



CASE STUDY

Ohio Automates Controlling Board Approval System

Process Accelerated by Weeks with Online Application Powered by Captaris Workflow

Industry	Government procurement
Challenge	Projects delayed due to time-consuming, paper-intensive methods; difficult public access to information
Solution	e-Controlling Board powered by Captaris Workflow; part of Ohio Administrative Knowledge System initiative
Integration	Oracle/PeopleSoft OAKS ERP system; Microsoft .NET, SQL Server
Results	Reduced the submission and review process from months to weeks or days; allows public transparency

BACKGROUND

In early 2004, Ohio's Governor Bob Taft decided to go forward with plans for the Ohio Administrative Knowledge System (OAKS, www.oaks.ohio.gov/oaks), an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system designed to improve the efficiency of state government and planned for full implementation in 2007. OAKS is expected to improve customer service and save taxpayers more than \$93 million in its first five years. It will replace legacy systems for financials, capital improvements, asset management, human resources and procurement since they are outdated and not integrated or centrally managed.

The first OAKS-related improvement project involves the Office of Budget and Management Controlling Board and more than 170 state agencies, boards, commissions, colleges and universities. The Controlling Board, made up of six legislators and a board president, meets semimonthly to review 140 to 200 goods or services expenditure requests from state agencies and state-funded educational institutions.

THE CHALLENGE

For its first OAKS-related project, managers targeted inefficient business processes within the expenditure request, review and approval process that lead to procurement of goods and services. "As we looked at requirements for ERP, it became evident that the Controlling Board's process for expenditure of funds was not standardized across the state," said David White, OAKS executive program manager. The Board needed a more efficient method to review and approve submissions. Agencies needed customized and simplified processes for expenditure proposals that did not involve stacks of paper, months of preparation, confusing and inefficient approval paths and redundant maintenance of independent databases that were disconnected from the mainframe-based Central Accounting System.

Almost 1,000 employees at state agencies, boards, commissions and institutions of higher education are familiar with the old time- and paper-intensive process for expenditure requests. "When agencies were ready to submit requests to the Board, they made 12 hard copies of a submission along with 12 copies of any supporting documentation," White said. Many submissions were first routed for approval to agency managers, such as CFOs, and then to intermediary groups before arriving at the Controlling Board for review. "It was not only time-intensive, it didn't allow for collaboration

to share edits and status," White explained. Staff at various levels could not always confirm the status of a request or whether they had the latest version. They were diverted from other critical tasks to perform clerical busywork, a costly endeavor whenever high-level executives are mired in administrative details. Also, without strict version control, the staff could duplicate efforts already completed by other employees.

Furthermore, changes or mistakes required reprinting and resubmission and necessitated lengthy planning by the agencies. "The standard schedule requires that Controlling Board requests must be submitted two weeks before a meeting," White said. To complete the request and handle all reviews and corrections, agencies had to build a month or two into the whole submission process, requiring more administrative attention from agencies and adding time to the procurement cycles. "And that's for a single request. Agencies often send several for one meeting," he added.

Once requests were submitted, they could spend weeks within the Controlling Board office being compiled and reviewed, according to White. Overall, this time-intensive process could conceivably result in delays affecting the public, such as stalled construction projects for a university.

THE SOLUTION

The e-Controlling Board application, powered by Captaris Workflow, was the first OAKS-related process improvement to be implemented. The application features built-in intelligence, automatic routing and other Web-based capabilities that make it easier for agencies to submit requests and for the Board to review them in a timely manner. "We wanted to utilize workflow as a toolset for the e-Controlling Board because we know workflow is integral to ERP and is a recognized best practice for effective task management," White said.

Agencies now log in to the e-Controlling Board Web site, www.ecb.ohio.gov, to create new requests or select other functions. Thanks to built-in intelligence, users only see instructions appropriate to the type of request being created. The application simplifies and accelerates request writing by automatically inferring or completing codes for data such as vendors and line items.

"We developed workflow models that reflect each organization's review and approval process," White said. All users can now be certain they are reviewing the latest information and are not duplicating efforts. For example, after an end user from a university initiates a request, Captaris Workflow automatically delivers the submission and attached supporting documentation to a supervisor for review and sign-off. When the supervisor approves it online and clicks "submit," the file is electronically delivered to the state's Board of Regents for review. University personnel can check the status through view-only access, but the application prevents them from making changes. The same is true when intermediary groups send the information on to the Controlling Board. This automated routing function and other workflow features accelerate the completion of projects. Captaris Workflow also enables business process efficiencies that support quality control and compliance with state requirements.

Captaris Workflow enables automated, simultaneous routing for approval. Instead of receiving piles of paper to be routed incrementally over weeks, budget, debt and accounting analysts all receive electronic requests for concurrent review within days. With final approvals coming from the Controlling Board president, the click of a single button in the application automatically builds the agenda for a Controlling Board meeting.

"Any type of workflow application must be flexible and rules-based. That's one of the nice things about Captaris Workflow," White said. He speaks from a well-studied position. The team spoke with analyst firm Gartner Group for advice on business process solutions and conducted a technology search before selecting Captaris Workflow. "We wanted to find the best tool that would fit well with our infrastructure decisions, such as .NET. We did the research and found Captaris Workflow," White said. "It will interface well with our PeopleSoft ERP OAKS system. It works well within Microsoft, and Captaris is a Microsoft Certified Partner. Captaris Workflow has proven to be a good fit for the overall solution."

THE RESULTS

"So much to discover!" Ohio's state motto rings true with the OAKS managers who are discovering the benefits of Workflow. "We really haven't seen the true impact (of Captaris Workflow) yet, but I anticipate it will be an overwhelming success," White said. "It's going to result in immediate benefits to the state in reducing paper and streamlining what used to be a time-intensive and highly manual process." Instead of clerical busywork, employees will focus on main responsibilities within their agency departments. Agencies will avoid redundant data entry and maintenance and other inefficiencies by using the Captaris Workflow toolset that will integrate well with a scalable, centrally managed OAKS system.

- **Impressive Return On Investment (ROI)** Workflow is part of the overall OAKS effort that is predicted to provide an impressive ROI. According to its Web site, the cost of the OAKS ERP system, to be financed over 10 years, is estimated at \$158 million. "However, once fully implemented, the system is expected to save the state \$251 million over the first five years," said White, who added that a survey administered to state agencies suggested the state could save up to an additional \$195 million in maintenance and replacement costs by retiring the current, redundant systems.
- **Faster Turnaround** Captaris Workflow helps the agencies and the Controlling Board complete submissions within a couple of weeks or even days instead of up to two months. Also, agencies can duplicate any request in a few seconds, then modify it and route it for approval which can save the several days it used to take to prepare new requests. The time saved translates directly to faster procurement of goods and services by the agencies and educational institutions, ultimately benefiting the taxpayers.
- **Electronic Advantages** Version control and automated routing have streamlined and accelerated review and approval processes. The Controlling Board office will realize substantial cost-savings by eliminating the handling and mailing expenses associated with up to 2,400 pages per month previously received. Electronic immediacy and portability also lead to further benefits, White said. "These submissions involve requests to spend taxpayer dollars. That garners a lot of public attention." In the past, media outlets had to travel to the Controlling Board office and wait for someone to make physical copies of massive documents. Now, reporters or members of the public can access this information online at any time. "It saves personnel dollars by reducing the amount of time we spend fulfilling information requests," White said. And, it helps Ohio comply with Sunshine Law requirements calling for state business to be conducted in a manner open to public scrutiny. As a result, taxpayers see where their dollars are going, which encourages trust and support for state government.

White concluded, "I look forward to phase two: taking Captaris Workflow and the e-Controlling Board application to the next level, allowing the Board to facilitate meetings." He mentioned laptops, approvals posted to the Internet and automated posting to accounting. Data could be entered error-free and immediately, rather than taking a couple days. Also, the system can reduce the need for high-level participants such as university vice-presidents to travel to Controlling Board meetings at the state capital. Captaris Workflow could also provide an automated advance notice from the Board to agencies when their proposals are ready for review. "Captaris Workflow will absolutely support us in the future," White said. And the OAKS team will go on discovering.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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