COURT INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY OFFICERS CONSORTIUM

Juvenile Court Case Management Application Development
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Tips for Implementation

1. **Understand your courts' culture.**

2. **Programmers need to demonstrate competency in court knowledge and procedures.**

3. **Strongly consider a phased development and implementation approach.**

4. **Change will impact a multiple-year IT project.**

5. **Code reviews and walkthroughs for quality programming.**

6. **Establish the best technological team; you need more than good programmers and analysts.**

7. **Lease hardware during your early phase; purchase hardware upon going live.**

8. **Training the staff is a user group responsibility.**

9. **Establish a judges user group.**

Juvenile Court Case Management Application Development

Due to the lack of any commercial juvenile court case management application that provided the needed functions for Utah's Juvenile Courts, about six years ago an idea started moving toward reality. From this six-year saga many lessons were learned, and numerous stories and experiences can be shared.

If you find your organization is faced with one or many of the data collection, business-processing, and technology issues that Utah's Juvenile Court was addressing, then these lessons learned will bring insight and value to your organization and development process.

Tip 1: Understand your courts' culture.
In our courts, changes in processes are very methodical, standardization goes against judicial independence, every courtroom and judge is the exception, and many judges and clerks are less willing to compromise and do things differently. Hence, the fast pace of technology can seem counterproductive to the courts' culture of methodical process changes, judicial independence, and standardization of forms and processes. A major development effort will highlight the nuisances of your court's culture. Be sensitive and recognize that the excitement of new development and change may not be as acceptable in courts as it is in Information Technology.

Tip 2: Programmers need to demonstrate competency in court knowledge and procedures. When Information Technology personnel can articulate court processes using legal and court terminology, communication between Information Technology personnel and judges, clerks, and probation officers is easier, and the working relationships for

application development are ready. Encourage programmers to spend weeks performing clerks' duties, shadowing probation officers, and observing judges in court. For Information Technology personnel to *"Walk in Court Employees' Shoes"* is an effective philosophy and method to gain commitment, enhance working relationships, and build understanding.

Tip 3: Strongly consider a phased development and implementation approach. Phased development and implementation can provide the organization quicker value over time, improve the process of information gathering as you move to a new phase, and gain momentum and user support because the project has provided some immediate value.

Tip 4: Change will impact a multiple-year IT project. A multiple-year application development project will be a victim of "change." Changing requirements (court rules and/or the laws), technology, management, users, and IT personnel will impact the project. When addressing project sponsors on the successes and status of the project don't fail to articulate the negative risk that changes bring to the project and many changes are unavoidable and out of the project team's control. Requirement changes can easily be tracked and prioritized, and risks can be assessed. Staffing changes will change the dynamic of the team, but it is more difficult to assess their impact.

Tip 5: Code reviews and walkthroughs for quality programming. If you have established coding standards, code reviews and walkthroughs can ensure quality programming. In addition to promoting the same look and feel on the screens, the programming code can have the same look and feel, making enhancements and other changes easier in the future. Code reviews and walkthroughs can provide training to junior programming personnel and can be a

catalyst for project completion by encouraging code re-usability.

Tip 6: Establish the best technological team; you need more than good programmers and analysts. In addition to top-notch programmers and analysts, at the beginning of the project, an effective development team needs a project manager with large project experiences, a strong Data Base Administrator, a fund raiser for possible grant-funding sources, and management with some sense of marketing. In selecting staffing, search for staff members that have staying power and will not get discouraged easily.

Tip 7: Lease hardware during your early phases; purchase hardware upon going live. If possible, on a multiple-year development project, early acquisition of hardware should be leased rather than purchased. The nearer you acquire your hardware to production implementation, you will enhance your leverage on faster and lower, cost technology. The life of this technology will be longer and avoid upgrading the hardware infrastructure three to six months into production. Additionally, you may reduce costs by eliminating the need for maintenance on early acquisition of hardware. Once again "changes" in requirements, organization, and technology can be less of an impact if the final hardware decisions and implementation is held until going live.

Tip 8: Training the Courts' staff is a user group responsibility. Recognizing that Information Technology's personnel could provide the training on a new application to court personnel during implementation, Information Technology resources are better utilized in other capacities. Most significant, the training responsibilities provide the users more involvement and ownership to the application.
The training responsibility will be motivational for the user group to get and stay involved in the project as early as the design and development phases, where

ideas and plans on training court personnel can be generated and documented. Effective training of court personnel on the new application and environment is vital to the success of the project!

Tip 9: Establish a judges user group.
Early in the project, establish a team of judges as a "judges user group." Encourage the team of judges to convince their peers of the value of process changes, form standardization, early involvement, and ownership of the application. Don't debate or argue with individual judges on formatting or their documents' professional look and feel. Let the team of judges drive decisions and discussions that enter the judicial domain.

Summary

Five to eight years ago the lack of juvenile court case management applications, and the plethora of pitfalls within application development, the fundamental question was "to build or to buy" an application. More so today, with willing and experienced vendors and years of collective knowledge and experiences that have fostered the juvenile court disciple the application market is alive and well. Yet, the nine points in this article reminds readers and court information technologists of the people, organizational, and technology balance that must be considered for a successful application development project.

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Disclaimer: The advice and opinions represented in this bulletin are based on the experiences of the State of Utah.

The comments in this document are only offered in the spirit of sharing experiences and information to others considering the development and implementation of a similar type case management environment.