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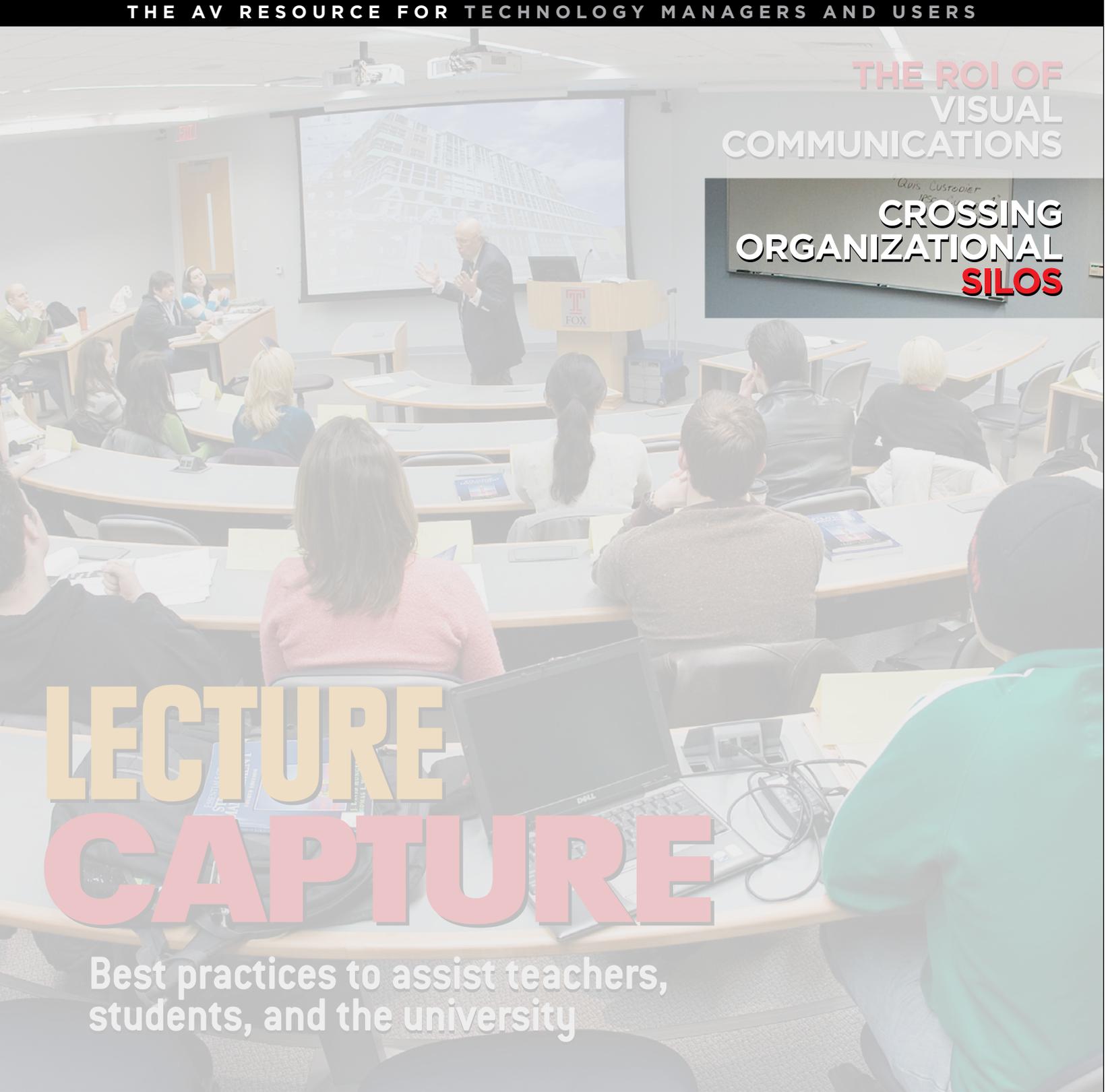
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THE WAY I SEE IT:

CROSSING ORGANIZATIONAL SILOS

OPINION

By Tim Cape, CTS-D

Integrating AV technology management into the enterprise requires some organizational re-thinking.

AV technology in organizations grew at an astounding rate during the 1990s and on into this decade. When an organization went from having \$100,000 worth of AV systems to several million dollars worth over a few years, it meant that some sort of structure had to be created to support all of those systems and their users.

In many cases, this meant that a senior AV technician was promoted into management, who then started to build an AV support operation. In the beginning, this was usually built outside the IT department. This arrangement sometimes worked well and sometimes didn't.

As the AV operations (and budgets) grew, upper management started to take notice, and many decided that, since it's technology, AV should be under IT. It makes sense. IT is a technology management group. They have many of the same functions in supporting equipment, systems, and users. So it's a no-brainer, right? Maybe. But it hasn't been as easy as it seems like it should have been.

And since AV has such a potentially large impact on physical facilities, there are other groups in the enterprise that need to



be working with AV, no matter where AV resides in the organization.

EARLY ACHIEVERS

IT organizations are generally highly evolved relative to AV. Since IT is generally seen as more mission-critical than AV (except when the CEO gets up to give a presentation and the AV doesn't work), they got a head start with ongoing attention from the highest levels of manage-

ment. AV management on the whole is still finding its own way.

IT operations derived benefits from business process analysis and other business school concepts, and ended up with their own, now ubiquitous, C-level management position.

In addition, IT professionals have a host of available technical certifications. There are some AV technical certifications, too, and we're catching up in that regard. Not so on the management side. Just check out the comprehensive IT management certification based on ITIL (Information Technology Information Library) that addresses not just technical issues, but high-level management as well. That doesn't exist for AV; not yet anyway.

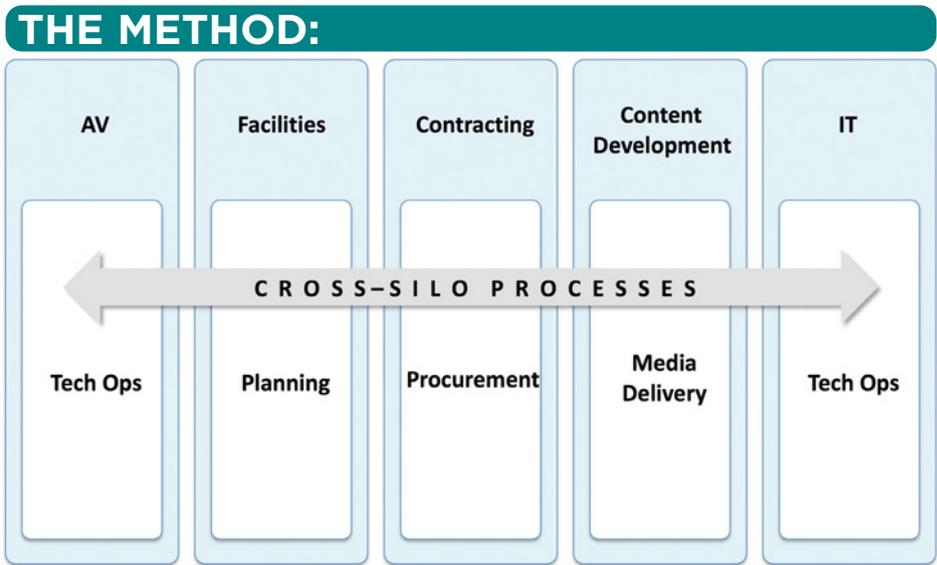
LATE BLOOMERS

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Since AV is or will soon be under an IT management structure in many cases, professionals in both fields need to understand the limits of convergence both technologically and managerially.

We still don't have the CAVO, and probably never will, but AV is climbing the evolutionary management ladder nevertheless. It's just happening a bit later than it did for IT.

bly never will, but AV is climbing the evolutionary management ladder nevertheless. It's just happening a bit later than it did for IT. One problem has been that, as AV becomes more integrated and connected with other trades (mainly IT and the building trades), each party has a lot to learn



AV operations should co-create processes that relate to and optimize AV system implementation and support across enterprise silos.

about the other. Until we get further along, there are problems because each party doesn't know what they don't know about the other.

AV professionals have learned a lot about IP networks, but not as much as the IT techs know. IT professionals have learned something about AV, but mostly through the narrow niche of prepackaged "telepresence" systems, along with some haggling about audio and video on their networks. But there's still a chasm between AV and IT, and it has a lot to do with the

technology behind the management and its impact on facilities.

Data networking is a big world, but it's more virtual than physical. Like Dr. Who's Tardis, it's bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. IT professionals are concerned with what happens inside data routers, switches, and the "cloud" (and there's a lot that happens in there!). There's a lot of concern about what happens from data outlet to data outlet or the cloud, but very little concern for what happens in the room being served beyond the data jack on

AV TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT

PLANNING	INSTALLATION	USER SUPPORT	OPERATIONS & MANAGEMENT
Budgeting	Procurement	Help Desk	Process Development
Design	Integration	Training	Vendor Management
Events	Commissioning	Presentation Support	Maintenance
			Event Management
			Content Development

AV technology management covers a variety of areas of responsibility, many of which appear the same as in the IT operation. However, the underlying knowledge and skills required may be very different.

the wall and the computer attached to it.

In AV, the world is getting bigger on the inside all the time (with DSP devices, network transport, and centralized AV management servers, for example), but we will always care about (and need to know about) what happens beyond the wire termination, and beyond the device attached to it. Audio, video, lighting, sightlines, acoustics, table finishes, wall finishes, seating layouts — the list goes on. These differences impact who should do IT or AV management, and how it gets done.

A CONVERGENCE BY ANY OTHER NAME

While there are some similarities managerially between AV and IT, there will always be vast differences, too, despite a lot of technological convergence.

For AV management to excel, the AV organization needs to reach out beyond IT across the silos that often exist in larger organizations.

AV technology management encompasses a range of tasks within the organization, including areas related to planning, installation, user support, operations, and human resources. These headings and their subcategories of AV tasks look familiar to IT professionals. Behind each one, however, are significantly different skill and knowledge sets — with some overlap. For example, user support and system maintenance may require a help desk and trouble ticket system for both AV and IT, but the user needs, skill set, and knowledge required to carry out those functions are significantly different between the two. [See chart: “AV Technology Management.”]

MORE THAN JUST TECHNOLOGY

Like technological convergence, there are limits to how converged AV and IT operations can be. While AV may continue to converge with IT technologically, it won't be a complete merger. There will always be issues of room seating layout, audio engineering, image processing, content development, and AV user interface design that are likely never to be the central purview of true IT professionals. Likewise, the depth of issues related to corporate security, compliance issues, and application deployment will probably never be the focus of an AV professional's knowledge base either.

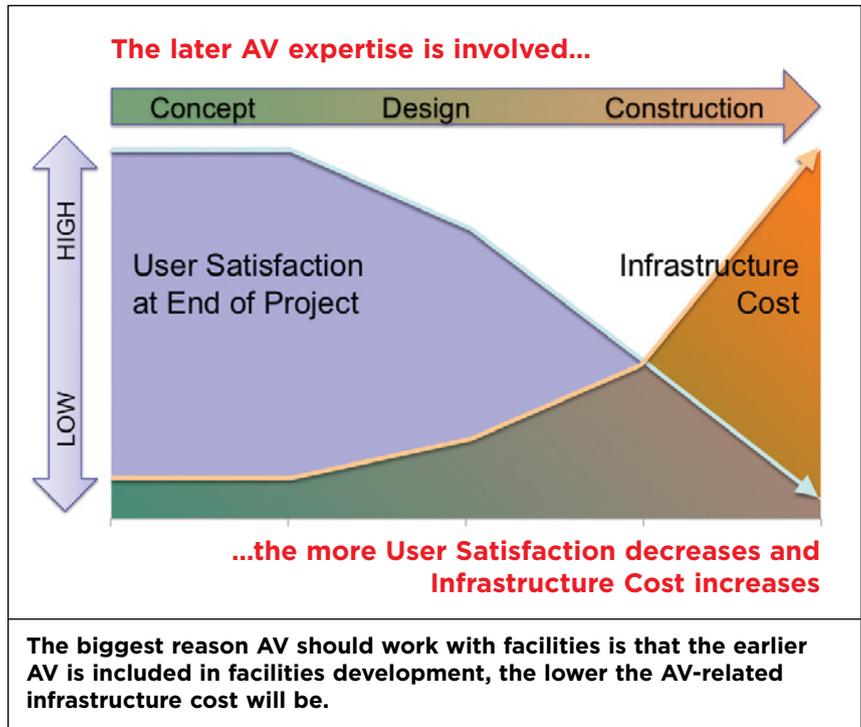
Since AV is or will soon be under an IT management structure in many cases, professionals in both fields need to understand the limits of convergence both technologically and managerially. Accommodating this reality technologically, managerially, and culturally will go a long way towards addressing the challenge of integrating AV and IT operations.

PARALLEL PROCESSING

Whether AV support is a part of IT or not, coordinating operational processes between and within each operation that address the major (and minor) areas of interaction is imperative. The processes should define both how the groups interface with each other as well as what happens inside each group with the ultimate goal of elevating the user experience and improving both internal and external customer satisfaction.

From the AV perspective, the following are some of the areas that cross-silo process development should address with IT. Each of these involves both a technological and an organizational component.

- ▶ **AV devices on the network:** Coordinate how AV devices connect to the network and how IP addressing and virtual or real sub-networks are implemented.
- ▶ **AV signals on the network:** Coordinate audio, video, and



control signals on the data network where they might affect users' data transfer speeds.

- ▶ **AV control systems:** Coordinate AV control on the network for services such as server-based centralized AV system monitoring, management, and troubleshooting.
- ▶ **Unified communications:** Coordinate AV-related communications such as audioconferencing, videoconferencing, and online content as it relates to a unified communications structure.
- ▶ **AV user support:** Coordinate how AV support is provided within or alongside an IT support operation.

BEYOND IT

For AV management to excel, the AV organization needs to reach out beyond IT across the silos that often exist in larger organizations. These silos have the potential to impact the AV operation, its effectiveness, and its return on an often significant investment. Besides IT, the facilities, contracting, and content development operations are prime candidates for establishment of cross-silo processes and documentation.

The facilities group needs to be able to incorporate AV parameters into building maintenance, retrofitting, and new buildings. A good set of cross-silo business processes would address issues such as getting the right lamps into videoconferencing room light fixtures, budgeting properly for AV infrastructure, and systems in new facilities and retrofits, and coordinating room design guidelines where facility planners may be allocating space and budgets for AV-rich spaces in pre-design phases.

Often there are contracting offices that handle vendor contracts that need to have processes and documents in place that address the differences between contracting AV providers and, say, door hardware vendors or electrical contractors. This may require templates and guidelines for AV provider RFPs (requests

for proposals), and the resulting contracts as well as commissioning requirements.

Many larger organizations also have content development groups that should be interacting in a more structured way with both AV (that may provide content terminals such as digital signage and kiosks) and IT (that provides the content storage and transport). Coordinating terminal needs, content management, and content delivery for the best user experience should drive operational processes.

WE'RE LEARNING

AV technology management has made significant strides in the past 20 years, but there's still a ways to go to catch up with IT's evolution. We need more working management models that help to optimize AV technology management on its own, in the context of an IT operation, and in relation to other organizational silos.

To that end, something we could use in the industry is research and data about AV technology management and its

parameters. This includes benchmarking data such as techs per room, base building infrastructure cost per AV system dollar, user interaction channels, optimal organizational structures, and much more. There are some surveys underway to gather this information as of this writing and there are sure to be more.

With or without more study, AV technology management is coming of age to take its place in the enterprise, and both AV and IT technology managers are learning to make appropriate organizational choices about how they support their systems and their users — and how to work together.

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