

ONTARIO INTEGRATED JUSTICE PROJECT:
JUDICIAL SNAPSHOT
WINDSOR, ONTARIO, CANADA

National Center for State Courts
Institute for Court Management
Williamsburg, Virginia, U.S.A.

Court Executive Development Program
Phase 111 Project
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The Honourable Mr. Justice Harry Momotiuk
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Ontario Court of Justice
Windsor, Ontario, Canada

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To judges working through their case flow, a certain paradigm begins to take hold. The concept is simple. Information is processed through a system in the form of pleadings and evidence. Before a trial occurs, various events take place, such as disclosure and pre-trials. After the trial, we have rulings, judgments, exhibits and data of all kinds for reports. The system processes court-related information into a structure which can be as varied as the number of courts. The question is can all this information be managed more efficiently?

The Ontario government has addressed this issue, among a number of others, by embarking on an Integrated Justice Project. The strategy includes a public-private partnership with industry members. It is a technology-oriented justice strategy to deal with the judicial and government participants related operations. The rapid expansion of technology used by court administration, the judiciary, the prosecution, probation offices, police and so on have created individual entities which are unable to share common data. If available, the reliable information would lead to more accurate decisions and record keeping. The inability to integrate a system of information affects participants operations and ultimately the public confidence in our system of justice. Integration is impossible on a province-wide basis without the new tools of information technology.

Ontario has taken a province-wide approach. It wants to connect all the participants. This is a daunting task, considering the many jurisdictions that have attempted to connect the participants within a city or a few counties and have failed. Cost and time are the usual culprits. Throughout the United States various integration systems are working at different capacities. This paper is an attempt to study and compare the issues involved in the development of such a project and then describe what is happening

in the Province of Ontario and the City of Windsor in particular.

This paper describes the approach to sharing responsibility and ultimately, that each party has a financial interest to ensure the project's success. The challenge is first to create the templates and models to attempt actual court scenarios. The test sites in Ontario were broken down to deal with civil case management in Windsor, criminal matters in London and family matters in Hamilton. Each city has experienced representatives who map the mass of activities staff perform. Only then, where necessary, can the software be written and mock motions attempted. The judicial involvement in the design and implementation was crucial because of the consequences that flow from the transfer of information. The coordination and collaboration with the other participants becomes enormous.

The paper concludes that the expertise and the contributions by the testers and creators can implement the integrated justice system within a reasonable time. The more difficult problem will be in obtaining the critical acceptance by the staff and the judges in the courtroom. Training and orientation will be extensive. As I have concluded, the old cliché "work smarter not harder" may have outlived its usefulness.

Today, to "work smarter" may mean that one has to "work harder".

If so, the benefits anticipated may depend on the success of the training and acceptance of the program by those who are charged with the responsibility of using it.

The implementation of the program will undoubtedly create personnel problems. On the other hand, it provides a great opportunity to develop new and unique skills to increase the calibre of the employee and the value of the position. As the interfaces become more user friendly, employees will find the process required to be learned easier. This may take some time to absorb in order to avoid the stress, disorientation and dysfunction within the court process.

To make a significant contribution lasting, a new breed of leadership will evolve. The testers of today are the pioneers of this modified implementation of technology.

With the design of new processes, the challenge will be in the continued improvement of the electronic computer technology. The project does recognize the interests of government, its employees and the public interest within the justice system that we are entrusted to uphold. Access to justice at a reasonable cost will be the ultimate test of its success.

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