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Best Practices for Information Services

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Best Practices for Information Services: Achieving Operation Excellence

Submitted by Sara Davis
IEEE Continuing Education Stipend Award Winner
SLA, June 2009

This past June I attended the professional development course "Best Practices for Information Services: Achieving Operational Excellence" at SLA's Annual Conference. I attended as the 2009 IEEE Continuing Education Stipend Winner in the Engineering Division. My thanks to IEEE for the stipend and the opportunity to attend SLA.

So, what is a best practice? You can probably put those words into your favorite search engine and come up with a variety of various definitions. The one that was used in class was: A best practice is the best way of carrying out a function or process. (and it's always changing!... added by our instructor) Best practice is a way of putting onto paper the intangible things that you do well. Then you can proceed to improve your work processes, maximize your resources, prove value and build stronger relationships across your organization.

In class we learned about a four step process to help develop operational excellence using best practices. Step 1: assess internal needs; Step 2: understand current practices; Step 3: examine alternative practices; Step 4: model best practices.

In step 1, you identify the company's needs, your performance needs and combine them into performance objectives.

Step 2 finds you capturing the current workflow (yes, the flow chart is back) that is happening and then identify where the gaps or failure places are.

Step 3 requires you examine alternative practices, including the best practices of internal departments and external benchmarks. Step 3

will also help you not repeat mistakes that might have happened before. And allows you to check out your competition and see what they have that you might be able to adopt and use inside your own company.

Step 4 is to select the right solution(s) for your situation while creating alternate workflows, just in case something doesn't work the first time around. Here is where a flow chart becomes very handy as you put items into the chart; suddenly you discover where you might have a gap in the process. From here you choose the solution that works best for you and your company now and begin your implementation.

While the four steps we discussed in class help you develop best practices for your place of business, it is not something to be done quickly or even easily. While in class we were asked to think of some things that we could appropriate from other places that might begin to help us develop best practices for ourselves.

One of the things that I thought of was how to tap into my own company's Lessons Learned database and see if there was something that I could appropriate and modify for use in the company library. While I'm still working on getting access to that database, I did appropriate something from SLA to begin marketing the company library without causing a lot of upset to implement. I added a small phrase at the beginning of my email subject line telling employees that this email concerns the company library. That allows me to remind people that there is a library but does not require much work or money on my part. So far, the response has been good. Here's hoping my eventual dip into the company database will yield even more best practices for the library. ❖