus business officer groups, the Business Process Analysis Working Group (BPAWG), and the Information Services and Design program at the School of Information.

Business process analysis and design skills are among a key set of skills needed within a 21st Century campus workforce. With these skills, and the collective expertise built up through their application over time, it will become more feasible to transform the way the campus does business with its internal and external customers.