



Chapter XXIV

MACROS: Case Study of Knowledge Sharing System Development within New York State Government Agencies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Knowledge sharing among divisions of an organization is an important yet difficult goal for any institution to achieve. This case reports on development of a system that fosters knowledge sharing across divisions and levels of government in a New York State agency. The case will focus on project management aspects, and discuss tools and models used to aid in the development and evolution of this project from an intra-division application to a more pervasive enterprise-wide system. A number of organizational and technological elements provide the impetus for growth, improvement, and success of this system. Overall, the case study provides insights and lessons learned to problems encountered in diverse and sizable organizations, such as large companies and not-for-profit organizations, as well as state and federal governments, where knowledge is distributed and sharing knowledge is critical to organizational performance.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Government agencies at all levels have come under increasing pressure to provide better services to their constituents. To deliver the same or better services at a lower cost, the roles of technology, information systems, innovation, collaborations, and knowledge management become even more critical (Dawes & Pardo, 2003; Faerman, McCaffrey, & Van Slyke, 2001; Fountain, 2001). During the last two decades, applying valuable business concepts to managing the business processes of government agencies has gained momentum and is now central to governmental agency strategic and operational practices. E-government, customer relationship management, and knowledge sharing are examples of information technology (IT) innovations in government agencies. In many public policy and social service areas, important decisions are based on information and knowledge beyond the jurisdiction of one agency or one level of government. As public programs grow in complexity and interdependency, knowledge and information sharing across the boundaries of government agencies and levels of government has become an essential element of electronic government. Sharing knowledge and information through IT provides strategic advantages for governments to reduce the cost, improve decision making, and enhance the quality of services and programs (Caffrey, 1998; Dawes, Pardo, Connelly, Green, & McInerney, 1997; Kraatz, 1998; Landsbergen & Wolken, 2001).

The focus of this case begins with the Division of Municipal Affairs (MA) of the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC), which is responsible for supervising the fiscal affairs of over 10,000 local government entities in New York State. The inception of the Multi-purpose Access for Customer Relations and Operational Support (MACROS) project can be traced back to 1997, as OSC found itself struggling with problems of locating the right information in the midst of islands of information, separated both geographically and organizationally. The services provided by OSC to local governments include auditing, training programs for local government officials, technical assistance, and local government financial information processing. The quality of services delivered relies heavily on the use of accurate and current information and knowledge about the fiscal conditions of local government. This information and knowledge is typically derived from diverse sources. For instance, when the State conducts an audit of a particular town, the audit will be more targeted if the field examiners have information about previous services offered, the type of previous policy inquiries these local government officials had made, and the technical assistance that they were given with respect to the inquiries. In addition to services provided to local government officials, MA also provides information about the financial condition of local governments in New York State to external customers such as federal agencies, legislatures, taxpayers, professional organizations, financial institutions, vendors, and citizens at large. Thus, information has always been a fundamental resource for MA's daily operations..

The strategic value of information and organizational knowledge was especially heightened when former State Comptroller H. Carl McCall¹ embarked on a new vision of *partnership* with local government officials to replace the regulation-oriented approaches such as directives, audits, and corrective action practiced in the past, to ensure the accountability of local governments. Under the new vision, MA began to embrace a service-oriented approach that would enable and encourage positive changes by providing training and services to local governments (CTG, 2001). In order to design and

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