ISD DIGITIZATION STRATEGY

Abstract

Digitalization offers opportunities to improve business outcomes for County business operations, and entail risks which must be managed in collaboration with ISD customer departments. A multi-pronged approach including staff training and partnering with our customers to establish a decision framework will enable ISD to add value to County decisions on the use of digital technologies.

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Executive Summary

Digitization is much more than just scanning paper documents and storing them electronically. Digitization is a transformative process that all county departments and the public can benefit from. Anchored in three strategic pillars (Resilient Infrastructure, Climate Action and Resiliency and Operational Excellence) digitization will begin to educate and empower staff to innovate their services. But without a comprehensive digital strategy which considers staffing, financial planning, governance and other organizational impacts, there may be a disparity in adoption. Digitization needs to be an operational imperative to position the county for the future.

Definitions

Many terms are widely overused and misconstrued in their usage within the IT industry therefore it is important to provide context to definitions as they will be used in this document.

Digitizing	A coherent set of standardized business processes intended to ensure quality and predictability of core business operations.
Digitization	Enhance service delivery through the implementation of technology solutions that reduce paper creation and provide improved business processes by converting information into a digital format.
Digital Offering	A unique solution developed for a business customer based on their expressed priorities.
Data Classification	Data classification is the process of organizing information assets using an agreed-upon categorization, taxonomy, or ontology. The result is typically a large repository of metadata useful for making further decisions, or the application of a "tag" to an object. This tag facilitates the use and governance of the data, including the application of controls during its life cycle.
Data Categorization	Data categorization is the process of organizing information assets that are similar to each other. The difference is that these assets referred to in the data categorization are not required to be mutually exclusive, whereas they are in data classification.
eForm	Electronic form, replacing paper-based processes. May incorporate workflow routing and electronic signature.
Electronic Signature	An electronic signature is defined by these attributes: 1.The electronic signature is unique to the person using it. 2. The electronic signature is capable of verification. 3. The electronic signature is under the sole control of the person using it. 4. The electronic signature is linked to the data in such a manner that if the data is changed after the electronic signature is affixed, the electronic signature is invalidated.

Background

Since late 2019, Sonoma County leaders have been developing their 5-year strategic plan. In late February 2021, the Board of Supervisors adopted it formally. As part of the planning phase, the County has engaged our county supervisors, department leadership, employees, and community members to provide input that will shape our priorities over the coming years. Certainly, the devastation from multiple wildfires combined with the Covid pandemic have dramatically altered the way we live, work, and engage. Many of the priorities that represent the pillars of the strategic plan reflect the impacts of these events and the urgency to address these changing needs.

Digitization will play a pivotal role in supporting the County's strategic objectives in numerous areas. Reducing the need for the creation and storage of paper files will lower the county's carbon footprint and assist in attaining the objective related to Climate Action and Resiliency. Implementing eForms and digital workflows will help transform traditional paper-based service delivery with streamlined mobile-ready solutions benefiting both county staff and the public. Conversion of paper to digital documents will allow both county staff and the public to reduce travel to county offices and safeguard the preservation of information assets. Having a digitization strategy will help provide guidance and direction for departments in the achieving organizational excellence.

Outcomes

To support the County goals around Resilient Infrastructure, Climate Action and Operational Excellence emphasis will need to be placed on the following:

- Identifying and implementing cloud-based collaboration tools to further support engagement with the public as well as staff teleworking (M365, Sharepoint Online)
- Helping our business partners leverage new technologies and capabilities allowing them to work in more effective and innovative ways (Adobe Sign/M365 Teams)
- Enabling access to information, and documents for remote workers and our citizens (digitizing paper documents)
- Leveraging automation for increased efficiency and reliability (data capture technologies)
- Guiding departments on their transition from paper documents to digital (digitization roadmaps)
- Identifying and implementing digital technologies to replace paper-based processes (digital workflows)

Digitization is a collection of transformational tools that will play a key role in helping the organization to meet these objectives. Ensuring that ISD has the infrastructure and supporting product knowledge in place to become a resource hub for customers interested in starting digital initiatives or expand existing services is instrumental for the success of this enterprise initiative. Much progress has already been made as a large majority of departments already utilize either the county's document management system (OnBase) or SharePoint. Both environments offer sophisticated cataloging and searching tools, that can transition difficult to find files to readily accessible. Expanding adoption onto these existing platforms will continue to be a focal point of ISD efforts.

Benefits

Digitization has come to the forefront because of COVID restrictions, necessitating telework and remote access to services. Organizations must have a digitization strategy that lays a foundation and provides a roadmap for reducing reliance on paper and embracing automation. The value in having a formalized digitization strategy are many:

- Helps to align and prioritize the selection of automation products with the County and IT strategic goals.

- Positions project participants towards more customer-centric service delivery.

- Establishes criteria to shape eform solutions based on the complexity of the workloads improving service delivery.

- Reduces reliance on physical record storage and the limitation of access.

Risks and Challenges

Digitization tools and offerings come in many forms and can be implemented in a variety of ways. Consequently, if we want to ensure consistency and achieve the value invested in the services, we need to consider and find ways to mitigate the following risks and challenges:

- Competing technology initiatives within departments may delay potential improvement opportunities.

- Department staff resources may be limited or diverted from the project.

- In today's tight labor market, it has been difficult to obtain skilled technology staff which could impact ISD's ability to meet strategy objectives.

- Pricing of services associated with physical paper processing to digital may prove challenging to departments.

- The adoption of digitization initiatives may be too disruptive to how people currently work.

- Departments with interdependencies to external agencies may be limited in the level of innovation and may be relegated to paper to digital conversion of existing physical files.

- Digital offerings will change over time with increased adoption and customer participation defining what has value. As departments mature in their use of the technology, digital governance will help reshape the pace and direction of ISD resources in addressing the county's goals.

Certainly, there are challenges of adopting digital workflow technologies.   However, if we continue to follow our current trajectory and rely on our existing technologies and methods of service delivery we risk remaining in a paper-based posture which will not serve our customers to the fullest. Risks of not adopting enterprise digitization technologies:

- Vendors are adding new eForm or document management functionality to their unique line of business applications. This often results in siloed data storage complicating disaster recovery efforts or digital tools which may not integrate with enterprise tools supported by ISD. .

- Customers need assistance from digitization subject matter experts in understanding the capabilities and limitations of the digital tools in the marketplace. Departments do not always have the expertise to implement technical aspects of a digital solution which could raise the risk to County around security, access, and service delivery.

Service Strategy

Expanding existing services and/or bringing new services online requires thoughtful consideration and planning around the service components and associated organizational impacts. Failure to do so would likely result in the inability to sustain the service due to bottlenecks in service delivery, instability of the products due to lack of experience or staffing, and overall poor adoption. To successfully introduce new services , consideration will need to be given to the following:

- Identifying the **digital portfolio**
- Defining the pathway to helping departments transition from current state to their desired outcome or **target state**
- Establishing **defining principles** that set the foundation for departments to be successful in achieving these goals
- Creating a **governance structure**
- Measuring outcomes against **key performance metrics**
- Assessing the **organizational impacts** to both ISD and the departments as it relates to funding, training and staffing resources all of which are necessary components of any successful strategy or program
- Beginning c**ommunications** c**ampaign**

Digital Portfolio

ISD will need to develop a portfolio of digital offerings that can address the varying levels of sophistication needed in solution delivery. These offerings are composed of infrastructure components such as electronic forms (Adobe Sign/SimpliGov) or mobile applications (OnBase/SharePoint); types of business processes automation (M365/PowerBI/Robotic Process Automation/Adobe Sign); information delivery (OnBase/M365/SharePoint) or data collection (Intelligent Form Capture).

ISD has already launched several initiatives related to digitization and digital workflows. Departments have been utilizing the county's enterprise document management platform (OnBase) in varying levels of automation. The value of document management needs to be extended to those departments not currently leveraging this technology. ISD will need to augment this service offering with electronic form development skills that can be adapted to the changing priorities within the organization. Similarly maximizing use of the M365 platform will be a key component. The digitization strategy will focus on

departmental priorities that align with county's goals and have measurable impacts in service deliver to the public.

Target State

While the digitization strategy for the county includes a portfolio of digital offerings, it cannot be a "one size fits all" approach. ISD must work with the individual departments to understand their workloads and priorities and also assess their digital maturity and ability to adopt change. The following is an outline of various project phases in the development of the department level plan.

1. **Understanding the Environment** - Assess and develop a baseline state within departments.
    a. Department mission, goals, and objectives are documented.
    b. Department definition of success in the areas of automation.
    c. Department challenges.
    d. Current state – people, processes, and technology.

Steps described in graphic above: Quantify → Assess Purpose → Prioritize Ops/DR → Retention → Automation Opportunities

- Identify high volume paper records for digitization.
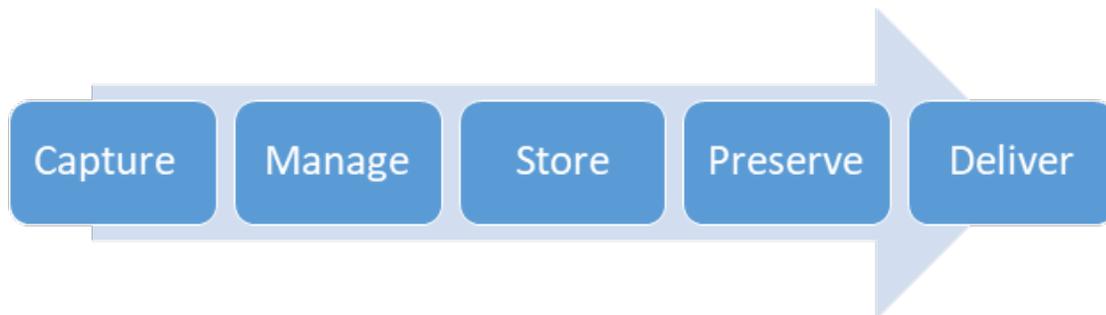
Steps described in graphic above: Capture → Manage → Store → Preserve → Deliver

- Identify any data categorization or classification in use.

2. **Develop the Plan**
    a. Process & Workflows – departmental and inter-departmental.
    b. Use of Technology – scanning, eForms, other automation tools.
    c. Workforce Capabilities – enable users through training.

       d.   Governance Body – establishes the digitization priorities among county departments

       e.   Roadmap – define a three-year plan to attain a desired future state.

3. Implementation

       a.   Initiate the plan – define, design, and prepare – consolidate departmental roadmaps.

       b.   Implement – build, deploy and put in place the resources necessary.

       c.   Review – outcomes, utilization, and workforce

Principles

The following are guiding principles for digitization:

1. Digitization starts with the customer department driving the change.
    ISD can't make a department innovate or participate in adopting the technologies.

2. ISD will be the technical resource to help establish what is possible.
    Embedded culture and structures are likely the biggest obstacles, but ISD leadership can help define digitization initiatives that are possible.

3. Digitization is a long-term and repetitive strategy that requires persistence and patience.
    Tracking of the metrics such as reuse, and time savings will ensure the time invested has measurable benefits.

4. Digital offerings will change over time with increased adoption and customer participation defining what has value.
    As departments mature in their use of the technology, digital governance will help reshape the pace and direction of ISD resources in addressing the county's goals.

Governance Structure

Having a robust governance structure in place improves "buy-in" to the service and increases adoption as it allows stakeholders to be part of the decision making process that defines and shapes the service as it evolves over time. The governance structure should include:

- Focus groups comprised of service super users within the departments that understand the products and how they provide value to their business processes. They are also key contributors in identifying service gaps which informs the selection of new tools to be included in the digital portfolio.
- Leadership Advisory Committee having executive level representation from departments that are major consumers of the service to provide feedback around digital priorities, product rollout, user adoption, and funding strategies. Value could be derived by leveraging existing governance bodies already in place such as M365 Executive team.

Key Performance Metrics

Metrics in the area of adoption, finance and service delivery will be used to measure the success of the digitization effort. These metrics will be evaluated on a semi-annual basis and reported on to the executive leadership governance body and the program sponsor. Key metrics to be achieved:

- Increase the adoption of elements of the digital portfolio by 10% annually.
- Expand each department's digital baseline (use of eforms, paper scanning, digital workflows) by 15% annually.
- Once all department baselines have been established, additional metrics such reduction of physical file storage will be added.

Organizational Impacts

Adopting a digitization strategy will inevitably require adaptations to how ISD currently approaches work. Some changes will be minor in scope while others more major. This section tries to identify what these changes might be and how ISD should address.

Finance

- Digital workflow development has been a "Pay As You Go" approach with ISD staff working with customers over a prolonged period of time. This may become more of an issue over time as customers begin to consume self service capabilities as an alternative but not fully achieving a consistent successful outcome. Some mechanism will need to be in place to ensure that ISD resources can be attributed to the projects or customers receiving the benefit of work performed.
- ISD will explore any opportunities for grants or one time funding for implementation and licensing.
- Traditional implementations of document management projects require the customer to agree to project costs relative to the complexity. To scan, store and retrieve documents is a baseline activity and involves a minimal amount of software and services. ISD should provide an adequate pool of licenses to accommodate expansion to new and existing customers, provided the associated maintenance charges can be recouped annually.
- Including Innovation services into the baseline will reduce the complexity of distributing licensing for client licenses. Department specific licensing and customizations should still be billed directly, but shared resources should be distributed seamlessly.
- Conversion of physical paper records to digital will have labor costs. These resources will need to be addressed by departments internally or by using third party service providers.
- The funding methodology employed should fully cover the cost of running the digitization program.

Training

While all teams should have some introduction to digitization concepts, it is not realistic that all teams can be experts in all technologies. The following approach should be adopted:

- The Digitization team should identify training at different levels:
  - Business or Executive focus
  - Broad digitization concepts appropriate for all technical staff
  - Targeted deep dive training in areas of core competencies
- Identified training should be developed from our platform providers

- Digitization champions should be identified within in each team to comprise a Digitization Task Force in areas of application programming, infrastructure, network, security as well as specific digitization technologies. This group should be extended to include members from outside ISD such as DIS staff in other County departments.

ISD Project Managers should begin including an orientation to digitization concepts into staff training development plans.

Staffing

The digitization initiative will be staffed with a Business Systems Analyst and Information Technology Analyst III and will also utilize additional ISD resources such as Project Manager, Senior Programmer Analyst and other roles as appropriate.

Departments will also need to commit staff time to take advantage of this initiative, as subject matter experts in the product being transformed to digital. Some responsibilities will include participating in meetings, process analysis, capturing metrics, and performing user acceptances testing.

Communications Campaign

- Once all the service components are in place, ISD will need to broadly communicate with their County partners the availability and benefits of the digital offering. This will be accomplished with targeted communications to existing users who are already leveraging some of the products to identify opportunities to expand their usage. To encourage new users, ISD will host townhalls where use cases of existing County customers and/or other counties are showcased. The goal of this campaign effort is for ISD to meet with individual departments and perform an assessment of their current digital state and identify opportunities for their digital advancement.

Appendix A - Digitization Project Checklist

The Digitization project consists of identifying a department's business processes with the goal of improve the service delivery through automation tools such as electronic forms. A second aspect of the project to develop plans for eliminating the creation and storage of paper records. The following questions are intended to capture the priorities and challenges your department is currently facing.

This document can be distributed to multiple divisions or workgroups as needed.

Department: _____

Department/Workgroup Priorities: _____

Current Challenges: _____

Do you have public facing documents/forms? _____

If yes, please list them: _____

Please list any internal forms that are being used_____

Do you currently use any document hosting services such as Softfile? _____

Who is the designated staff member responsible for records management? _____

Does your department/workgroup have any plans to relocate offices? _____