

# **IT Centralization at CWRU: The Path from IT to [U]Tech**

## **BACKGROUND**

From its 1960's merger of the Case Institute of Technology and Western Reserve University, the resulting Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) had an established culture of distributed, school-based functions. Many administrative functions, from faculty and student recruiting, marketing, HR, facility management, alumni relations, and budgeting were conducted in loose association, rather than as a single organization. Accordingly, Information Technology, a new function in the history of the university, was also developed within the individual schools, with one twist: network infrastructure was common and run by the university. CWRU had, through natural organizational development, established a landscape of siloed IT operations, i.e., an IT unit in each of CWRU's constituent faculties, each silo long-established with individual IT functions and a built-in comfort level due to familiarity as well as perceived adequate efficacy.

Other than required participation in university-wide enterprise initiatives, e.g., Human Capital Management, Student Information System, Financials, a learning management system, and network services, each constituent unit was making its own technology decisions and purchases, which were often based on very short-term decision making related strongly to availability of funds rather than a strategic view of the value of technology to the unit. It is worthwhile to point out the unevenness of how IT support was delivered, if at all. In some areas, significant investments were made and robust IT organizations arose. In other areas, IT was left to individual faculty to figure out. And, of course, there was everything in between. IT professionals based in each school/unit were isolated from one another, each running their own unit independently, despite their sharing a common home at the university with common goals for service in a common context of higher-ed tech.

When Sue Workman was first recruited as CWRU's VP for University Technology/CIO, she walked into this landscape of silo operations. Workman's hire happened to coincide with a moment in which the university leadership wanted to consider this fact, and whether its decentralized IT operations were the best approach in service of the overall university, especially in light of growing cybersecurity threats. One of Sue's first endeavors was to take on this consideration and evaluation.