

Chapter 6

Discovering Ways That Don't Work on the Road to Success: Strengths and Weaknesses Revealed by an Active Learning Studio Classroom Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educational technology projects undertaken by higher education institutions range in complexity, scope, and impact. The Edison project created a sophisticated studio classroom that supports active learning teaching methods for both local and distant students. The team undertaking this complex project was composed of information technology and instructional design professionals with no real background in formal project management techniques. The team soon discovered that intuition and organic processes for implementing a complex project with increasing scope

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resulted in risks and challenges that threatened the success and potential impact of the project. The project team learned valuable lessons about the need for a systematic project management process. This case shares the project details, major accomplishments, and lessons learned by the team through the Active Learning Studio classroom (Edison) project.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

If we all did the things we are really capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.....
–Thomas Edison

The Warrington College of Business Administration is one of the world's top-rated public business programs, recognized for excellence by *U.S. News and World Report*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, and *Fortune*. As part of a Research Intensive institution, Warrington is dedicated to a substantial research agenda, in addition to its teaching mission, from the undergraduate to the doctoral level. Warrington instructors work to develop future business leaders through course activities that incorporate teamwork. These curricular activities as well as co-curricular activities provide students with opportunities for development of leadership, interpersonal and total management skills. This promotes mastery of business functional areas and fosters the habits and attitudes that constitute a solid research and work ethic.

Warrington has an internal technology unit, Information Technology Support Program (ITSP), which is overseen by one of the College's associate deans. ITSP has a staff of approximately 30, and a 2012-13 operational budget of roughly \$2.1 million. ITSP and the College at large have experienced several budget reductions in recent years due to the recession. Functional teams within ITSP handle technology support, software development, and communications. The college has also recently created the Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, which is dedicated to faculty support and enhancement of quality in the college's courses and programs. The Center is an independent entity, reporting to an academic dean. ITSP and the Center work on many projects collaboratively to support the teaching mission of the college.

SETTING THE STAGE

Due to budget constraints, most college-level Information Technology (IT) groups are lacking project management specialists. These IT groups include staff with exceptional technical skills in their areas of expertise: instructional designers, Audio-

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