The Right Blend of Administrative Management

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The right blend of administrative management is having synergies aligned while retaining individual responsibilities.

In a typical administrative office, job descriptions drive what tasks are done and who they are delegated to. The way work was inherited, and the capability of the individual responsible dictates how those tasks are performed. Administrators consequently work in silos, typically populating numerous spreadsheets of lists or reports on their individual workstations, struggling to keep information on these up to date, and even missing overlap in their own work.

A more strategic way of working is to blend these pockets of information, looking for integration wherever reasonably possible; and to make the content available on a wider scale through a networked secure local database, entrusted to the administrative team. On the surface disparate tasks, such as the examples following, have nothing in common, and in large departments are processed by several administrators: tracking security card issue; forecasting of funds committed to short-term staff; compiling meeting attendance sheets; computer allocations to postgraduates; and planned building decanting. As a starting point all have in common easily identifiable basic information (names) as well as the less obvious yet strategic information (employment end dates).

When this information is brought together within one system, the efficiency gains are significant. The flow of information between administrators becomes seamless with a higher accuracy of live data. Consistency of presentation is more professional.

The database transforms organized storage of records to an effective Information System facilitating each administrator to use the data in a wider, innovative context. As a consequence, better strategic reporting and cross checking, against more reliable data, is enabled.

Given the same information is accessible to multiple users simultaneously, with the right blend of data security and responsibility, the database effectively becomes a "one-stop shop" for the entire administration group. Shared information is practical as it allows for efficient and reliable back-up and job sharing, quicker training of new staff, and collegial learning of existing staff.

This approach enhances the blending of often under-utilised technology generally available to administrators. Not only do databases have easy tools to manipulate sets of data, but a package such as Microsoft Office has the capability to interface very readily amongst its programmes, making data speedily adaptable. For instance, storing information in MSAccess is easily accessible to create pivot tables in Excel, mail-merged documents in Word, and with one click open an email to a chosen recipient in Outlook. The days of time-consuming cutting and pasting, and sending sections of spreadsheets to each other are eliminated.

Strategic decisions for implementation include finding the right blend of inputting data generated by the administrators in-house, and interfacing data generated by external reports from organisational central databases. Linking organisational reports to the departmental database gives the administrative team the same immediate versatility as using self-generated data.

In summary, the innovation of a departmental database balancing fragmentation and togetherness to its most effective point can transform individual administrators into a well-connected, better informed and more strategically thinking team, using resources better.

This presentation will elaborate on the decision making and design process in setting up systems of this kind including some practical hurdles to overcome, and give an overview of the diverse type of office environments where these systems have been implemented.