



Stewardship of the Information Commons: Cultural, Service, and Operational Issues

University of Michigan's IT Commons

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Macro Change Impacts Micro Environment

Should an Information Commons be seen to exist within the context of the total campus IT environment?

- Students move freely across campus...
- In & Out of the Information Commons
- Students carry the same needs & expectations wherever they go.

Duderstadt Center

(formerly known as the Media Union)



Partnership of

- Engineering IT (CAEN)
 - Art, Architecture & Engineering Library
 - Digital Media Commons
- ◆ To provide information commons services and resources and much more.

campus *IT Commons* initiative

◆ Issues:

- Centralized computing led to limited diversity.
- Distributed computing led to little or no coordination.

◆ Steward Comments:

- Central IT struggled to offer very low level services acceptable to everyone.
- Resources siloed.
- Duplication & wasted effort.
- Little communication.
- IT units not aligned with goals of the campus.
- “Lost opportunities abounded.”

IT Commons Process

◆ Challenges:

- Change culture.
- Look at University in a new way.
- Set a vision beyond the local unit.
- Build trust.

◆ Steward Comments:

- Lots of small steps.
- Commitments to each other.
- IT Commons is about critical mass not consensus.
- Close the deal!

IT Commons Results

◆ Impact:

- Created a **community** of IT leaders.
- Central IT rehabilitated.
- Local units beginning to drop some services.
- Development of a common vision.
- Hard deliverables secondary; culture of continuous change.

◆ Steward Comments:

- Conversations are now about what is best for the University.
- Central IT is now looking out for collective interests.
- Local IT people feel a growing partnership with Central IT.
- High level of trust now exists.

IT Commons Lessons Learned

- ◆ Managing IT strategically is less about the technology and more about relationships.
 - *Relationships have lasting power. Technology is always changing.*
- ◆ Adoption of “*emergence*” operational model.
 - *Change the fundamental conditions so that new opportunities will emerge. Instill a discipline of fine-tuning as you go based on experience.*

IT Commons Lessons Learned

- ◆ To re-centralize, strengthen de-centralization.
 - *Empower local units to free them to collaborate broadly across the institution.*
- ◆ Central IT needs to be the servant of the University.
 - *It will always be more challenging for Central IT because they are held to a different standard.*



IT Commons Lessons Learned

- ◆ Sometimes by doing less locally, you can do more to support the institution.
- ◆ If you don't have the right people at the table, invite them in.



Duderstadt Center Results

- ◆ Change in campus climate changed local expectations too.
- ◆ Lessons learned in the IT Commons were applied locally.
- ◆ Better communication; more & better collaborations, services for students and faculty.



Duderstadt Center Conclusion

The student IT experience can be better, more consistent and more in sync with teaching and learning if the Information Commons is viewed as part of a campus-wide collaborative IT environment.

From a student perspective, the campus is the information commons.



Resources

- ◆ **IT Commons Initiative**

- www.umich.edu/itcommons/

- ◆ **Consultants:**

- **Rick Chavez**

- www.chavezgroup.com

- **Allan Cohen**

- allan@allancohen.com

Readings

- ◆ **Peter Block**, *Stewardship: Choosing Service of Self-Interest*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1993.
- ◆ **John Hagel**, *Out of the Box...*, Harvard Business School Press, 2002.
- ◆ **John H. Holland**, *Hidden Order: How Adaptation Builds Complexity*, Addison-Wesley, 1995.
- ◆ **Michael D. McMaster**, *The Intelligence Advantage: Organizing for Complexity*, Butterworth-Heinemann, 1996.

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