Case Study 24

HR/OD Intervention Focus: Geographic Information Technology

Bringing Mapping Technology Up to Speed

For Mary Jane Montemor, database manager of the 1:50,000 scale maps at the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA), age was once a drawback. Being the youngest among her peers, she had felt that older and more senior colleagues did not give her

much credence. That all changed after she came back from Australia to pursue graduate studies through the Australia Awards Scholarships (AAS).

"When I used to suggest something, the senior people would not listen to me. But right now, they ask me what I think," she quips. More than the new technology or software that she has learned, Montemor shares that gaining credibility among her peers was probably the best thing about her scholarship. She has also gained the confidence to talk to her superiors and push for her ideas.

After 10 years with NAMRIA, Montemor had applied for the prestigious AAS upon the recommendation of her boss and was offered a slot in 2011. She pursued her Masters in Geographic Information Technology at the University in Melbourne the year after and returned with updated skills and information about her field.

The scholarship proved vital to Montemor, who needed to upgrade her competencies in light of her office's transition from analog to digital technology. Though she had prior experience in Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, she shares that migrating to a new system was still a challenge. She needed to be competent, and more so because her division was banking on her to show them the way. "We have to update our capability in the office," she says, as doing so would enable them to support the unified mapping project that the agency was embarking on.

Better data management

An additional bonus for Montemor was the liberty to craft her REAP. Her REAP was on data management, particularly the utilisation of geographic information technology in topographic mapping, which was very much in line with the direction their division was taking.

In Montemor's case, she had already started implementing her REAP even before she left for Melbourne and was already halfway done with the manual for the database management system by the time her scholarship commenced. While she was in Australia, her colleagues made comments and proposed amendments to the manual which she then reviewed when she got back. Upon her return, however, she expanded her REAP upon the advice of her boss to include a generalisation method that would account for the 1:10,000 map that is in the pipeline.

Needless to say, NAMRIA counted on Montemor to accomplish much for her office as soon as she got back. She had to work on the proposed revisions to the pending manual while attending to many other things that were on her plate when she returned from Australia. As if these were not enough, she was also given new assignments to pursue. As a result, Montemor is currently only halfway through her REAP implementation. "Although it's part of what I'm doing, I also have other urgent instructions from my other boss to do additional maps," she explains.

The need to train other people also poses an additional challenge. "Instead of focusing on modifying or developing the manual and then developing the database, I still have to deal with other colleagues aside from [those in] my team," shares Montemor. In particular, she notes resistance among her other peers to learn the new software because they are already experts of the old one. To help her with this, she has formed a team to help her conduct weekly trainings or workshops.

Transitioning to the new system

According to Montemor, the strategic direction of her office has remained essentially the same apart from new developments in their mapping requirements. Her division was one of the last ones at NAMRIA to transition to the new system, and her colleagues had already been trying to cope with this change while she was still in Australia.

Montemor believes that her REAP has a big impact on the geoportal project that the agency wishes to implement. By automating the work and converting it into digital data, she helps make information easily and readily available. Furthermore, her work has a direct bearing on the disaster preparedness efforts in the Philippines. She explains that prior to her scholarship, her office did not have the capacity to convert to digital format the 1:50,000 base map which NAMRIA currently uses. As such, they resorted to scanning the images which was not good for formatting and prevented them from customising the map. Now that the map has been digitised, customisation is possible.

She further explains that to adequately address the needs of the Local Government Units, the goal is to transition to a 1:10,000 map as this goes down to the micro-level of the barangays (villages). At the moment, though, this is just in the works as what is available is only the 1:50,000 map. "It's the only map that covers the entire Philippines. That's the one we use for disaster mapping," she explains.

Still, NAMRIA continues to prepare the 1:10,000 base map even as it currently utilises the 1:50,000 map which is currently available. This is reflected in Montemayor's revised REAP, which has her finetuning the 1:50,000 map while collecting data for the 1:10,000 one. She stresses, though, that the 1:50,000 map will still be there and will continue to be utilised. "But 1:10,000 is in the pipeline and we are preparing it for the whole country, which is really extensive," she shares.

Mary Jane Montemor finished her Master of Geographic Information Technology from the University of Melbourne in 2012. Her REAP focused on Developmetand Management of Geospatial database for 1:50,000Topograph Maps w/ integrated methodology on MapUpdating