



## Microsoft Dynamics – Expert Columns

### Finance Collaboration *Working with other Departments*

*By Randy Johnston, Executive VP, K2 Enterprises, LLC*

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Finance has historically been a consumer of information. Today's market demands much more interaction and cooperation to get and give the information needed to run a business effectively. Besides top management, finance professionals can benefit dramatically by cooperation with marketing, sales, manufacturing or production, human resources and the information technology operations of a business.

What is the benefit of this cooperation? Much easier access to the information needed plus promotion from other functional units when it comes time for projects, change and requests for additional information. You'll probably be able to get your job done without collaboration, but you'll find it will be much more pleasant, productive, and rewarding if you work on collaborating with others.

#### **Collaboration – Why**

What is the strategic plan of the business? How do you match that strategy with tactics? What is your need to make that happen? What is your mission for the business? Look for at the top needs of the organization, and determine how the finance department can make a difference in these strategic initiatives. Consider the cash flow needed for existing initiatives, new projects, and maintenance of existing infrastructure and operations.

Consider how you can help each department in your organization. Think of your responsibilities as a service organization to all of the other functional units. You are probably already functioning as a support arm for top management. You are maintaining bank lines, providing appropriate insurance coverage to mitigate risk, and taking care of compliance issues. Hopefully you are also providing key metrics for the business with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), analysis of new projects, capital outlays as well as the requested monthly and quarterly financial information. If you are providing what top management needs, consider turning your skills to other areas of the business. Most finance professionals have analytical skills for procedures, and can clearly see through issues and fluff to get to the heart of the matter.

#### **Collaboration – How**

Consider the marketing arm of the business. This is often an area with fairly significant monetary outlay that has difficulty tracking the effectiveness. Meet with the person in charge of marketing and determine what they believe are the key initiatives. Offer to help with the skills you have such as negotiating contracts or measuring results. Assure the marketing person that you do not want to do their job or control their decisions, but to help them get the most effective results possible. Help them understand that if marketing is being effective, efforts are often increased, which would help them

grow their area of responsibility. Help the marketing team consider automation that could assist them. This might include a more automated web presence, paperless efforts, automated polling, a more effective CRM system, and measurements of programs tied to marketing spend. You have the discipline to look at the long haul, and many marketing programs don't get enough time to be effective. You may also help the marketing person see ineffective spending that can be redirected to efforts that produce better results. Most marketing people have workloads like you, they have more to do than they can handle, so look for efficiencies at every opportunity.

It is likely that the Information Technology (IT) function reports to you, but even if it doesn't your IT department and you have many things that you can do together. Most IT departments are constrained from both a personnel and dollar perspective. If you can work with IT management with the intent that we are looking for a way to deliver more IT to the end-users, you may be surprised what you find. Note, we did not say that we were necessarily going to spend more money, but we want to spend the money more effectively. That could mean negotiating more effective contracts like Open Licensing, it could mean buying or leasing the appropriate Servers, SANs, desktops and laptops. You may find that outsourced IT labor may drive out some costs, and you may find that managed service contracts allow you to have more reliable operations. Projects like virtualization and SAN upgrades could be totally justified, but the IT department may not have produced an appropriate Return on Investment scenario.

Additionally, IT can help you and others by enabling technologies like SharePoint, ODBC, SQL Reporting Services, and Terminal Services. You will probably have to go through a bit of a learning curve to understand all of the terminology, but remember the IT team will have to do the same with all of your finance terminology. You may bring vision to the IT team for projects like paperless, portals, handheld deployment and web services. You will probably have to help the IT team understand the benefits of Software as a Service, and why some applications are better implemented this way. You may discover some unwelcome visitors like marginal security, bad procedures, wasted money, and inadequate training. However, both departments will benefit as this process unfolds.

Once you have had wins in marketing and IT, your reputation as a problem solver should be spreading in the organization. You will then be able to step through each department improving internal controls and spend effectiveness while driving out waste. Remember this is an on-going process that has to be visited quarter after quarter and year after year. After the initial clean-up, you will find that maintaining collaboration between departments will be much easier and better for the organization as a whole.