Introducing the Court Technology Framework

Overview

The landscape of courts continues to change as outside factors evolve. One of the greatest continual changes in courts is the use and availability of technology. It is difficult to witness a court in action and not see some type of technology infused in the daily activities. Technology is everywhere.

While many of these more advanced technological capabilities have become core competencies in private business, they are new, difficult, and not easily embraced by many courts. To assist courts in controlling these new capabilities, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and the Joint Technology Committee (a joint committee of the Conference of State Court Administrators — COSCA, the Conference of Chief Justices — CCJ, and the National Association for Court Management — NACM) are developing the Court Technology Framework (CTF). The CTF seeks to promote the managerial integration and unification of court technology from the business level down to the technical level. It can help courts align their technological capabilities with their business goals and to efficiently manage court technology projects across different organizational units over time.

The CTF provides a unifying concept, common terminology and principles, common standards and formats, a normalized context for strategic planning and budget formulation, and a universal approach for resolving policy and management issues. It describes the enterprise information systems architecture and its components, including the architecture's purpose, benefits, characteristics, and structure.

Framework Objectives

As technology becomes more prevalent in court operations, it is vital to provide a framework that helps define how technology can continue to enhance a court's business. COSCA took the first step in a white paper entitled, "The Emergence of E-Everything," a vision for courts to embrace in the use of technology.[1]

The Court Technology Framework is an extension of COSCA's "*E-Everything*" vision. The CTF has four specific goals.

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[1] See the Conference of State Court Administrators position paper, *"The Emergency of E-Everything,"* December 2005 (http://cosca.ncsc.dni.us/WhitePapers/E-EverythingPositionPaperApprovedDec05.pdf).

1. The CTF seeks to promote the managerial integration and unification of court technology from the business level down to the technological level.

2. The CTF promotes alignment of IT initiatives with business goals. Understanding how technology can support a court's business is vital to the future success of courts to achieve higher levels of performance.

3. The CTF defines a standard set of components, interfaces, and dependencies that make up a comprehensive court IT environment. Implementing new technologies, keeping them up-to-date, and managing technological capabilities in an operationally competent manner requires alignment of all the court's IT capabilities, business goals, and dependencies with other justice partners, units of government, and the public.

4. The CTF helps courts more readily identify opportunities to reengineer court processes or to identify improved efficiencies and/or cost savings through the use of technology in existing processes.

Benefits to Stakeholders

Administrators and technologists jointly use technology to serve business needs. We once thought of technology as a "tool, not an end unto itself."[2] However, we must now think of technology as an instrumental component of our business strategy. To do so, all stakeholders must be involved in the development of that strategy. The CTF is one mechanism for the stakeholders to obtain an understanding of the business needs, the technology to meet those needs, and their interrelationship. The CTF provides a roadmap outlining key components of court business and technology; these must be considered to ensure efficient court operations and effective tactical and strategic planning. Among the stakeholders, the following provide an example of the benefits to them:

Court Leaders: the CTF provides a structure for court managers, that is, non technologists, to comprehend the interrelationships between technology components. This in turn should enable business and policy makers to recognize the role of technology, its importance, and its relationship to the business drivers.

Court IT Professionals: with the use of CTF, court technologists may obtain more productive communication with the non technology policy makers regarding technology. Productive and

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[2] National Association for Court Management, Core Competency Curriculum Guidelines, Information Technology Management http://www.nacmnet.org/CCCG/cccg_4_corecompetency_ITmgmt.html.

effective interaction on the role and use of technology, in tradition bound courts, will assist the policy makers in implementing technology to conduct business.
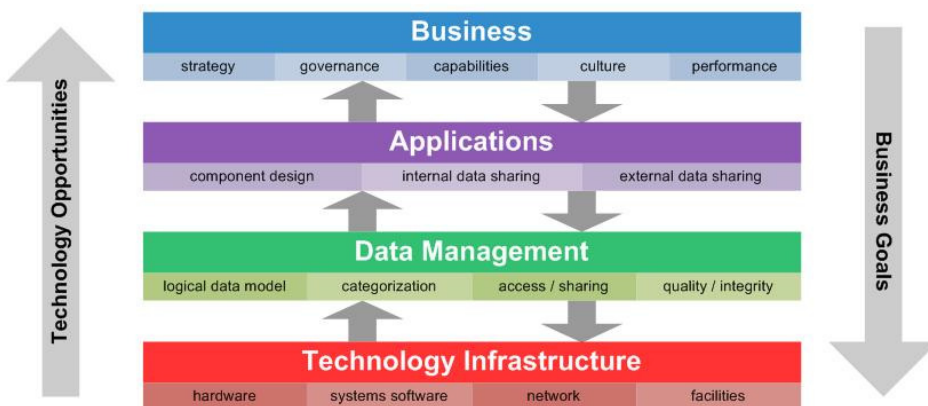
IT Vendors and Providers: benefits of the use of the CTF to IT vendors and other technology providers is similar to that experienced by court IT professionals. The use of a common picture and language surrounding technology opportunities and business goals will make interactions more effective.

Public and Court Users: users of the court system will be the ultimate beneficiaries of effective technology deployment. The layers and categories from the CTF should be invisible to court users, if constructed properly by court leaders, court technology professionals, and vendors.

Justice System Partners: in the court system, information processing and transmittal occurs with a myriad of justice system partners. These partners along with the direct court staff – whether technologist or not – must rely upon the technology to conduct increasingly complex transactions. Among the typical partners are agencies of state and local government. By using the CTF, court leaders, technologists, and partner policy makers and technologists can share a common understanding of the technology deployed, needed, and included in strategic plans.

Framework Structure

To fully understand complexities of the business and information system relationship, the CTF presents a graphic representation of these interrelationships among courts, their business process, and the information systems that support them. This graphic[3] helps to illustrate organizational and planning aspects of the court business and the many technologies and related issues that should be considered when planning for and implementing technology solutions.

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[3] Additional information on the Court Technology Framework and an in-depth explanation of the CTF graphic, including more detailed definitions of the various components of the framework, may be found on the CTF Wiki hosted and maintained by the National Center for State Courts at http://www.ncsconline.org/wikis/ctf/.

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- The CTF consists of four layers (Business, Applications, Data Management, and Technology Infrastructure).

- Each layer is further broken down into multiple categories that identify key areas of concern relating to that layer.

- The smaller gray arrows represent bi-directional interactions between layers and the provision for services supporting those interactions.

- The large gray arrow on the right side of the graphic depicts the need for business goals to drive planning and deployment of IT systems to support those goals.

- Conversely, the large gray arrow on the left side of the graphic illustrates a desire to leverage opportunities to realize efficiencies and cost savings that may not be apparent through traditional development and procurement processes.

Next Steps

This document is intended to introduce the court business community to the Court Technology Framework. It is our hope that the framework will serve to guide courts in aligning technology capability with business goals and help them to manage technology projects better over time. A series of tools are being developed to help courts utilize the CTF. For now, we must take a good first step by creating an introduction to the CTF that people understand and in which people find conceptual value. To that purpose, the CTF Working Group will be seeking feedback on this introductory document by sharing it with various organizations in the court community. We welcome comment and suggestions so that we can improve the document in future iterations which should include versions of the tools referenced herein.