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DCF TURNS TO I.T. TO ENSURE CLIENT SERVICE[1]

The costs of a large-scale shift in technology and the impact on the underserved.

Brad Frearson, IT Director at the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) received an escalated ticket and immediately felt panic. The case was from a Child Protection Investigator (CPI) – his hard drive crashed, and the evidence collected for the child abuse case he was investigating was lost; Frearson received similar tickets from dozens of employees. DCF's SunCoast Region IT team served over 1400 employees who provided protection and support to the state's most vulnerable people. He knew there must be a better way to ensure that employees, especially the front-line workers, were always able to serve their clients.

DCF, a state agency of Florida, had over 12,000 employees. The management of DCF's assets was disparate and Frearson wanted to ensure that the organization could continue to run efficiently and handle client cases, maintain cybersecurity, and effectively manage resources. Frearson's SunCoast Region team managed several separate technologies, including Lansweeper, TeamViewer, AirWatch, and SATS (proprietary), which added to the issues in Asset Management. Frearson had joined DCF a year prior, and it was clear to him that these challenges inhibited the department's client service.

The solution was clear to Frearson and fortunately, the decision makers in Tallahassee agreed. The Department would be implementing Microsoft Endpoint Manager statewide. This technology would surely solve all the SunCoast region's IT issues... or would it? Would Frearson have sole responsibility for implementation in his region? What support would he receive from his leadership team or Microsoft to ensure a successful implementation? Once Frearson was able to define what a successful implementation would look like, he had to make a very difficult decision on how to get there.

Editor: Grandon Gill

The Department of Children and Families (DCF)

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) was established by the Florida Legislature for the purpose of providing social services to persons eligible for assistance (DCF, 2019). The DCF was one of 47 state agencies within the Florida system of State Agencies. The Department was led by a Governor-appointed Secretary who had oversight of over 12,000 employees and managed an annual budget of over 3.3 billion dollars. The Department had multiple programs including the Abuse Hotline, Office of Economic Self Sufficiency, Adult Protective Services, Child Care and Background Screening, Child Welfare, Domestic Violence, Homelessness, Refugee Services, and Substance Abuse and Mental Health. Examples of services delivered through these programs included child protective services, adult protective services, childcare licensing, refugee services, and public assistance eligibility determination.

The Department was organized into six regions. The SunCoast region served an 11-county area from Pasco County in the north to Collier County in the south. This region was further divided into 4 judicial circuits which included Circuit 13 (Hillsborough County), Circuit 6 (Pinellas and Pasco counties), Circuit 12 (Sarasota, Manatee, and DeSoto counties), and Circuit 20 (Charlotte, Lee, Glades, Hendry, and Collier counties). Frearson recognized that leading a team with such a large geographic responsibility came with challenges, especially since each area had its own unique needs and each program had its own requirements.

The department functioned under a hybrid business model approach. This approach included a combination of internal department staff performing the work and contracting some of the work out to partner agencies. The two main functional areas of the department that contracted work out to partners were the Offices of Child Welfare and Substance Abuse and Mental Health. These programs worked with community-based care agencies and managing entities to provide case management services for department customers.

The Underserved Versus Politics

> *"Public-sector organizations aren't created to maximize shareholder wealth. Rather, they are charged with promoting a particular aspect of the public's welfare. Effective and efficient execution of their mission is what taxpayers pay for. It's also what motivates agency staffers." (Ostroff, 2006)*

As a publicly funded provider of social services, the Department did not compete with private or not-for-profit organizations but there was budgetary competition amongst State agencies for funding on priority projects. Key changes to the competitive situation included a significant increase in the number of public assistance applicants as well as increases in child welfare cases. The region's largest program, the Office of Economic Self Sufficiency (OESS), faced challenges related to shifting political opinions on public assistance. Negative opinions about the use of federal dollars, related to issues such as expanding Medicaid and the overhaul of the legacy FLORIDA system that supported caseload management for the program, led to resource limitations and the inability to receive approval for needed technological changes. For the region's Child Welfare program, rising caseload sizes and media scrutiny on high profile child abuse and neglect cases pressured the Department to increase the capacity and capability of frontline team members as well as create efficiencies in systems for child welfare caseload management.

The SunCoast Region's Needs Are Different

The SunCoast Region (SCR) caseload sizes for the Department's three primary programs (Family Safety, Adult Protection, and the Office of Economic Self Sufficiency) accounted for 20%-25% of the state's caseload volume. Exhibit 2 shows a breakdown of each program by region. While Family Safety was the program that received the most media attention from high profile child abuse cases, Frearson's largest

customer within the SCR was the Office of Economic Self Sufficiency (OESS). The OESS program accounted for over 700 of the 1400 SCR employees.

IT Budget and Staffing

Frearson did not have ownership or oversight of his budget or spending. The Chief Information Officer maintained primary oversight of the IT budget for each regional IT team. Frearson's primary role was as a consultant for the SunCoast Region team. Frearson's team of IT personnel were housed around the region in all four circuits. While Frearson provided oversight to nine IT personnel, some of his team members were administratively housed under budget entities outside of the IT budget. These IT team members were hired to supplement the regional IT team and were usually hired on a seasonal temporary basis to support projects and programs within the Department with large hiring cycles. As the largest program in the region, the OESS had the largest budget and often supported Frearson's team by paying the salary of his temporary staff. Frearson knew that he had to keep his largest customer happy during this transition.

Living in a Digital World

The DCF served the community by providing protection, support, and resources to persons in need including victims of abuse, trafficking, and domestic violence. Their services also included children's legal services, refugee services, and services to those with disabilities. Most resources could be accessed in the office or most commonly by visiting the website www.myflfamilies.com but all employees depended on the ability to serve clients through digital processes: email correspondence, access to the server, and access to online technologies that support caseload management.

One of the most common and severe issues with the technology in place was server outages. Such outages inhibited the employees' ability to print, access, or save shared files. On a larger scale, entire departments were sometimes unable to access critical applications or programs. The unavailability of needed data, information, and access to critical caseload management portals affected employee productivity and effectivity, ultimately impacting the success of client outcomes. Frearson recognized that one of the Department's core competencies (exhibit 1) was "a world class workforce". How could he ensure that his team was doing its part to leverage the organization's greatest asset, its employees, to uphold its noble responsibility to the state's most vulnerable citizens?

The SunCoast Region's current asset management system had increasingly become a budget concern. The system was not integrated and did not maintain the ownership data such as: device date of purchase, the Purchase Order (PO) number, and expiration date of warranty. This impacted Department spending on surplus inventory, pulling funds from other important priorities.

Organizational Web

The Department's administrative and support services division included Human Resources, General Services (Facilities Management), Budget, Legal, and the Office of Information Technology. The Office of Information Technology Service (OITS), housed under the Office of Administrative Services, reported directly to DCF's senior IT Leadership, specifically the Department's Chief Information Officer (Exhibit 3). OITS was tasked with ensuring that all members of the organization had immediate access to the technology they needed to perform their job duties, including hardware (computers, telephones) and online systems. The goal of OITS was to make sure tools were always available and ready for use and deliver services in a manner that enabled the highest levels of customer satisfaction.

There were five main executive functions within the OITS. (Jon Bristow, 2021)

- **The Enterprise Data Management Team (EDM)** had responsibility for the make-up and oversight of the entire agency's data framework. This comprehensive structure of tactical, operational, and strategic services provided performance support, leveraged innovative technology, and assisted in required data governance protocols.
- **The Information Security Services** administered the department's Information Security Program, which existed to protect the department's technological resources and staff.
- **Application Services** had responsibility for creating, operating, and managing various applications that served both internal and external audiences.
- **Infrastructure Services** served as the direct interface between Information Technology Services and the employees of DCF along with contracted partners across the state, with a primary focus on delivering optimal customer and enterprise technology services and ensuring that back-end systems operated at maximum efficiency.
- **Enterprise Business Delivery Group** (EBDG) had the responsibility of providing OITS oversight, management, and operational support in contracts & procurement, budgets & accounting, and human resources. The EBDG delivered services to enable customers in the form of a help desk, as well as the OITS intranet presence, performance measurement, and strategic initiatives.

How could Frearson work with the OITS to ensure successful implementation of Microsoft Endpoint Manager for the SunCoast region?

Current Technology

Frearson's team managed technologies that provided separate functionalities when servicing DCF employees; they had pieces of the process, but not a unified one. Remote employees and frontline workers were the most vulnerable when their hardware or software did not work. The technologies Frearson managed included:

- **Lansweeper** – Lansweeper managed and consolidated all DCF assets and inventory such as **Hardware**, **Software**, and **Users**, in one place. For DCF this was a great standalone solution, but Endpoint provided the same solution. By moving to Endpoint, the technology would be simplified and streamline DCF's current processes.
- **TeamViewer –** DCF used the TeamViewer suite of remote connectivity, augmented reality, IT management, and customer first engagement solutions to connect to any device to support the workforce remotely. The remote management functionality of TeamViewer was the only component DCF used. Having used SCCM (the part of Endpoint that performed remote management functionality) and TeamViewer, Frearson found that SCCM was easier to connect.
- **AirWatch** - enabled Frearson and his team to deliver and manage any app on any device, securely. Like Lansweeper, the technology was functional, but Endpoint provided this solution as well. AirWatch would become redundant once Endpoint was fully integrated.
- **SATS – Statewide Asset Tracking System-** The SATS system was created by an in-house DCF programmer to track all hardware within the region. The database was not user friendly but did allow Frearson, his team, and OITS the ability to track all technology assets around the state.
- **Manual Imaging -** A computer image was a version of the operating system and initial settings intended to standardize the systems. Manual Imaging took several hours to process. Endpoint had settings that could automate all the imaging steps and would eliminate the manual imaging process; giving Frearson and his team the time to attend to more pressing issues such as reducing

the cycle time on IT tickets that needed processing. "Our current cycle time to complete customer tickets was 4 days. We should be servicing customers within 2 days." - Frearson.

- **Operating System (OS) and Application Updates-** OS and Application updates require frequent action. Utilizing Endpoint would manage all updates and reduce the time consumption and customer productivity loss for much of the process.

Endpoint offered cloud protection, threat, and vulnerability management for Windows, macOS, and Linux operating systems (Exhibit 4). With the updated technology, DCF was empowered to support remote workers in accessing the applications they needed without compromising security of their clients.

Asset Management

There were many solutions to consider, including cloud configuration options, asset management software, as well as others. Cloud configuration such as Microsoft Endpoint Manager offered a unified platform to manage security, devices, and other cloud actions (Endpoint, 2022). Asset management software could reduce IT hardware and software costs. Other solutions involve building a strong infrastructure to reduce cybersecurity threats.

Consolidation of Technologies

Microsoft Endpoint Manager had the following offerings within its solution: Microsoft Intune, Configuration Manager, Co-Management, Desktop Analytics, Windows Autopilot, Azure Active Directory, and the Endpoint Manager admin center. "I know that [some products] we currently use are direct analogs of various parts of Endpoint," Frearson said. He was interested in Microsoft Intune, Configuration Manager, and Microsoft System Center Endpoint Protection (Exhibit 5), which he believed would help consolidate the Department's current technology needs.

- **Microsoft Intune**: Allowed IT to control features for mobile devices including Android, Apple Operating systems, and Windows 10 devices and to integrate with other services (Exhibit 6).
- **Configuration Manager**: Enabled the IT team to manage on-premise assets such as desktops, servers, and laptops. With this feature, the team could deploy applications, software updates, and operating systems, and monitor assets in real time.
- **Microsoft System Center Endpoint Protection (SCEP)**: An antivirus and anti-malware tool for Windows that allowed Frearson's IT team to manage anti-malware and Windows Firewall settings for computers on DCF's network.

How Do We Begin?

"Rules governing such areas as procurement, personnel, and budgeting, which were originally adopted to prevent public-sector wrongdoing, have created workplaces that are significantly less flexible than those in the private sector. And legal doctrines intended to keep agencies' activities within the scope of the powers delegated to them by Congress can inhibit initiative. Public-sector managers know, too, that the penalties for failure are almost always greater than the rewards for exceptional performance." (Ostroff, 2006)

One of the challenges Frearson faced was successfully implementing Endpoint within a state agency and multiple teams; he was accountable for the implementation in the SunCoast region but would have to work with the implementation team on a state level (Exhibit 7).

Microsoft provided suggestions regarding how to implement the technology within a system.

To understand the heavy lifting of the project, the first task Microsoft suggested was to determine objectives. This task included, but was not limited to, the following objectives: access organization apps and emails, secure access to all devices, and the keeping of organization data inside the organization. The next task was for the organization to inventory its devices. What platforms were supported, did any teams use their own phone or organization-owned devices and how were the desktops managed? The next two tasks included determining cost and licensing and reviewing existing policies and infrastructure.

The last task was the implementation plan which was the most daunting if the Department was to hit the full integration goal by the end of the 2021 calendar year. In Exhibit 9, Microsoft showed that the ideal implementation would happen in three phases over four months. If the Department had already completed the first four tasks, then fully integrating Endpoint within all the agencies was realistic. If the previous tasks had not been completed, then the Department would have challenges with system uptime and the productivity of DCF employees could possibly suffer more during the transition.

A successful implementation as defined by Microsoft included thorough communication of goals and metrics, defined goals, and success metrics that used the SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely). Microsoft suggested the phase plan (Exhibit 8) to first improve configuration, documentation, and notification, in order to make future rollouts more efficient. The suggested phased approach would allow consistent feedback from a wide range of users.

Microsoft Endpoint Manager Approved

The State of Florida Governor's Office approved Microsoft Endpoint Manager (Endpoint) statewide, and Frearson faced a tight deployment timeline and knew there would be challenges to organization-wide change: implementation, training, and personnel loss by attrition or obsolescence.

From his prior experience at the Department of Health, Frearson was familiar with the capabilities of Endpoint, fully aware that the technology boasted endpoint security and device management, two of DCF's main IT challenges. After the technology was approved to implement for the entire organization, Frearson immediately turned to the pressing issue of rolling the technology out on a short timeline. How could he work with the Office of Information Technology Service (OITS) to ensure the technology alleviated the challenges that employees faced when serving their clients? Would the Department provide training for his team and implement new processes for employees to manage their assets?

The Race Against Time

Placing priority on speed was aligned with Leadership's objective but Frearson foresaw inevitable challenges. The timeline for implementation would put a strain on DCF's IT Team – Frearson wanted to ensure success for his region, but he knew certain elements were out of his control. Without training, his team would be ill-prepared to deploy this new solution. Frearson would be racing against the implementation schedule if he wanted to stage communication, documentation, and procedures to mitigate the impacts on his team and the SunCoast region employees.

Who's Paying for That?

The cost of the solution was just one part of implementation – DCF would certainly need to budget for additional resources. For example: both the timeline and budget for implementation was set and adjustments and changes during the implementation process would require additional billable hours or dollars to be pulled from other projects (either future or ongoing projects), forcing Frearson to cut back

on scarce resources, some of which he may have already committed in other areas. Foregoing the extra resources and expertise needed to effectively develop and implement the solution could cause a cascade of system issues and user challenges.

One Size Fits…

Poor management of the implementation could increase challenges to employee productivity, affecting the clients. Employee frustration with unmanaged change could lead to personnel loss, further exacerbating DCF's client service difficulties. DCF had project managers in Tallahassee that were responsible for the organization-wide implementation. These project managers would have experience with navigating large-scale organizational change and would also have a valuable vantage point to oversee and aid each of the regions, including the SunCoast region. One management program statewide would increase security and productivity and product flexibility. Lead security for the state would have greater visibility and be able to manage multiple divisions more efficiently and with opportunity to scale. With the different regions of DCF, Frearson was concerned that one team with a "one size fits all" approach would not meet the unique needs of the SunCoast region and those of their clients.

People versus Technology

Frearson's team would ultimately be responsible for managing this technology and ensuring its efficiency for the SunCoast region. If team members were averse to learning new technologies or did not receive proper training, Frearson was in danger of losing those resources. Regarding consolidation of technology, correctly identifying and eliminating those existing applications made redundant by Endpoint was a critical element of success; how many and which of the applications could be phased out was yet to be determined. There was a possibility that new or supplemental technology would need to be added to DCF's technology stack.

Rule Your Technology, Don't Let it Rule You

What would constitute successful implementation? Minimizing losses in time, money, and employees? Frearson's largest technological concern was whether the information turnover of individual devices could be performed remotely and as an automated process. If so, the challenge of getting Microsoft Endpoint Manager on employees' machines would be relatively painless. But this was not a guarantee. If the re-imaging of devices had to happen manually and on-site, this first step would quickly become the largest time and money drain for his team and budget. If Frearson decided to delegate components of the implementation away from his own seat to conserve his time or that of his technicians, he would certainly lose control of the impact on the SunCoast region. Frearson had to carefully decide where to best facilitate and support the implementation to ensure the SunCoast region employees were not affected when it came to providing critical client services. Exhibit 9 outlines an interview with the Director for Family and Community Services, Marla Timmons, in the SCR. This interview highlights how IT issues impact the critical work of frontline team members meeting the Department's mission to protect the vulnerable. "Our child protection investigators must have reliable tools to do their jobs. Technology that works "some of the time" is not acceptable." stated Ms. Timmons. Frearson had to find the best path forward that ensured client services were top of mind when considering the timing, costs, training, and complexity of implementation.

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Biographies

Michael A. Ens is a Regional Sales Manager for Holmatro Inc., a global manufacturer of hydraulic equipment specializing in vehicle rescue tools. He earned bachelor's degrees in Marketing and Communications from the University of Dayton in Ohio.

Isaiah Jackson is a Marketing professional with experience in driving substantial pipeline for B2B companies. He has extensive experience in leading and developing marketing strategies, brand identity and design, marketing automation and operations. He is certified in digital marketing and marketing automation, and has grown business internationally in LATAM, EMEA, and APAC. Jackson attended the University of South Florida for a couple years as an undergraduate and finished his bachelor's degree in business management with a concentration in marketing from the City University of New York, Brooklyn College.

Ashley Schultz, Sr. Digital Marketing Specialist – API (Application Programming Interface) Product Manager at FedEx. Ashley owns, defines, and prioritizes the program backlog and business owner/stakeholder for the FedEx Developer Portal. She has also developed and managed strategic relationships with industry leaders, including Square, Twilio, GitHub, Slack, Box, and Wise (formerly TransferWise). Schultz is a member of USF's Executive MBA 2022 cohort and successfully completed Harvard Business School's online Credential of Readiness (CORe) Program. She received a bachelor's degree in telecommunications from the University of Florida.

Nichole Solomon is the Regional Program Manager for the Department of Children and Families Office of Economic Self Sufficiency. Nichole is responsible for the development and deployment of strategic and business plans and has oversight of business operations, policy, training, quality assurance, workforce development and strategic partnership initiatives. Nichole is a Six Sigma Green Belt, a Certified Master Facilitator, and a Master Sterling Examiner. Nichole received a bachelor's degree in music from Florida State University.

Exhibit 1: DCF's Mission, Vision, Values and Core Competencies

MISSION
The mission of the Department of Children and Families is to work in partnership with local communities to protect the vulnerable, promote strong and economically self-sufficient families, and advance personal and family recovery and resiliency. Ch.20.19 F.S.

VISION
We are a highly skilled workforce committed to empowering people with complex and varied needs to achieve the best outcomes for themselves and their families. In collaboration with community stakeholders, we will deliver world class and continuously improving service focused on providing the people we serve with the level and quality that we would demand and expect for our own families.

CORE VALUES
A workforce that operates with integrity maintains loyalty to a code of ethics that requires the courage to take responsibility for providing the highest quality of service to the vulnerable. We are a solutions-focused learning organization built on a foundation of transparency in action and accountability of results. Both within the organization and among our stakeholders, we thrive in a culture of respect for diversity of opinion that is nurtured through open communication. High performing and committed, we are unified in our goal of excellence in achieving quality outcomes for those we serve.

CORE COMPETENCIES
Systems Integration
The Department oversees diverse and multi-faceted systems of care that must be designed, managed and continuously improved. We must be experts in the systematic integration and coordination of services to optimize available resources and drive the best possible outcomes for each person we serve.

Vendor Relationship Management
The services for which we are responsible are delivered through a complex network of vendors and community partners. It is critical that we ensure vendors and community partners share in our mission and vision – it is not enough for them to simply deliver services. They must uphold our values and maintain a commitment to world class service and outcomes. We must balance partnership with accountability.

Data Analytics
Everything we do must be outcome-based and solution-focused. We must analyze data and information in multidimensional ways to gain deep understanding of system issues and challenges. We use analytic data to drive daily actions; inform strategic, operational, and financial decision-making; and improve outcomes.

World Class Workforce
Because we have a sacred mission to protect the vulnerable with the same passion we have for our own families, we must have a committed and competent workforce. Our workforce is truly our most valuable asset. We are committed to recruiting, developing, and retaining a world class workforce to support this organization now and into the future.

Source: https://www.myflfamilies.com/about-us/office-secretary/mission-vision-values.shtml

Exhibit 2: SCR Clients Served by Program

Data for child investigations for FY 2020-21 by Region

| Row Labels	Count of Intake Number	Percent of Total
Central Region	85,852	26.85%
Northeast Region	54,932	17.18%
Northwest Region	34,172	10.69%
Southeast Region	46,245	14.46%
Southern Region	20,216	6.32%
SunCoast Region	78,370	24.51%
Grand Total	319,787	100.00

Data for adult investigations for FY 2020-21 by Region

	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	TOTAL	
CNR	1,056	1,065	986	1,046	969	863	943	951	1,080	1,030	970	1,026	11,985	24.3%
NER	727	689	656	700	569	692	632	663	754	661	645	659	8,047	16.3%
NWR	428	426	395	369	356	366	350	329	441	409	369	421	4,659	9.5%
SCR	1,117	1,123	1,032	1,046	901	1,049	1,047	981	1,166	1,040	999	1,099	12,600	25.6%
SER	766	713	664	706	675	696	607	684	750	709	733	726	8,429	17.1%
SNR	343	329	293	297	251	276	293	244	314	318	296	305	3,559	7.2%
Grand Total	4,437	4,345	4,026	4,164	3,721	3,942	3,872	3,852	4,505	4,167	4,012	4,236	49,279	100.0%

Data for public assistance cases received for FY 2019-20 by Region

Region	RFA Received	Percentange of State
CN	1,194,235	22.92%
NE	662,050	12.71%
NW	318,065	6.10%
SC	1,050,923	20.17%
SE	967,684	18.57%
SN	1,017,350	19.53%
State	5,210,307	

Source: Developed by Terry Field and Daniel Davis, DCF SunCoast Region Planner and Data Manager, September 2021.
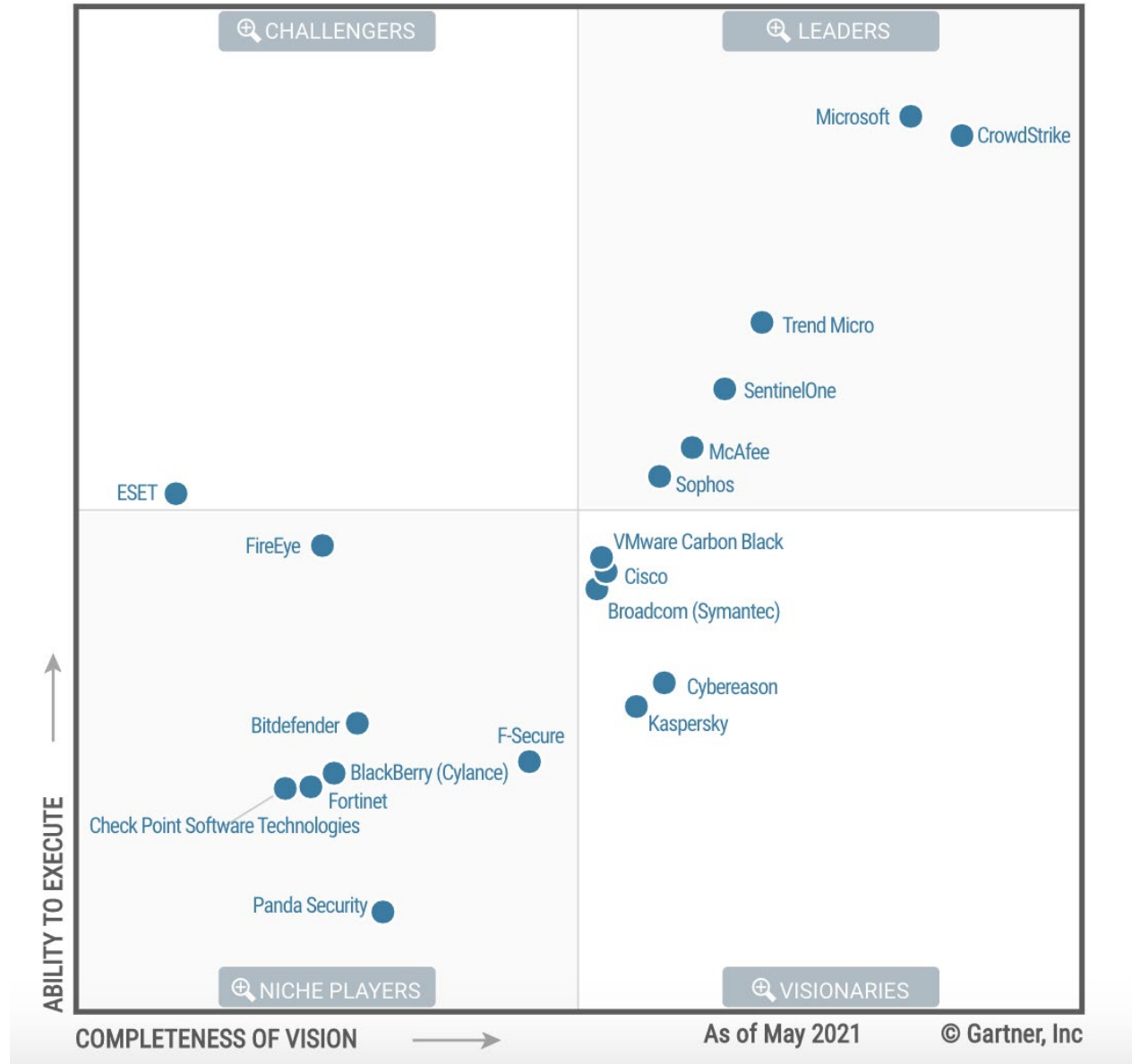
Exhibit 3: DCF's IT Organizational Structure
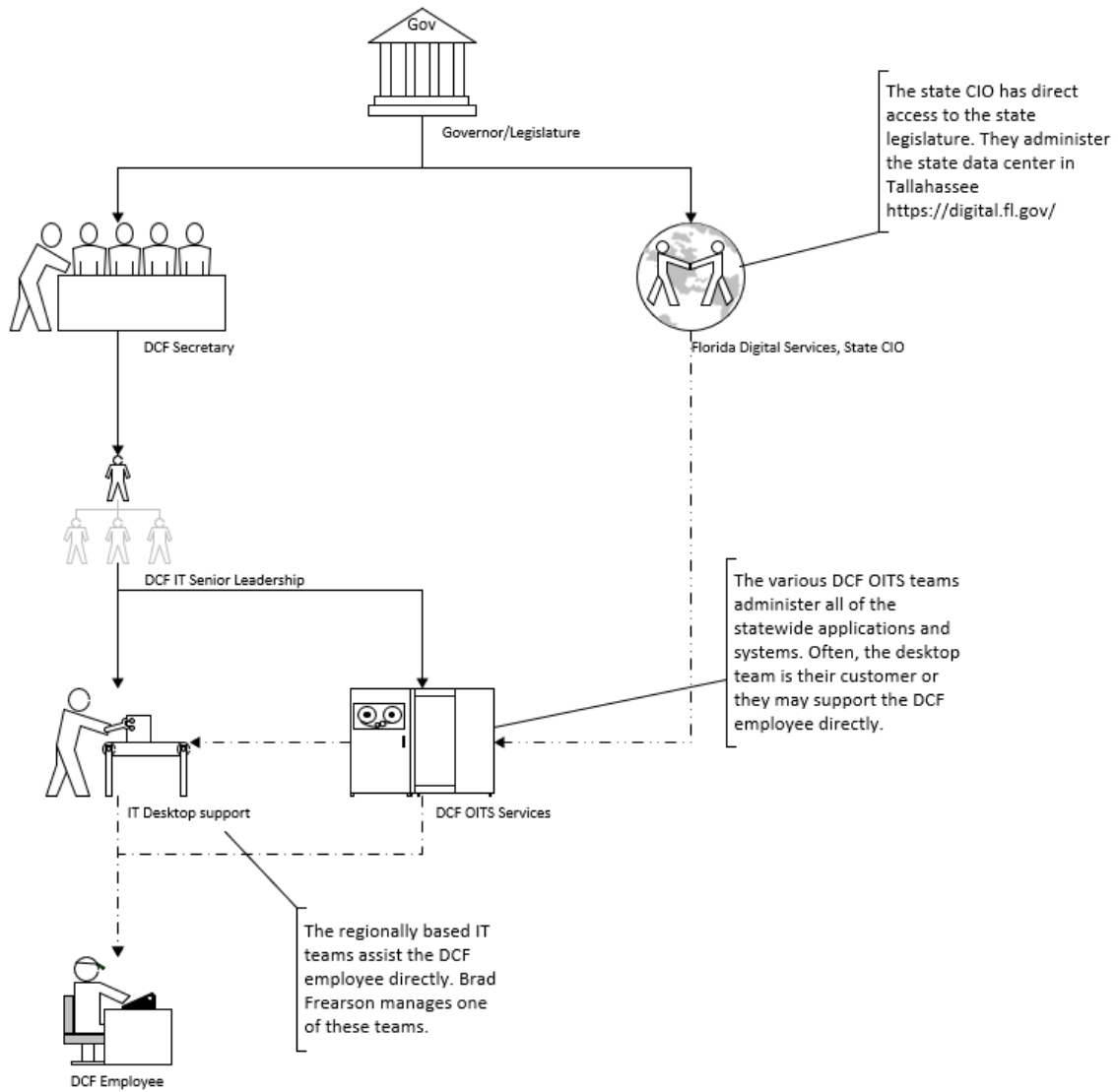
Source: Developed by Frearson Frearson, DCF SunCoast Region IT Director.

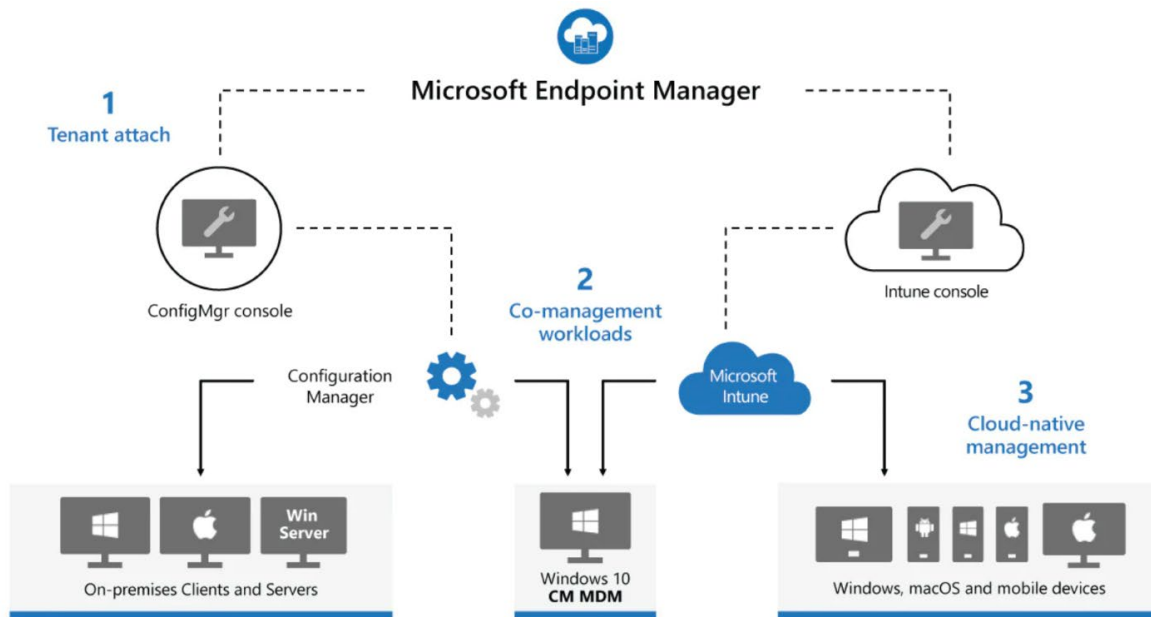## Exhibit 4: Magic Quadrant for Endpoint Protection

Source: Published 05 May 2021 G00450741. **Analyst(s):** Paul Webber | Peter Firstbrook | Rob Smith | Mark Harris | Prateek Bhajanka

Exhibit 5: Microsoft Endpoint Manager: A Unified Platform

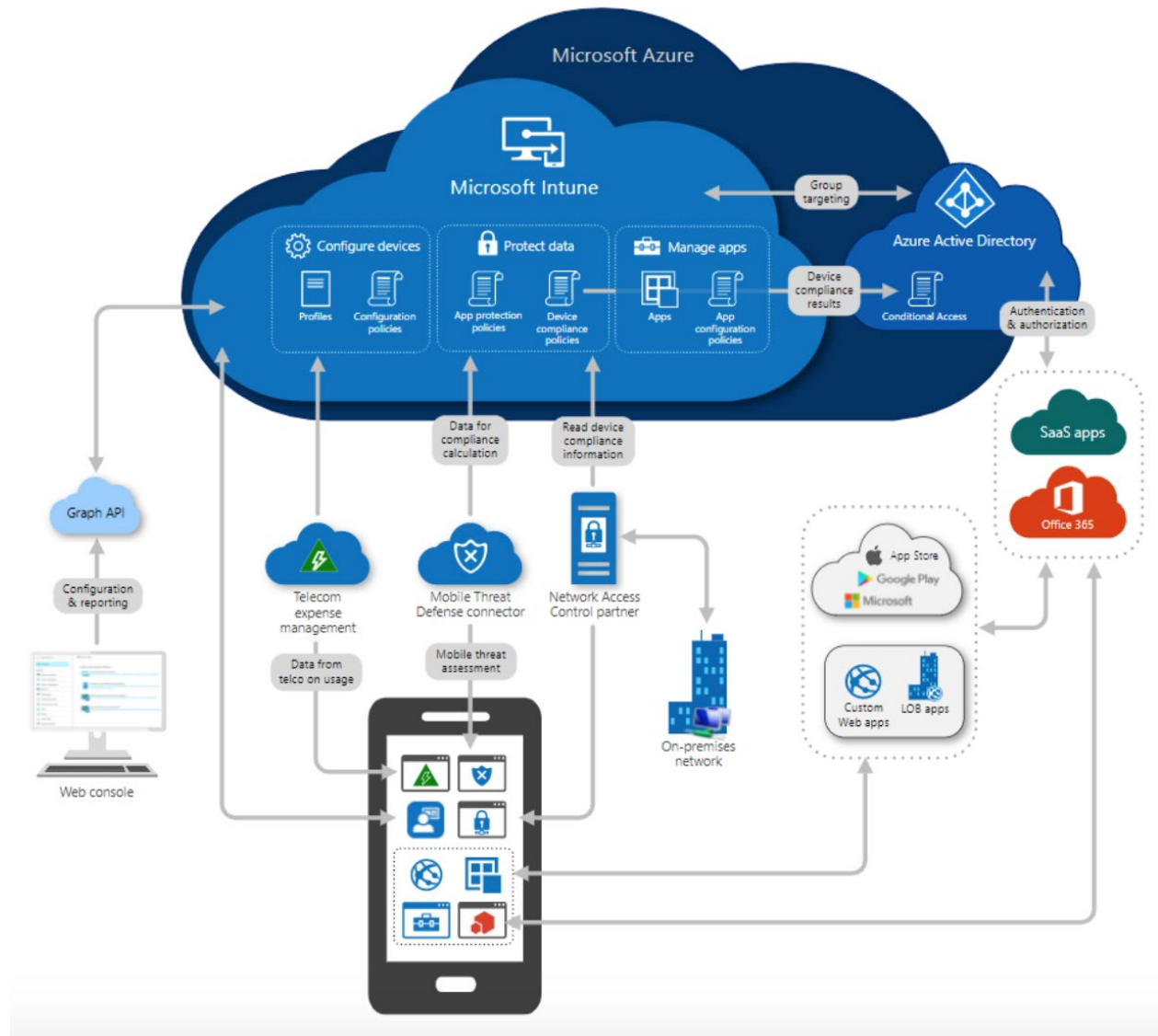*Source*: https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/security/business/microsoft-endpoint-manager

Exhibit 6: Microsoft Intune

Source: https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/mem/endpoint-manager-getting-started

Exhibit 7: Responsibility Assignment Matrix (RACI chart)

	PM	Server Team	AD Team	Smart Phone Techs	Digital Services	OITS Senior Leadership	Desktop Team	Helpdesk Team	Security Team
Project Scope	R	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Impact (network)	A	R	C	NA	NA	I	I	I	I
Impact (desktops)	A	I	A	I	NA	I	R	I	I
Impact (servers)	A	R	I	NA	NA	I	A	I	I
Educate Users	I	C	A	I	NA	A	R	R	NA
AD integration	I	C	R	A	I	I	R	I	I
Endpoint GPO alterations	I	A	R	C	NA	I	R	I	I
Software deployement	I	I	R	R	I	I	R	R	I

R: Who is responsible for the change?

A: Who is accountable?

C: Who is consulted?

I: Who is informed?

Source: Developed by Frearson Frearson, DCF SunCoast Region IT Director.

Exhibit 8: Microsoft Intune

Rollout phase	July	August	September	October
Limited Pilot	IT (50 users)			
Expanded Pilot	IT (200 users), IT Executives (10 users)			
Production rollout phase 1		Sales and Marketing (2000 users)		
Production rollout phase 2			Retail (1000 users)	
Production rollout phase 3				HR (50 users), Finance (40 users), Executives (30 users)

Source: https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/mem/intune/fundamentals/intune-planning-guide

Exhibit 9: Employee Interview

Nichole: Marla, describe the most significant ways that interruptions or delays in IT service have impacted your child protective investigator's ability to successfully perform their duties.

Marla: That's a great question Nichole. There are three different examples I can think of where IT issues have impacted my team member's ability to work.

1. When the Department was migrating to Microsoft Edge, all DCF employees were encouraged to stop using Internet Explorer as the default browser and to begin using Microsoft Edge. Unfortunately, my team was not able to access Florida Safe Families Network (FSFN) while using Microsoft Edge as the approved browser while working remotely. FSFN is the application designed to meet both State and Federal requirements for a child welfare system, including child protection, adoption, and foster care. The system automates casework practices, and integrates client, service, financial and provide data to provide workers, supervisors, and administrators with the information they need to protect children, help families, and manage child welfare programs. Child Protective Investigators (CPI) spend most of their time working in the field. They must have access to FSFN. There seemed to be a breakdown in the communication or deployment preparation in this instance.

2. Another issue that we ran into was computers reaching full memory capacity and crashing. My team members run several applications throughout their workday. The use of these multiple systems caused many team members to reach their max capacity of memory. While there was a simple fix to this issue- add more memory- we did not always recognize this issue early enough to proactively solve the issue. Unfortunately, many CPIs worked with very slow computers and had their computer crash before we were able to work with IT to mitigate the issue.

3. A final issue is one that can be extremely troubling. When a CPI must be issued a new laptop because the old laptop has crashed, there is no guarantee that all the critical documents on the old device will be transitioned to the new device during the imaging process. During child protection investigations, multiple sources of evidence are collected including interview notes and pictures. If a child protection case leads to a criminal trial, this evidence must be available for the prosecution and defense teams. Keep in mind, evidence may not be subpoenaed until two years after case initiation. Unfortunately, we have had instances that a computer crash and imaging issues have caused us to lose critical evidence that was needed during trial.

Source: Developed by case writer, Nichole Solomon. Interview with DCF's SunCoast Region Family and Community Services Director, Marla Timmons, September 2021.