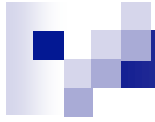




# **IT Decision-Making in Colleges within a Large University**

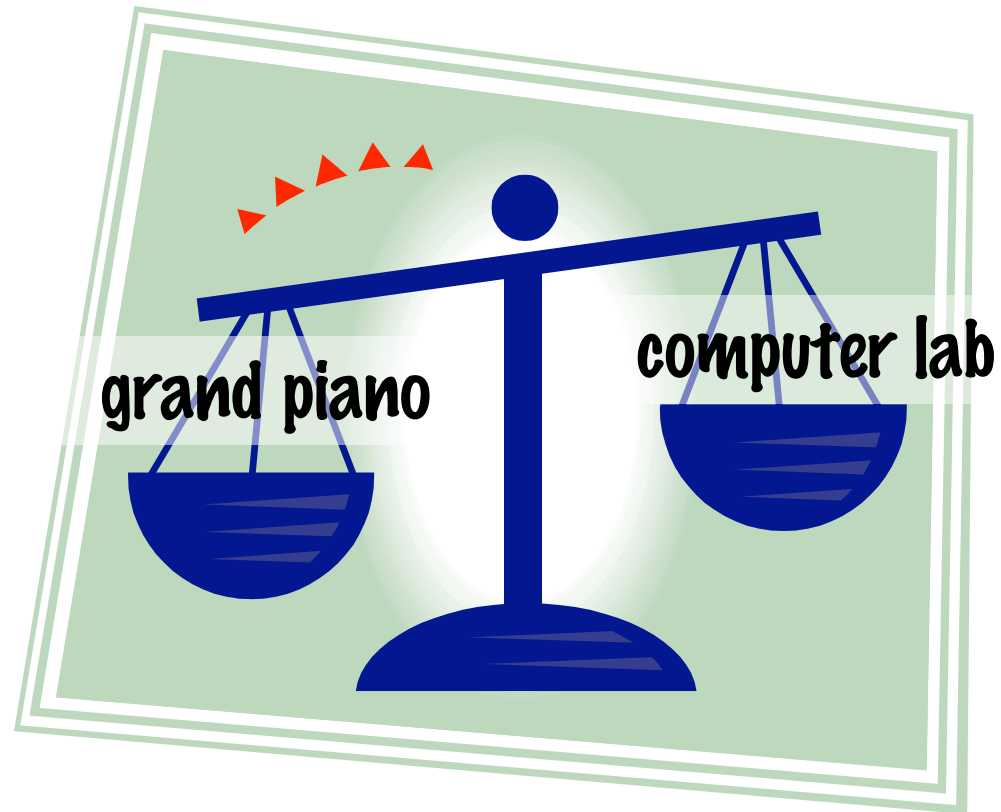
Michelle Stine

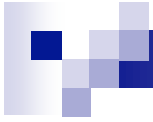
CSMS March 2005



# **Why do this study?**

- In disciplines with few sources of external funding, such as the arts, what gets funded when budgets stay flat?





- On the flip side, in colleges with resources, those who have the money often do as they wish



# **IT-Related Decisions:**

## **What is IT?**

- Users and administrators may have different definitions
  - **Do electrons flow through it?**
  - **Does the task require a computer in any way, shape or form?**




# **The Tension between “Real IT” and “Academic IT”**

- Academic IT is driven in a large part by the faculty. Top down cultures are rare in research universities. Research shows they are more prevalent in community colleges.
- New staff often experience culture shock--  
The users have administrative privileges??!?



# **IT-related decisions in colleges within a large university**

- Qualitative study with 8 participants in 8 different college IT units
- 1-1 1/2 hour interviews
- Same questions about IT Staffing, Services, College Initiatives and IT Policies were asked of all 8.

- 
- **IT Staffing:** Decisions involving the addition of staff, changing responsibilities, compensation
  - **IT Services:** Operational capabilities typically run by IT personnel. May include servers, support, training or application development
  - **College Initiatives:** Initiatives that are managerial or academic in nature and tend to drive what IT does.
  - **IT Policies:** Policies surrounding the use and configuration of IT systems/networks



## **For each decision category,**

- Who were the decision-makers?
- What was the rationale?
- How long did the decision take?
- At what level was the decision initiated?
- Is this typical of this type of decision in the college?



# College Characteristics

- Size
- Discipline
- Research Income per Full-Time Faculty Member



# **Participant Decision Justifications: Rational**

- An immediate technical problem was solved or future problem avoided
- Lower long-term costs calculated
- Leveraging existing knowledge or infrastructure
- Part of Strategic Plan
- Cost analysis mentioned or inferred



# **Participant Decision Justifications:**

## **Political**

- Based primarily on the perceptions or actions of others
- Personalities and competing agendas mentioned
- Concern for keeping the peace/maintaining relationships
- Effort to “sell” the decision
- Rank/level of influence or control of resources mentioned



# The Findings...

- 1) Participants mentioned fewer justifications for decisions about Staffing and College Initiatives and more for Services and Policies
- 2) Dean involvement typically led to fewer decision justifications (cleaner decisions)
- 3) College discipline may affect decision processes



# 1. # of Justifications: Staffing

- Staffing decisions mostly revolved around reorganizations or justifying new staff
- Majority were rational (cost savings, solving technical problems or meeting needs)
- 6 were initiated by IT (5 of these were for IT positions)
- 8 were decided by deans



# **1. # of Justifications: Initiatives**

- All 8 decisions were started at the dean or college level.
- 7 decisions were made at the dean or college level (8th was a university mandate)
- Majority were rational
- 4 of 8 participants mentioned facilities issues



# 1. # of Justifications: Services

- 6 of 8 Services decisions were initiated by IT
- 6 of 8 Services decisions were made or heavily influenced by IT
- Decisions involved wireless access, email servers, outsourcing and support



# 1. # of Justifications: Policies

- 6 of 8 Policies decisions were initiated by IT
- 6 of 8 Policies decisions were made or heavily influenced by IT
- Decisions revolved around firewall policies, service and support, and purchases.
- Services and Policies had more justifications per decision than Staffing or Initiatives



# Decision Comparisons

	Initiated by IT	Decided by IT
IT Staffing	6/8	0/8
IT Services	6/8	6/8
College Initiatives	0/8	0/8
IT Policies	6/8	6/8



# 1. Number of Justifications

- **Working Proposition:** Services and Policies decisions require more justifications than Staffing or Initiatives decisions.

Incidentally, these decisions are more often made by IT.




## **2. Dean Involvement**

- In those Services and Policies cases where the dean got directly involved, the number of reported decision justifications was also less.



# **#s of Justifications: Simple versus complex decision environments**

- 3 Strikes and Out Policy: 4
- IT Approval for Purchase Policy: 4
  
- Implementing Firewall Policies: 5, 6 and 14
- Cessation of a Service: 14

- 
- As a general rule, IT units should anticipate a more complex decision environment when the dean does not want to get directly involved.
    - **Reportedly successful IT groups showed the ability to generate political as well as rational justifications**

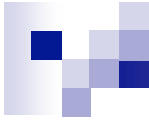


# Reported Policy Justifications by Source

	Cessation of Service	Firewall Policies
College Rational	0	0
College Political	10	3
IT Rational	3	2
IT Political	1	9

**Reported problems**

**Reported Successful**



# Reported Service Justifications by Source

	Outsourcing	Email Server
College Rational	0	0
College Political	11	2
IT Rational	1	3
IT Political	1	2

**Reported Problems**

**Reported Successful**



- Working Proposition: When the dean is not directly involved, decision justifications from IT must anticipate and match the number and complexity of justifications from the college (faculty, department heads, deans)
- All levels of IT staff should be able to articulate these reasons



### 3. College Academic Discipline

- Different disciplines encourage different types of leaders (Neumann & Boris, cited in Dill, 2000a)
- Graduate training shapes reality (Dill, 2000b)
  - **Graduate school cult-like? (Benton, 2004)**
- Differences are so great between disciplines that it makes little sense to generalize about “scholarship” and “higher education” from one discipline alone (Braxton & Hargens, 1996)



## **3. College Academic Discipline**

- Disciplines in “high-consensus” fields like Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) tend to be more effective in acquiring human and financial resources (Braxton & Hargens, 1996)



### **3. College Academic Discipline**

- There was a pattern in STEM colleges for proportionally high rational justifications for Staffing and Services, and equally high political justifications for Policies

No other factor (size or wealth) seemed to be a pattern, although STEM colleges tended to be wealthy



# What does this mean?

- IT groups need to anticipate political responses to their initiatives
- IT groups should enlist the administration whenever possible
- IT groups must vary their strategies based on the contexts of their particular colleges (deans, histories, values, people)



# Unstable environments

- All participants had units which had experienced significant organizational change within the last five years
- Decisions were often dean-driven, and deans are transitory



**The email server: Balancing  
departmental agility with  
university-wide capability**



# Good Relationships

- Participants describing good relationships between IT and the college viewed themselves as part of a community, not necessarily as part of a service unit, and certainly not as Us and Them
- They did not emphasize process and procedure when doing things, as in asking for help or privately owned machines
- How do you maintain relationships as you scale up?



## **Further Research?**

- Are these findings generalizable?
- Colleges in multiple universities
- Managerial and staff perceptions of decisions



**Questions?**



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