

Two new systems ram information roadblocks

Programs improve communication, save time, money

By Dave Schafer

For years, supervisors in the Aviation Department complained to Dolores Rodgers about the tediousness and complexity of the employee performance plan and evaluation form.

'The new ERP should change the culture of the city. It's a chance to change the whole business of the city, the whole mentality.'

**— Julia Greer
Information Technology**

Rodgers, the department's assistant director for human resources, understood their complaints. Those concerns had prompted her to search for software to help with her annual reviews. In 1997, she began using a software program called Performance Impact.

In 2004, all of Aviation used PI for employee evaluations. PI was so successful, Rodgers

took it to a task force Mayor Bill White formed to review the employee evaluation process.

Now the upgraded system is being implemented citywide to replace the Excel spreadsheet-based EPE form.

The PI system is just one new computer-based application the city is using to streamline city functions and cut back on manual paperwork. In May, the city quietly kicked off the two-year implementation of a new enterprise resource planning system for running city business and managing employees.

The ERP affects payroll, accounting, purchasing and financials, such as budget, grants, contracts, project accounting and procurement. It also affects department human resources functions, such as benefits, workers' compensation, and employee relations.

"The new ERP should change the culture of the city," said IT's Julia Greer, who's leading the implementation project. (See Countdown to a new ERP, page 6.) "It's a chance to change the whole business of the city, the whole

See **SYSTEMS** on page 6.

SAP for the new ERP

The city uses an 8-year-old version of AMS Advantage for enterprise resource planning. The new system will offer streamlining opportunities the city can't take advantage of with its version of AMS Advantage.

"This is a system that has long been on the verge of collapse and must be replaced," said City Controller Annise Parker, whose office is responsible for ensuring the integrity of the city's financial system.

Countdown to a new ERP

June 1 – The project-planning phase kicked off.

Aug. 1 – 30 to 40 city employees from all departments will transfer onto the project full time.

August and September – Implementation team will configure the software to meet each department's needs while maintaining citywide standard practices.

Jan. 1, 2006 – Development and testing of the system. For the next nine months, the program will be developed and tested by about 150 workers who volunteer for the project.

July 1, 2006 – The city's new financial/purchasing system – for accounts payable, grants management, fund accounting, purchasing and inventory management – will go live and be used by every department.

July 30, 2006 – Following the same process as above for the HR and payroll phase.

Jan. 1, 2007 – HR and payroll go live.

But, even more important is how the new system can break down bureaucratic barriers citywide, she said.

There will be fewer obstacles to getting things done in the city, Greer said. Processing purchasing orders will be easier, requiring less paperwork and less wait time.

For employees in the field who rely on replacement parts to do their daily job, the new system is expected to make the purchase of such parts more efficient.

The city's contract with

In April, City Council voted 14-1 to appropriate \$22.7 million for a new system. A team of 13 department representatives selected SAP Public Services Inc. to implement the new ERP system.

SAP is flexible and can grow as new technologies emerge, Greer said.

The implementation team is still in the process of determining exactly how the system will operate and what it will entail.

But SAP offers many possibilities.

Unlike AMS, an employee can put data directly into the SAP system, rather than putting it on an official form for entry later.

Once the information is in the computer, others – including those in other departments – can access the information rather than having to re-enter it.

For instance, some employees may be able to request days off through the computer, rather than writing it down on a 206 form and copying it for a supervisor to approve, make more copies of, and enter into the computer.

There should be less errors, Greer noted, because data will be entered just once.

This new system will put the city on pace with other major corporations and cities, or even ahead of them, Greer said.

Tippee, a new EPE

SAP requires the city to conform its approval process to the company's software, which means the usual barriers to getting things done will be removed, Greer said.

"We'll need to be thinking across departments, not just in our own little world," Greer said. "It will be a lot easier to get things done and to communicate among departments."

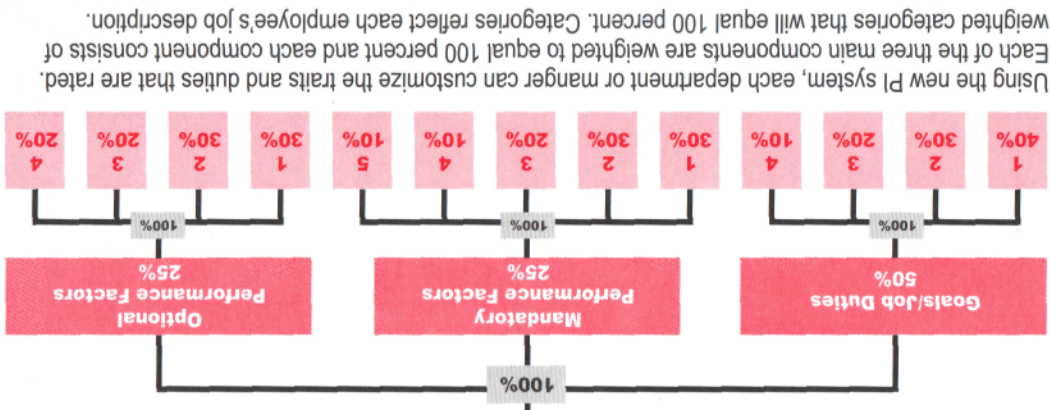
The printed PI form looks similar to the old EPE form, including the same elements and a weighted scoring system.

"The process, the components of employee performance management aren't changing. Only the tools are changing," said Viveca Sonberg, Public Works and Engineering assistant director. Sonberg piloted the EPE change while in HR.

"Used correctly, it will allow managers to give better coaching, and it will prompt managers to do that more often."

PI will use less paper, and minimize manual input, be more detailed and allow more comprehensive manager feedback, Sonberg said. The system makes it easy for managers to make notes, and it gives them a secure place to put those notes.

Employee Performance Evaluation



PI also has coaching tips to help managers deal with employees who are struggling in a particular area, such as communication skills or tardiness.

Besides encouraging more feedback, the coaching tips should improve managers' teaching skills, which should lead to better employees, Sonberg reasoned.

With PI, each department or manager can customize the traits and duties that are rated. Under each trait are questions that force managers to think more thoroughly about the job and the employee's performance.

PI features IntelliText, a program that automatically writes the evaluation summary as managers enter the scores. That feature makes it easier for managers to give feedback, and allows them to edit the text to make it more detailed.

For employees, the biggest adjustment, besides the increased feedback, will be the new weight rating system. (See box.)

"I think PI will help managers," Sonberg said. "It's intuitive, it provides support for your memory. It guides them in thinking about employee performance."

PI and SAP will also guide the city in changing the way it does business.