



CASE STUDY

Promantek's TrakStar Software Delivers Impressive Performance Appraisal Process Change and Organizational Productivity Improvement

November 2004

A Sheriff's Office is not just a law enforcement agency; it is also a public safety organization. As such, its very nature makes it an ideal candidate for performance appraisal process change and improvement. The challenge is to provide exceptional public safety service, along with a serious focus on the responsibility of being good stewards of public tax dollars. This Case Study describes how a new appraisal process began and developed into a particularly good example of a performance appraisal process change. This change has resulted in impressive organizational productivity improvement.

In the winter of 2003, J. Grayson Robinson, Arapahoe County Sheriff, commissioned a small task force to design a new performance management system. Task force members wanted to focus on this critical aspect and were confident they could improve it by working together in collaboration with organizational input from all levels.

Once system requirements were defined, the task force evaluated a number of software vendors. The team selected Promantek, Inc., a leading, innovative provider of Web-based software aimed at dramatically improving HR and line manager productivity with their performance appraisal tool - TrakStar. This automated software centralizes and simplifies the appraisal process that has long burdened organizations with difficulties and inefficiencies. With TrakStar, ACSO now provides supervisors with tools to help them quickly and easily create quality performance plans and appraisals that communicate specific goals to employees along with the behaviors that will lead to further successful performance. TrakStar completely automates and ensures uniform performance standards. ACSO estimates that the new appraisal process has cut the time necessary for supervisors to prepare and conduct annual reviews by almost 50% while at the same time significantly improving communication.

CUSTOMER BACKGROUND

Arapahoe County, Colorado is the state's first county and one of the largest with a population of more than 500,000. TrakStar performs the performance planning and appraisal process for the Sheriff's 600+ employees who are involved in many facets of public safety. The Sheriff's Office is located in Centennial, CO.

Please see <http://www.co.arapahoe.co.us/Departments/SH/index.asp>

BUSINESS DRIVERS FOR IMPROVEMENT

There were many economic, management and Human Resource drivers that led the ACSO to implement an online web-based performance appraisal system.

Prior to TrakStar, the ACSO employee Performance Appraisal process was an antiquated manual process and needed to be updated. A significant number of supervisors characterized the employee appraisal process as "flawed". Additionally, the process drew relatively low marks in organizational surveys. In short, many supervisors felt the system was ad hoc at best and in need of significant improvement. Some of the key issues with the in-place ACSO system included:

Manual appraisal scheduling. The frequency of appraisals at ACSO varies based upon the employee classification (civilian and sworn) and time in position.

Absence of regular performance note taking. Most appraisals were assembled using service comments forms and limited notes during the Performance Appraisal cycle devoid of any employee notes to help justify the final rating on a competency.

Inconsistent manual data collection. ACSO had a manual paper/pencil process for about 20 years, which was fairly typical for law enforcement agencies. Microsoft Word was also used for some data collection. As a result, tracking the status of appraisals often became an "administrative nightmare." In addition, Word templates saved on local workstations and in

filing cabinets breached confidentiality.

Lack of position descriptions and required competencies. Performance standards were generic for all employees, regardless of their area of expertise. There was no way to add specific behaviors required for each position. ACSO wanted to establish specific expectations at the beginning of the performance period.

Inability to track employee performance over time. It typically took up to 1.5 hours for a manager to manually assemble an appraisal document and up to 1 hour to conduct the actual review.

DESIGNING THE SOLUTION

ACSO decided to assemble a Performance Management System focus group consisting of top managers from across the organization. The team was charged with reforming the Performance Appraisal processes in addition to developing new competencies/dimensions encompassing the basic duties and responsibilities of each classification. This was conducted to better meet the needs of the employees and ACSO leadership, primarily management. Over the course of four months, the team reviewed Performance Appraisal objectives, researched periodicals, studied motivational theories, and reviewed other law enforcement systems in search of the best practices to adopt and major mistakes to avoid.

SETTING GOALS

Along the way, the ACSO redesign team established specific goals:

Automate. Move away from paper forms and processes and allow anytime/anywhere access for line managers through Web technology.

Reduce time. Cut the time managers need to produce performance plans and appraisals and conduct reviews.

Establish an institutional memory for the future. Make it easier to change and track goals/objectives throughout the year.

Free up resources. Rely upon the new system to automatically schedule plans and appraisals and remind supervisors and HR of delinquencies.

Standardize. All employees should be affected by the change.

Centralize." Data and processes should be centrally administered and driven from a common source. Supervisors should be able to create and archive appraisals in an efficient manner.

EVALUATING VENDORS

What follows is a description of the ACSO's evolution from the old appraisal system to the current performance management format utilizing Promantek TrakStar software. It covers the evaluation phase through the impact the software continues to have on the organization.

Evaluation. The redesign team conducted in-depth research on software vendors/products and compared vendors and their offerings against pre-established goals. The most critical factors identified by the team were the need for flexibility, ease of installation, ease of use, customer service, and cost.

TrakStar Selection. Ultimately, ACSO chose Promantek's TrakStar Performance Appraisal System, which met and often exceeded all baseline criteria. The full product implementation was completed successfully and on time in December of 2003.

Improving performance and process management. As the redesign team progressed, it became apparent that ACSO needed to invest in management training at the same time it would be adopting a new performance information system.

A flexible solution. During the product functionality evaluation, Promantek separated itself from competing vendors by offering a more flexible solution that proved to be relatively easy to implement. Promantek was responsive to ACSO's specific needs and offered a flexible software configuration.

A hosted solution. In addition to offering licensed access to its software on ACSO servers, Promantek also formally offered a Promantek hosted version of TrakStar application. Ultimately, ACSO decided to host the software on its own servers because of unused capacity and county risk management issues.

A consultative sales approach. Although Promantek was new to the law enforcement field, the company spent considerable time addressing ACSO's particular needs. Promantek also took the time to understand specific nuances of the law enforcement agency.

Simplicity. ACSO was in search of a fairly simple solution, one that would be not only easy to implement, but also easy to use and access.

Cost. Promantek provided compelling solutions at better price points. In short, the primary factors in choosing Promantek's product were its flexibility, ease of use, and cost. It appeared to be a comprehensive, but simple to use solution that would allow each supervisor to configure and customize appraisals.

IMPLEMENTATION

This phase went smoothly. The combination of internal ACSO collaboration and close attention by Promantek made it a success.

Data transfer. The first step in implementation was for ACSO and Promantek to have a "go live" meeting in which they discussed transfer of data. Not surprisingly, the portion of data in the old system that ACSO had stored electronically and the new positions and competencies it had developed were easily transferred.

Custom positions. ACSO created more than 100 custom position descriptions and competencies reflecting the workforce management needs common to many law enforcement agencies. It took some time to establish the database of positions, and consultation and collaboration between the ACSO design team and supervisors was significant. ACSO used a few of the competencies in TrakStar's library but for the most part created their own law enforcement agency library of standards.

Getting ready to go live. According to ACSO, the actual implementation was quite easy and seamless. ACSO was given almost instant access to the software.

TrakStar introduction. After receiving significant training on the product, the HR administrator arranged for extensive hands-on training by Promantek, to more than 100 supervisors using ACSO's state-of-the-art training facility. During the transition, Promantek's training service was characterized as "excellent." According to the ACSO HR administrator, Promantek's support staff went out of their way to address and take responsibility for any issues that arose.

ACCEPTANCE AND BENEFITS

The reaction to the Promantek TrakStar solution across the organization was overwhelmingly positive.

Management. The HR administrator sent out a questionnaire about the product to measure the benefits for managers and the organization as a whole. Eighty-eight percent of responding managers rated the software very favorably, especially in the areas of time savings and the ability to forward "rater assignments" to others. An overwhelming number of managers now classify the process as a must keep and long needed change.

Employees. Employees, who filled out the questionnaire, seem to like the new system. In particular, they like the format of the Promantek TrakStar appraisal form uniformity and fairness. Not to mention, the addition of the process for employee input and an upward appraisal.

Human Resources. From the HR perspective, the ACSO HR administrator particularly likes two features of the Promantek product. The first is the Administrator's Home Page, which provides administrators with an at-a-glance summary of all upcoming and delinquent appraisals and the ease of reassigning employees to new jobs and supervisors. The second is the automatic email notification capability, which allows HR to proactively notify managers of impending deadlines. Moreover, the HR administrator pointed out that whenever ACSO uncovered any difficulties, Promantek responded in a timely manner, as it did during the implementation phase. Most issues involved managing user access and were resolved quickly and effectively.

Organizational Benefits. It did not take long for the new software to spark dramatic improvements in everything from the time spent on appraisals to more fluid and effective processes as well as cost savings.

Time. The new appraisal process has cut the time necessary for managers to prepare and conduct annual reviews by up to 50%. The new software also lends additional efficiency by providing a step-by-step reminder system. One of the key enablers of these timesavings was the ability for HR and managers to more efficiently collect centralize and disseminate necessary information.

Centralization and dissemination of information. The software is centrally administered and is flexible when it needs to be customized. Moreover, according to staff, the new system enables managers to create and archive appraisals much more simply. In essence, ACSO has noticeably enhanced its overall performance evaluation process through use of the new software.

Organizational efficiencies. ACSO says the Promantek TrakStar software improves appraisal quality, accuracy, and privacy with intuitive interfaces and centralized storage. The new system also provides the ability to track and modify objectives/standards and performance notes throughout the performance year. It also adheres to the CALEA standards for accredited law enforcement agencies. As advertised, it has streamlined and automated the employee appraisal process.

Cost savings. The cost savings ACSO will enjoy over the first three years following the implementation of the Promantek TrakStar software is primarily associated with decreased management time spent on annual performance evaluations. Through discussions with ACSO, Promantek discovered that since the implementation, managers spend an average of 50% less time on staff appraisals, a decrease from an average of 90 minutes per employee to an average of 45 minutes per employee. By taking into consideration the three-year cost of the Promantek TrakStar software (including the license fee as well as support and administrative costs) and the savings associated with freed-up management time over that same three-year period, we can estimate a total three-year net savings for ACSO. Based on this approach, Promantek estimates that over the three-year period ACSO could potentially enjoy a 164% return, in terms of net cost savings, on its investment in the Promantek TrakStar system.

KEY FINDINGS

The following list summarizes Promantek's key findings from the Case Study:

The combination of simplicity and flexibility of the Promantek TrakStar solution seems to be among the software's greatest assets. In conjunction with this, allowing each supervisor to easily create quality performance plans and appraisals in the Performance Planning and Appraisal Workshops.

Trust, gained through the ongoing accessibility of the vendor, has been essential in the Promantek-ACSO relationship. The software vendor's ability and focus on customer support and satisfaction has been key.

Collaboration throughout every phase of the process from evaluation and implementation to adoption and utilization was essential.

CONCLUSION

ACSO's experience with Promantek appears to verify the claim that Promantek TrakStar software is "an effective Web-based performance appraisal product that transforms the traditional employee review process from a time-consuming and laborious once-a-year event into a simplified and ongoing function that can drive new processes and guide organizational culture". In essence, Promantek found that the automated software centralizes and simplifies the entire employee appraisal process, lending flexibility and efficiency to one particular law enforcement agency in need of change. Promantek also found that the new appraisal process significantly cut the time necessary for administrators to prepare and conduct annual reviews. Over a period of time, the new Promantek TrakStar software will generate a large return on investment in terms of cost savings.