10. Managing the IT department

Just as there should be a policy requiring users to obey certain rules in order to use the Internet, there should also be a document outlining the tasks and aims of the IT department. Institutions recently connected to the Internet can easily fall into the trap of having a network administrator deciding everything – whether or not to have content filtering or whether or not to produce statistics and analyse log files, for example. Typically, administrators would do these things only if they are particularly diligent or if they feel like it.

Because they are the 'experts', network administrators can easily say that something cannot be done or can make technical excuses for why something is wrong, when neither are necessarily the case.

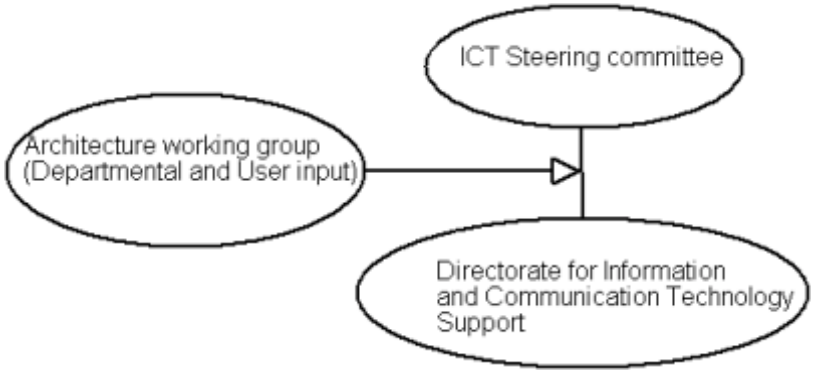
Furthermore, the IT team is usually the largest consumer of bandwidth. They download things like service packs and other software, and even 650 MB ISO images. They have greater access to the network than anyone else, and they know how things work. They are more Internet savvy, and are as likely as anyone else to abuse bandwidth.

10.1 Getting the IT department to do what a university needs

A structure should be established that gets the IT department to do what a university needs. To this end, the ICT structure at Makerere University is suggested:

The Makerere University Network (MAKNET) is implemented and supported by the Directorate for Information and Communication Technology Support (DICTS), which is also responsible for IT-related projects.

DICTS, in turn, reports to the ICT Steering Committee (ICTSC). This Committee takes high-level and budgetary decisions about the direction of ICT aims and projects. The Director of DICTS is the secretary to this committee. There is also an Architecture Working Group (AWG), which is composed of representatives from all faculty-level academic units as well as administrative units. The aim is to 'provide a forum for the development and continuous review of the University's information architecture, ensuring that it conforms to the common vision of the end users'.



The ICT structure at Makerere frees the network technicians from making policy decisions and enables them to work towards the goals set by this structure. Another attraction of this structure is that departments get formal high-level input in the form of the AWG, where they can say what they need without having to talk only to a technician.

10.2 Retaining good staff

It is often difficult for governments and universities to compete with the private sector for good ICT staff. A university might see its best staff continually being lured away by better salaries in the private sector, even though it is in the business of training people for the benefit of the country; but it needs a stable network and therefore continuity in staffing.

One way to deal with this problem is the semi-commercial approach taken by the University of Dar es Salaam. Their University Computing Centre Ltd. is a company wholly owned by the University of Dar es Salaam. It supplies computing services and Internet access to the University community in Tanzania, and is business-oriented and self-financing. Being self-financing, it can pay its staff market rates. It also allows the University to benefit from a pool of skills and talent that are developed through working for other institutions and companies. But an inherent danger is that the University's students and researchers might receive lower priority in terms of bandwidth and service than other, more demanding, commercial customers.

A better way, perhaps, is for a university simply to pay competitive rates for such staff.

10.3 Division of work

In any network, there are user issues that need to be addressed, and this is often done by a support engineer who attends to the users' PCs. There is also a central role – staff who look after the network and who are not distracted from doing essential work, such as installing a proper backup system, by individual users' problems. The Malawi College of Medicine case study provides an example of a network where important central functions were neglected because the support team were too busy attending to user issues.