Information Alliance, Inc.
IT Professional Services
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Case Study

Business Process Reengineering for Efficiency Improvements

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Project Overview / Key Business Drivers

The Compliance Department at one of our Pacific Northwest clients was responsible for oversight of a critical infrastructure protection (CIP) compliance program which ensured that critical infrastructure assets were properly protected. There are multiple CIP requirements which are applicable across a broad range of asset types. Those asset types capable of complying with a requirement must do so. Those which are not technically capable may receive an exception if the asset owner submits what is known as a Technical Feasibility Exception (TFE). These exception requests are first submitted to the Compliance Department for approval, but ultimately must be approved by the Western Electric Coordinating Council (WECC). The compliance department's challenge was to redesign their process for submitting, reviewing, approving/rejecting, maintaining, and reporting on the population of TFEs for which they were responsible.

Key Considerations

There were multiple areas within the existing solution/process where improvements were desired. These included:

Usability – Ease of usability was an important consideration toward ensuring successful adoption within the department. Any redesigned solution must be intuitive and easy to use.

Alignment with WECC – TFEs had to be submitted to WECC for approval. It was important that status and submittal information on the WECC web site needed to stay in sync with the client's tracking system.

Notification Process – To ensure timely processing, the solution needed to include automated email notifications to submitters and approvers.

Improved Reporting – A key component of the solution needed to be real-time reporting, and the ability to quickly determine the quantity of outstanding TFEs, which were approved, rejected, and pending.

Adding/Removing Assets – The redesigned solution needed to deliver a more robust means of tracking assets associated with TFEs. The solution needed to provide the ability to add and remove assets as needed, and to ensure only authorized personnel had the ability to do so.

Information Alliance, Inc. Professional Services:

- Project management, including oversight of business and technical team members, team staffing, and stakeholder relationship management.
- Business analysis and process reengineering, including facilitating as-is and to-be process work sessions, documentation, and use case definition for testing.

Reengineering Approach

Information Alliance worked with primary stakeholders to help them take a fundamental look at what they were trying to accomplish, and to re-think the manner in which work should be done. Key activities included the following:

As-Is Process Modeling – The approach began with a detailed analysis of how work was currently being done. Swim lane diagrams were created, illustrating who was involved, and the steps they performed.

Review of Pain Points – Current business processes were carefully reviewed to identify non-value added steps, points where delays often occurred, and root causes for inaccurate reporting and data collection.

Workflow Automation – By implementing automated email notifications, data input validation rules, and dynamically populated drop-down lists, we were able to automate part of the business workflow, while increasing the accuracy of data inputs and outputs.

To-Be Process Design – A final step in the reengineering approach was to create a series of "to be" process flow diagrams along with a set of user interface (UI) wireframes. Once these were created, a sequence of walkthroughs were conducted for each use case to ensure the desired outcomes would be achieved.

Leveraging the Results

The reengineered solution went through rigorous system and user acceptance testing (UAT) exercises before being deployed to production. Once deployed, the solution enabled business users to leverage the following capabilities:

Creating and Cloning – Rather than using Excel spreadsheets, TFEs were created using online forms which ensured all necessary data was entered. If similar exception requests needed to be created, a new request could be created by cloning an existing form, thus saving time.

Viewing and Editing – Through an intuitive application menu, requests could be searched for, viewed, and edited, as needed. Active Directory-based security determined whether a user had edit or view-only privileges.

Reporting – The system could be quickly and easily queried to produce lists of exception requests based on a variety of search criteria, including Request Date, Approval Date, Request Status, Requirement #, and Asset Type. Results could then be exported for further analysis.

Improved Security – An important aspect of the reengineered solution was ensuring that only authorized personnel were able to perform certain types of functions with certain types of assets. In addition, super users were able to perform some application administrative functions themselves, thus reducing their reliance on IT support.

About Information Alliance, Inc.

Information Alliance, Inc. is an IT professional services firm dedicated to helping clients achieve their business goals by providing expertise in project management, business analysis, quality assurance, and data integration, with specialization in technology modernization and information delivery projects. Its depth and breadth of experience, coupled with a structured approach helps clients transform data into useful information.