U.S. Army Information Systems Engineering Command Seeks a system to support its transformation

During Operation Iraqi Freedom, there was a pressing need to establish and upgrade fixed communications facilities in the country. The Central Iraq Microwave System was the result which extended critical terrestrial broadband microwave connectivity out to five remote locations in the greater Baghdad area. This is an example of the many types of work performed by the US Army’s Information Systems Engineering Command (ISEC).

With its motto of “Excellence in Engineering”, ISEC is a vital but somewhat “under the radar” part of the US Army. If there is a system that does some type of communication in the Army, from satellite systems to email systems to data centers, ISEC has probably touched it in some way. For example, ISEC is heavily involved in communication systems related to the Army’s base relocation projects. Its activities include designing, building, and installing systems, performing quality assurance / quality control of communication systems, completing information security audits and assessments, and a number of other activities.

Situation

ISEC has an interesting paradigm for a government agency. They have to compete with other government organizations and contractors for work. This was not always the case. Prior to 1996, ISEC was like many other government agencies: they were core funded, meaning their funding came from the US Army’s budget, and they performed work for other US Army commands and installations at no cost. In fact, other Army commands were required to use their services. That all changed in 1996 when their status went to reimbursable. That means that all of their project work had to be paid for by the client, and other commands could go elsewhere to procure the same services. ISEC had to compete.

This had a significant effect and resulted in changes in how ISEC conducted business. They had to change their view about project management in general and get serious about managing project schedules and metrics. Their agreements and relationships with their customers changed. ISEC now had to go into detail with how much a project would cost, who would work on it, and what the deliverables would be. They had to generate proposals to win the customer’s business. They had to operate much like a government contractor while at the same time be governed as a government agency. Keith Moore, a Senior Engineer with the Office of the Technical Director at ISEC states, “It has been a growth process to quantify our efforts.”

Another challenge for ISEC was how it managed matrix support. ISEC is organized into seven directorates. It has been a work in process to manage how resources from one directorate support projects in other directorates, how that work is charged to the customer properly, and how to do it without overburdening their resources.

It hasn’t been easy, but ISEC has made a lot of progress. While there is still improvement to be made, with its strides in its project management processes and tools, along with its advantages of being a government agency, they provide a compelling business case to their customers. “Being a government agency, ISEC has the inside road to get things done, including clearances and processes, plus the wealth of experience of doing these things in a government setting,” according to Moore.

Solution

About four years ago, ISEC recognized the need for a project management software system to supplement its efforts in project management. It was revising its centralized tools for the command and project information was scattered throughout the organization. ISEC went on a search for a project management software system to supplement its efforts in project management. They evaluated many different possibilities. As with many organizations, ISEC needed to work with a
limited budget, but it also did not want or need a system that was overly complex. Many of the systems they looked at were simply too costly. There was a high initial expenditure along with high ongoing maintenance costs. In addition, they were simply much more complicated than what ISEC needed.

ISEC eventually decided on EnterPlicity for its project management software system. It chose EnterPlicity because of its affordability and simplicity compared to other systems. That is not to say that EnterPlicity did not have to meet certain requirements. ISEC went through a requirements process and measured EnterPlicity against that process. It found EnterPlicity to provide the functionality and flexibility to meet those requirements, but without being overly complex like some of the other systems. “Simplicity was definitely a factor in choosing EnterPlicity,” says Moore. “We use EnterPlicity for time logging, project scoping, project planning, and project tracking.”

Benefits

ISEC has approximately 600 government employees on the system logging their time against projects. It also has approximately 600 contractors, although only a small percentage of them are currently required to use the system. Not only does this provide visibility into things like where time is being spent and resource costs, it also provides key metrics that the command needs.

The EnterPlicity implementation was fairly straightforward in terms of getting the system loaded and configured properly; although, there was an Army accreditation process that EnterPlicity had to go through to be granted a network connection. The result of passing the stringent network and security tests resulted in a Certificate of Networthiness for EnterPlicity.

As with many organizations, especially government, it took a while longer to change the organization to properly use the new tool. ISEC managed their own training, and Moore said that a lesson learned for them was to do a better job of defining the training program, staffing it properly, and carrying it through to completion. While it got a good start, it did not continually carry on as it should have long-term. That would have sped up the process, according to Moore.

The result of all of this effort was that ISEC now has a system to track and manage their project plans and time logging.

Approximately one year ago, ISEC had another need. It needed to move off of a custom project proposal generation system that generated “workplans”. Workplans are a key document for ISEC. They are somewhat like a scope of work and project charter wrapped into one. They define the relationship between ISEC and its clients, and they are what ISEC uses to compete for projects.

ISEC found its solution in an existing system, EnterPlicity. Because of EnterPlicity’s flexible architecture, it was able to duplicate and improve its workplan process in EnterPlicity through EnterPlicity’s custom data capability, custom reporting, resource cost calculations, and Microsoft Word template abilities. As of the summer of 2010, ISEC now generates all of its workplans out of EnterPlicity.

EnterPlicity is not the only strategic information tool in ISEC’s arsenal. ISEC also has an extensive Sharepoint system. It uses Sharepoint primarily for document sharing and news items now, but its goal is to expand that into a strategic portal, including taking advantage of integrations with other systems, such as EnterPlicity and the project data stored there.

While ISEC has many areas to continually improve, its efforts have transformed ISEC into a more efficient organization. It can compete effectively for information systems engineering work. It performs its mission better, and serves a vital role in the communications capabilities of the United States’ military branches.
About EnterPlicity

EnterPlicity is a project information software system that combines project management tools, SharePoint-like information sharing, process automation, & reporting into a single, easy to implement package for mid-market companies to work better. You can learn more by visiting our website at http://www.teaminteractions.com.