It is better to travel hopefully than it is to arrive: A journey in IT strategy at the University of Adelaide

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ABSTRACT

"Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."

Technology in Universities is increasingly recognised as an enabler of efficiency improvements, service excellence and a facilitator for innovation and change. At the University of Adelaide there is an accepted critical need for a comprehensive technology transformation plan that will increase its readiness and capability to prioritise technology as a vehicle for facilitating its core business. However, if transformational change in Universities is generally considered a challenging undertaking then transformational change in the IT domain in Universities must qualify as an extreme sport. This presentation in essence constitutes a half-time report.

The publication in 2008 of the University of Adelaide's Strategic Plan 2008-12 – "Building a Great Research University" generated the requirement for a comprehensive technology transformation plan to aid delivery of the Institution's objectives. This triggered a high level review of the function, structure and alignment of IT services, IT governance and IT strategic direction in the University. One of the principal outcomes of this review was the establishment in early 2009 of a new section within the Infrastructure Branch with primary responsibility for the University's IT Strategy and Architecture. This is a small group of staff with a clear and definitive business-oriented strategic and architectural focus but who also have advanced technical skills. One of the critical factors is that the group operates separately but alongside the Technology Services units in the University so as to maintain agility and avoid being drawn into operational issues. The principal responsibilities and outcomes of this group are
- To deliver a Technology Transformation Plan ensuring that IT supports and enables the strategic objectives of the University;
- To deliver an Enterprise Architecture that enables University business operations and objectives;
- The effective creation and operation of the University's new ICT governance framework, and
- To achieve a significant improvement in Partner Engagement with the University community

The last 21 months has seen the establishment of the IT Strategy and Architecture Unit and its growing relevance, influence and service to the core University business of research, learning and teaching and also its developing relationships with central Technology Services, Project Delivery and other service units across the institution. Over this period, there has been significant developments in each of the streams above with an agreed set of IT principles, an enterprise-wide accepted IT strategic plan, a functioning governance structure with enthusiastic participation from all areas of the business, a maturing Enterprise Architecture initiative that has gained positive buy in and feedback from Schools, Faculties and central divisions. The principal element to success in all aspects of this venture has been the significant improvement in engagement across the institution through a holistic, sustained and comprehensive programme of consultation, liaison and communication. Listening and understanding the needs of the business, developing appropriate strategies in conjunction with the business and regular feed back in business language rather than technical language has been a critical success factor.

The proposed presentation to CCA-Educause plans to outline the key components and decision points of the IT Strategy and Architecture journey at the University of Adelaide to date. As a "take-home" for the audience, the talk will offer suggestions of some key ingredients we feel are fundamental to success, relate some of the unexpected roadblocks, losses and wins, lessons learned and next steps.