

SEPTEMBER 2020

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These are disruptive times and the volume of information coming in is steadily increasing while budget constraints are forcing cost saving measures. Once again, public safety professionals are being asked to “do more with less.” All the leading indicators across the nation are pointing toward a shrinking public safety budget. Agency leaders are going to be faced with tough choices and there is no easy solution. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Knowing what is on the horizon gives us the ability to prepare.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

“If you always do what you’ve always done, then you will always get what you’ve always got”
Albert Einstein/Henry Ford

Technology enables working smarter, not harder. But so does good business process. You likely have heard about digital transformation and there are all kinds of fancy definitions of what it is. We like to keep it simple. As it relates to records operations, it is positioning your agency to operate in a digital environment, wherein not only are your records electronic, but so too are all the touchpoints of information. It is managing agency information from start to finish electronically; enabling the public to contact you electronically; sending and receiving records electronically; signing records electronically; maximizing the use of the information in your records, electronically.

This may seem like a monumental task but in the face of budget and personnel cuts, it is an avenue for achieving significant savings. Many of our clients have already faced layoffs. Savings can be achieved in non-traditional ways. A digital transformation cost benefit analysis may reveal a return on investment when you calculate how much personnel time, supplies and fees associated with unnecessary records storage services are costing the agency.

When tackling a project such as this, think of it in terms of a marathon instead of a sprint. True digital transformation involves the organization moving to a digital mindset. This means everything and everyone is involved in the process and everyone contributes to managing agency information more efficiently.

PREPARE FOR ACTION

What areas in your process are redundant? What steps are repetitive or, could be done away with altogether. Why print out a Word document for filling in with a pen? Why scan those records when they should be saved as an electronic record in the first place?

Inventory each and every workflow and identify those which could be eliminated or converted to a digital process. And as I've said too many times...stop printing reports to create case files.

Keep in mind that digitization is a moving target. New and innovative technologies are continually being developed, refined and improved upon. This isn't a one-time fix, but rather a mindset of constant process improvement.

Once you've defined the process, targeted chokepoints and identified areas to increase efficiency, you can start to develop an overall transformation strategy.

IMPLEMENT IT

Making a change for the sake of efficiency is good, but it is not enough. We need to include decision makers and key stakeholders and let them know why this is important to them as well. This is easier said than done. If you were the chief decision maker, it would be easy. If you're not that person, then here is a starting point. It's a matter of buy-in and demonstrating benefit.

This is your answer to the *why should we do this* question. Other than the obvious, you can demonstrate a better approach to information management and the tangible savings and future savings that could be achieved. If inaccurate, untimely, or inaccessible records and data is standard fare, this is an indication of a disease. These are symptoms of a greater failure yet sometimes, change comes from within. If a government agency is not able to manage its own information effectively, how can it expect to manage everything else that relies on it?

People often ask in our training, "how do I convince the bosses that this is important". I can't answer that question; but you can. If you own the operation and invest in its future the answer will become quite apparent. Take a look around. Take stock of how things are being done today. It's 2020. If your department hasn't changed, it's time.

About Us

PRI is a highly specialized consulting firm that provides criminal justice agencies records management, IT and crime data consulting, training and project management services. With core competencies in public records, UCR/NIBRS, CJIS, CAD/RMS/JMS/CMS and records operations, PRI is transforming criminal justice information management in America.

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