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AUTHOR Sapp, Mary M.; Temares, M. Lewis
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a project in which an office of institutional research in a private research university developed a "Key Success Indices" (KSI) report that is presented each month to the president and other senior officers of the university. The KSI report collects summary data from a wide range of offices within the institution to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of management strategies. The report focuses on year-to-date data and comparisons with the previous year for 126 key indices collected from 18 offices. It is prepared using spreadsheet software and requires about 4 hours a month to enter and check the data and print the report. The monthly oral presentation usually requires about an hour. The KSI report alerts senior management to areas varying significantly from the previous year and has increased accountability of campus offices and the visibility of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research. This paper discusses the evolution of the project, the KSI report itself, the information gathering process used each month, perceived obstacles and how they were overcome, and some of the benefits of the process. Tables detail the KSI areas and the report format. Includes 12 references. (DB)

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**BEING COMPETITIVE IN TIME:
KEY SUCCESS INDICES**

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Mary M. Sapp, Ph.D.
Director, Planning and Institutional Research
University of Miami
P.O. Box 249086
Coral Gables, FL 33124
305-284-3856

M. Lewis Temares, Ph.D.
Vice President for Information Resources
University of Miami
P.O. Box 248011
Coral Gables, FL 33124
305-284-3515

Paper presented at the 31st Annual AIR Forum of
the Association for Institutional Research
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Jean Endo
Chair and Editor
Forum Publications Editorial
Advisory Committee

ABSTRACT

Although offices of institutional research often concentrate on in-depth reports pertaining to a specific topic, a summary of information from a wide range of key areas also can be important for decision makers. This paper describes a project in which an office of institutional research in a private research university developed a "Key Success Indices" report that is presented each month to the president and other senior officers of the university. A brief history of the evolution of the project, the KSI report itself, the information-gathering process used each month, perceived obstacles and how they were overcome, and some of the benefits of the process are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Institutional researchers have considerable experience doing in-depth studies and preparing ad hoc reports to provide policy makers with a bridge between data, information, and decision making. The focus of many of these reports, however, is on one particular issue or area within the institution (e.g., students, staff, sponsored research). This paper will describe an equally useful project for institutional research, namely, collecting summary data from a wide range of offices within the institution (many of which may not be traditional "clients" of the institutional research office) and assembling the information into a monthly "Key Success Indices" (KSI) report to help senior officers track the health of the institution.

The project began in 1987, when the Vice President for Business and Finance decided to develop a critical success factors report. His objectives were to bring management together in the same room at the same time to focus on changing trends in the quantitative factors that drive the University's future well being. Shortly thereafter, the Office of Planning and Institutional Research was assigned responsibility for the project.

Rockart (1979) has defined Critical Success Factors (CSFs) as "the limited number of areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance for the organization. They are the few key areas where 'things must go right' for the business to flourish. . . . As a result, the critical success factors are areas of activity that should receive constant and careful attention from management" (p. 85).

Rockart and others have used the CSF approach in several different kinds of businesses for information systems design (Boynton and Zmud, 1984; Bullen and Rockart, 1986; Munro and Wheeler, 1980; Rockart, 1979; Rockart and Crescenzi, 1986; Rockart and De Long, 1988; Shank, Boynton, and Zmud, 1985; Swift, 1985). Boynton and Zmud (1984) argue "CSFs provide a focal point for directing a computer-based information system

(CBIS) development effort, and the CSF method should result in an information system useful to a CEO as it pinpoints key areas that require a manager's attention" (p. 17). Their assessment of the approach is that it provides a "structured design process for eliciting both MIS plans and managerial information needs" (p. 26). The CSF approach also has been advocated as a useful technique for strategic planning (Leidecker and Bruno, 1984).

Although the CSF approach arose in the business arena, Peat Marwick developed a critical-success-factors model for higher education (Turk, 1988). The Peat Marwick model, which listed 67 critical success factors, was designed for use by senior administrators and emphasized the need to "compress information so that managers can focus their attention on high priorities in making and assessing decisions" (p. 8).

The interest at the University of Miami was in an approach similar to the CSF method but with several important differences. First, although the Peat Marwick CSFs involved factors that were measured on a yearly basis (e.g., percentage increase in tuition and fees, the ratio of admittances to applications, average salaries), the University of Miami wanted indices that could be monitored monthly. Second, most other applications used CSFs to develop computerized "Executive Information/Support Systems," "Decision Support Systems," or "Executive Decision Assessment Programs," but the senior administrators at the University of Miami were not interested in having to use a computer system to access information (although one might call the KSI report a "low tech" executive information system). Third, CSFs are usually limited to a small number of factors, but the University of Miami developed a much longer list. Fourth, CSFs are based upon interviews with a group of senior officials, but at the University of Miami, the report relies heavily upon input from the Vice President for Business and Finance. Fifth, CSFs often include "soft data" as well as external data (Munro and Wheeler, 1980; Leidecker and Bruno, 1984), but the

report at the University of Miami contains only numeric institutional data.

The resulting report is much more akin to what Dolence (1989) calls Key Performance Indicators (KPIs): "a detailed list of measurements the institution considers key to monitoring and evaluating enrollment management strategies. They are numbers that can be used to indicate the effectiveness and efficiency of strategies and tactics" (p. 7). Dolence, who uses KPIs to evaluate enrollment management programs, emphasizes the importance of KPIs from a strategic planning point of view. Whereas CSFs are pre-conditions for the success of a strategy, KPIs "help maintain a sharp focus on what must be measured" (p. 10). The KPI terminology also is used in the context of Executive Information Systems to describe the information summarized for the executive (Brooks, 1990).

Because of the differences between the report developed at the University of Miami and traditional CSFs or KPIs, the decision was made to coin another term for the report: Key Success Indices (KSIs). The report includes information drawn from many areas of the university, but the purpose is in effect to monitor the "health" of the institution rather than to support strategic planning directly or to implement a computer system. Although there are over 120 items in the report, the monthly oral report tends to focus on a much smaller number of key areas that are either crucial at that particular time of the year or that are different from the previous year.

HISTORY

After the decision was made to monitor a fairly lengthy list of indices on a monthly basis, the Director of Planning and Institutional Research informally interviewed several individuals at the university to gather suggestions as to which indices to include in the report. Eventually, a list of topics and a presentation format for the KSI report were

developed, contacts were identified in each of the offices supplying the KSI data, and a spreadsheet was prepared to produce the KSI report. A uniform format was followed for all indices. The main interest of the Vice President for Business and Finance was in comparisons in year-to-date figures, but because questions might arise about monthly figures, comparisons with budget, and year-end totals, those items were also added to the KSI report.

The first KSI presentation was made in January, 1938. Since that time, several categories of data have been added to the report, but the format of the report itself has not changed. The role of the KSI report and of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research, however, has changed considerably.

Originally, the role of Planning and Institutional Research was simply to collect the data, prepare the KSI report, and brief the Vice President for Business and Finance, who presented the report to the President and sixteen senior officers of the university (see Table 1 for a list of current participants). The Director of Planning and Institutional Research attended the KSI meetings only to be available to answer any questions that might arise about the data. About a year ago, however, the Vice President for Business and Finance asked the Director of Planning and Institutional Research to make the actual KSI presentations.

In addition to an evolution of roles, there has also been an evolution of the KSI report process. Vice Presidents with responsibility for the areas covered in the report now come to the KSI meeting prepared to comment or offer explanations regarding their areas. Furthermore, the KSI meeting has now become an opportunity to present other short management reports on topics related to areas covered in the KSI report, such as summaries of data comparing the institution with other private universities (obtained from

the Higher Education Data Sharing consortium), results of student surveys, trends in the number of employees, and similar topics. Usually, the Director of Planning and Institutional Research also makes these presentations, but sometimes other participants (or someone from their offices) will give a short presentation.

THE KSI REPORT AND THE PROCESS

The KSI report itself (Table 2) is five pages long and focuses on year-to-date data and the change from last year's year-to-date data. The report also includes the most recent monthly data, corresponding year-to-date and monthly data for the prior year, and the current budget (where applicable). One hundred twenty-six key indices (see Table 3) are obtained from 18 offices throughout the university by using a pre-printed data-collection form (Table 4). When necessary, follow-up telephone calls are made to remind the KSI contacts to send in their data. Each month, any office with a major change from last year or from budget is asked to explain the change at the KSI meeting. Usually, these explanations are presented orally during the report, but sometimes tables are also used to explain the situation.

The KSI report is prepared using a Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet (the layout appears in Table 5). Each month, data are entered into the appropriate columns of the current year-to-date (YTD) section of the spreadsheet. Current monthly figures are calculated by subtracting the previous month's YTD from the current month's YTD figures. The prior YTD amounts are copied at the end of each year from the previous year's data (although some offices prefer to provide prior year data each month instead of having the data copied).

The figures on the KSI report (the first page of which appears in Table 2) are obtained by using the @HLOOKUP function of Lotus 1-2-3, with the month used as the

column index. The total budget amounts are manually entered, where appropriate, and the estimated YTD budget amounts are calculated by prorating the total budget amount by the proportion of the prior year's year-end total that had been accumulated by this month last year.

It takes approximately four hours spread over the third week of each month to enter and check the data and to print the KSI report. Additional time is required to follow through with the KSI contacts on any questions about the data.

The KSI report is circulated to the participants a few days prior to the KSI meeting, and only highlights of the report are discussed at the meeting itself. Graphs showing monthly trends in student accounts receivable, indirect cost recovery by campus, tuition remission, and average net cash position are also presented each month. Excluding questions and discussion, the presentation itself usually takes only around 30 minutes. Questions during the presentation and the ensuing discussions of certain areas often lengthen the entire presentation time to more than an hour.

PERCEIVED OBSTACLES TO DEVELOPING A KSI SYSTEM AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

The initial reaction of several people (including the Director of Planning and Institutional Research) was that the KSI project would be difficult to develop and produce. First of all, many of the data in the report do not normally fall within the purview of Planning and Institutional Research. For one thing, institutional researchers usually deal with benchmark data rather than with data that change on a monthly basis. As a result, the Director was unfamiliar with exactly which measures should be reported or even whom to contact, much less the nuances of the data.

Interviews with the controller and budget officer helped identify the indices to use and the contact people who could supply the data for the KSI Report. These interviews plus discussions with the KSI contacts have helped the Director of Planning and Institutional Research better understand the wide range of data in the KSI report.

A second obstacle was that some of the data originally did not exist or were not readily available in the format desired. Also, sometimes there were problems with the comparability of data from one year to the next. All of this meant more work for the KSI contacts.

Where monthly data had not been collected in the past, KSI contacts were asked to reconstruct the data, if possible, or at least to start collecting it. Where data were not comparable from one year to the next, KSI contacts were asked to recompute the prior year's data in such a way as to make them comparable. Because the KSI contacts were the authorities, if they felt that the data should not be presented in the format we originally requested, we usually agreed to change the format (with an explanation to the Vice President for Business and Finance as to why the change had been made). Sometimes, however, we had to negotiate which format to use.

A third problem was that some of the offices supplying the data already felt overworked and were not happy about the prospect of collecting additional monthly data. Certain KSI contacts also were reluctant to share their data, even with senior officials.

Fortunately, many of the offices involved in the KSI project report to the Vice President for Business and Finance, so invoking his name increased their willingness to supply the data. In one case, the Vice President sent word to one KSI contact who did not want to release sensitive data that he was to share the real numbers, not the "public" numbers.

A fourth problem involved deciding which office to use as the source of the data, especially when two offices had conflicting information. Tracking down the appropriate KSI contacts took some persistence, and deciding which office to use sometimes involved "playing Solomon." On one occasion, when KSI contacts from different offices could not agree on which number was most appropriate, the Director of Planning and Institutional Research set up a meeting with both individuals, listened to their arguments, and finally decided to resolve the conflict by including both numbers in the report.

Fifth, although the Vice President for Business and Finance knew that he definitely wanted the KSI report (he had developed similar reporting systems for clients when he worked at Andersen Consulting), he had not decided on a specific format or on a complete list of the topics he wanted included. Furthermore, contacts had not been identified or contacted. Therefore, it was apparent that developing the report would involve a lot of time and effort on the part of the Director of Planning and Institutional Research.

Although the Vice President for Business and Finance did not make many changes in the original draft for the layout of the KSI report, developing the report did require a major investment of time. Because the Director of Planning and Institutional Research wanted the preparation of the KSI report to require as little time as possible each month and also wanted it to be the kind of task that could be delegated to a staff member, extra effort was spent up front on designing the spreadsheet in such a way as to make data-entry easy and printing the report fast. Locating and winning the cooperation from the 20 contacts also took time.

A final obstacle was that some of the participants in the KSI meeting were not very enthusiastic about the KSI report at the outset. They were also concerned about protecting the confidentiality of the sensitive data reported.

The enthusiasm, commitment, and support of the Vice President for Business and Finance was paramount in selling senior administrators on the importance of the report. Even though there were data errors and foot dragging at the outset, his perseverance to provide more discipline in our relatively undisciplined industry of higher education was a key factor in the success of the project. Furthermore, a great deal of time was spent, particularly at the beginning, to ensure the accuracy of the KSI report and the data (especially because those responsible for the data would be present at the meeting to respond if there was a mistake). This attention to accuracy helped provide credibility to the KSI report itself. An effort was made to keep the presentations very short so no one in the meeting would be bored. The KSI reports are always marked confidential, and for a period of time, the reports were collected after each meeting to minimize the possibility of any inadvertent lapses in security.

Perhaps the best measure of the success of the KSI report is that the President now will request in-depth follow-up reports to explain anything that looks "unusual" in the KSI report. Furthermore, one of the vice provosts asked for an index for one of his areas to be added to the KSI report. Recently, when the decision was made to cancel a KSI meeting, the President and Provost expressed disappointment and asked why it was cancelled.

BENEFITS

One of the main purposes of the KSI report is to alert senior management to any areas of the institution that are "out of control" (i.e., either significantly above or below last year's data or the budget for this year). Major changes in an index will prompt questions and may lead to a change in policy (or at least in budget). The Vice President for Business and Finance describes the KSI report as "a point of departure, a vehicle for bright managers

to understand information and ask questions."

The KSI report has been successful in helping management think about the basics of our institution in ways that trustees and other executives think. It raises questions about situations at an early stage before they develop into real problems. It focuses on simple, real measures, like cash position, receivables, payables, a deceleration in growth of research, variations from budget in numbers of incoming students, and a shortfall in continuing education revenue.

A second benefit is that the KSI report encourages all of the senior officers of the institution to focus on the same information. The KSI report has helped to educate senior management concerning areas of the university outside their direct responsibility and to make them more comfortable dealing with management reports. Those who attend the KSI meetings are now much more attuned to areas of concern for the overall university. That the discussions and questions about areas covered in the KSI report may cause the presentation to stretch to an hour or more shows the report is serving its purpose: stimulating thinking about and understanding of key sets of information about the university.

A third benefit has been to alert the offices providing the KSI data to the fact that they are accountable for the management of their operation. The decision was made at the beginning to have the office with responsibility for the data supply the numbers for the KSI report each month rather than to have the Office of Planning and Institutional Research run its own computer programs to collect the data. This decision was intended not only to save time for the Office of Planning and Institutional Research but also to give the other offices a sense of ownership, participation, and importance. Actually, most offices are pleased that their senior administration want to include their data in a monthly meeting with the President. Therefore, they not only provide the data but are helpful in providing

answers to any questions. Still, there are a few who need a reminder telephone call each month to send in their KSI data.

An incidental result of the KSI report is that the visibility of the Office of Planning and Institutional Research has been increased, not only with the senior officers of the university but also with other offices around campus. Furthermore, the Office of Planning and Institutional Research now has a better understanding of and access to important overall university data than it did before, which makes the office more effective. As with other planning projects, the process of developing the KSI report itself has been more valuable than the report.

It is always important for the senior administrators to monitor what is happening in their institutions, but as we move into the 1990s, with limited revenue streams and rising expenses, the importance increases. A KSI report is a useful tool in helping to make this goal a reality.

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TABLE 1

LIST OF PEOPLE ATTENDING KSI MEETING

- **President**
- **Executive Vice President & Provost**
- **Senior Vice President, Business & Finance**
- **Senior Vice President, Medical Affairs**
- **Vice President, Development & Alumni Relations**
- **Vice President, University Relations**
- **Vice President & General Counsel**
- **Vice President & Treasurer**
- **Vice President, Information Resources**
- **Vice President, Student Affairs**
- **Vice Provost**
- **Vice Provost, Undergraduate Affairs**
- **Vice Provost, Research**
- **Associate Provost & Dean of Enrollments**
- **Assistant Vice President, Business Services**
- **Assistant Vice President, Facilities Administration**
- **Assistant Secretary of the University**
- **Director, Planning & Institutional Research**

TABLE 2

KEY SUCCESS INDICES--STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL REPORT

UN KEY SUCCESS INDICES -----	FY 91 YTD Amount	BETTER (WORSE) THAN PREV. YEAR -----		MARCH 91 Amount	BETTER (WORSE) THAN PREV. YEAR -----		PRIOR YEAR AMOUNTS -----			CURRENT YEAR BUDGET -----	
		Amount	%		Amount	%	YTD	Same Month	Yr. End Total	Total	EST YTD
NUMBER OF DEGREE UNDERGRADUATES											
MARY CONWAY (04/16/91)											
New Freshmen											
Applied											
Admitted											
Verified											
Transfers											
Applied											
Admitted											
Verified											
NUMBER OF HOUSING APPLICATIONS (Fall 91)											
BOB REDICK (04/17/91)											
New Freshmen											
Transfers											
Continuing BUGs (incl. by deadline)											
FINANCIAL AID											
PAUL GRENDEK (FY 92)											
New Freshmen											
number offered											
amount offered											
number of students verified											
amount of students verified											
New Transfers (FY 92)											
number offered											
amount offered											
number of students verified											
amount of students verified											
Total UM Aid Awarded (FY 92)											
Total UM Expenditures (FY 91)											
Graduate Stipends (FY 91)											
number paid											
amount paid											
RETENTION RATES											
MARY MCKENRY PERCIVAL											
FT New Freshmen Return Rt (fall-spr)											
FT Degree Undergrad Return(fall-spr)											
6-year graduation rate (1984 Fresh.)											
Fall to Spr. Ratio--Reg US tuition											
Fall to Spr. Ratio--Reg Grad tuition											
NUMBER OF GRADUATE STUDENTS--BUSINESS											
STEVE MILLER											
Applied											
Admitted											
Verified											
NUMBER OF GRADUATE STUDENTS--EDUCATION											
ROBERT MOORE											
Applied											
Admitted											
Verified											

**TABLE 3
KEY SUCCESS INDICES--TOPICS**

Page 1	Page 2
DEGREE UNDERGRADUATES	LAW STUDENTS (Day & Evening)
New Freshmen	Applied
Applied	Admitted
Admitted	Verified
Verified	CONTINUING STUDIES
Transfers	Total Revenue
Applied	Net Total Rev. (excl. electricity
Admitted	& Summer Session expenses)
Verified	STUDENT ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE
HOUSING APPLICATIONS	Amount of Accounts
New Freshmen	SPONSORED RESEARCH REVENUE
Transfers	Number of proposals
Continuing Degree Undergraduates	Coral Gables Campus
FINANCIAL AID	Medical Campus
New Freshmen	Marine Science Campus
number offered	South Campus
amount offered	Total
number of students verified	Amount of Awards Received
amount of students verified	Coral Gables Campus
New Transfers	Medical Campus
number offered	Marine Science Campus
amount offered	South Campus
number of students verified	Total
amount of students verified	Number of awards received
Total UM Aid Awarded	Coral Gables Campus
Total UM Expenditures	Medical Campus
Graduate Stipends	Marine Science Campus
number paid	South Campus
amount paid	Total
RETENTION RATES	INDIRECT COST RECOVERY
FT New Fresh. Return Rate (fall-spr)	Coral Gables Campus
FT Degree UG Return Rate (fall-spr)	Medical Campus
6-year graduation rate (1984 Fresh.)	Marine Science Campus
Fall to Spr Ratio--UG tuition	South Campus
Fall to Spr Ratio--Grad tuition	Total
GRADUATE STUDENTS--BUSINESS	Total Federal Indirect
Applied	DIRECT COST
Admitted	Coral Gables Campus
Verified	Medical Campus
GRADUATE STUDENTS--EDUCATION	Marine Science Campus
Applied	South Campus
Admitted	Total
Verified	Total Federal Direct

TABLE 3 (Continued)
KEY SUCCESS INDICES--TOPICS

Page 3	Page 4
SOUTH CAMPUS/ADMIN SUPPORT	PAYROLL (EXCLUDES MED. SCHOOL)
Special Account #110508	Unrestricted & Designated Funds
GIFTS	Administrators/Professionals
By Purpose	Faculty (incl. Research & Training)
Current Unrestricted	Staff
Current Restricted, Designated, Priv.	Students
Plant	Total Restricted Funds
Loan	PAYROLL (MEDICAL SCHOOL)
Endowment	Unrestricted Current Funds
Annuities & Trusts	Administrators/Professionals
Trusts Held Outside	Faculty (incl. Research & Training)
Total by Purpose	Staff
PROFESSIONAL INCOME PRACTICE (PIP)	Students
PIP Charges (gross earned revenue)	Designated Current Funds
PIP Receivables	Faculty (incl. Research & Training)
Gross	Other
PIP Collections	Total Restricted Funds
PIP Expenditures	EMPLOYEES
Dean	Number of Monthly Employees
Department	Medical
Surplus/(Deficit)	Non-Medical
PUBLIC HEALTH RECEIVABLES	Number of Biweekly Employees
Total Receivables	Medical
30 days aging	Non-Medical
60 days aging	BENEFITS
90 days aging	Tuition Remission Costs
ESTIMATED COST OF LOSSES	ACCOUNTS PAYABLE
Medical Malpractice	No. Invoices Processed
Reserves	Checks Issued
Asset Valuation (Market)	Invoices on Hand
Number of Open Cases	
General Liability	
Actuarially Projected Loss/Reserves	
Total No. of Open Claims	
Other Lawsuits Being Defended	
Maximum Exposure	
Number	

TABLE 3 (Continued)
KEY SUCCESS INDICES--TOPICS

Page 5

CASH FLOW ANALYSIS

Average Net Cash Position

Debt

 Total Line of Credit

 End of Month Outstanding Debt

 Available on Line of Credit at EOM

EOM Balance in Investment Portfolio

YEAR END FORECASTS

FINANCIAL AID

 Total Financial Aid Expenditures

CONTINUING STUDIES

 Cont. Stud.'s End of Year Net Total Revenue

PROJECTED INDIRECT COST RECOVERY

 Coral Gables Campus

 Medical Campus

 Marine Science Campus

 South Campus

 Total

PROJECTED BUDGET VARIANCE

 Current Funds

 General Funds

 Designated Funds

 Restricted Funds

 Total

TABLE 5
Layout of Key Success Indices Report

Formal Report	Current YTD	Current Monthly	Prior Yr's YTD	Prior Yr's Monthly
	J J A S O N D J F M A M	J J A S O N D J F M A M	J J A S O N D J F M A M	J J A S O N D J F M A M
page 1	page 6	page 11	page 16	page 21
page 2	page 7	page 12	page 17	page 22
page 3	page 8	page 13	page 18	page 23
page 4	page 9	page 14	page 19	page 24
page 5	page 10	page 15	page 20	page 25
Autocalc of Curr YTD, Curr Monthly, Prev Yr's YTD, & Prev Yr's Monthly	Data Input	Autocalc from Curr YTD (last month minus this month)	"Rolled over" from Curr YTD at end of each year	Autocalc from Prev Yr's YTD (last month minus this month)