

the dream org chart

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HighEdWeb Michigan

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Monday, May 20, 13

Hello, everyone, and thanks for sticking around for the last session of the day. My name is Aaron Rester, and I'm the Sr. Manager of Electronic Communications at the University of Chicago Law School. By way of introduction I've been working in the higher ed web in one capacity or another since I graduated from Oberlin College in 1999; I started there as a web intern, working for what was then called the Office of College Relations. When I moved to Chicago for graduate school, I worked as "webmaster" – also known as an army of one – for 5 separate Area and International Studies Centers as a 20 hour per week work-study job. That was turned into a full-time Communications Coordinator position in 2006, and I moved to the Law School in 2007 as part of a then 2-member Communications office that has since grown to 4. So I've worked in some very different circumstances in different parts of my career.

Web Governance

The authoritative administrative structures that set policy and standards for Web product management.

- Lisa Welchman

<http://www.welchmanpierpoint.com/blog/web-governance-definition>

Today I'm going to be talking about what's come to be known as web governance. What's web governance? It can be a slippery term, but the best short definition I've found comes from Lisa Welchman. The impetus for this talk came in part from the fact that when I would come to conferences like this, I very often found myself asking people how the department they work in was structured, and it seemed like no two schools ever had the same structure. And it also came from my own frustrations with what I saw at my own University, which has traditionally been very decentralized and where it frequently feels like the right hand doesn't know what the left is doing. And I'd see things happening at the University level and find myself thinking, "If I was in charge, I'd do it differently!" Anybody here find yourselves thinking that on a daily basis? I'm not naive enough to think that anyone here is going to back home and be able to implement the suggestions we hear today overnight, but maybe, just maybe, in 10 years someone in this room will be the one who actually gets to make these kind of decisions at their school.

photo by Flickr user ElBeardo2007



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Since this presentation has really come out of conversations with the community, I’m hoping that it will be at least as much conversation as presentation. I’ve planned a lot of time for discussion at the end, but If you have questions or comments, while I’m up here, please don’t hesitate to shout them out.

Web Departments in the Higher Ed Hierarchy

Research for a presentation at #hewebMI by @aaronrester on where web departments fit into higher ed org charts. Results will be made public.

What size is your institution?

- ☒ Under 1,000 students
- ☐ Between 1,000-5,000 students
- ☐ Between 5,000-10,000 students
- ☐ Over 10,000 students

How centralized is the production and maintenance of the web at your school?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Centralized ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very Decentralized

The group that does *the majority* of your institution's web work is part of

- ☐ IT
- ☐ Marketing/Communications/PR
- ☐ Admissions
- ☐ Advancement/Development/Alumni Affairs
- ☐ Some combination of the above
- ☐ Other:

How many people work for that web group?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2-5
- ☐ 5-10

When I began working on this presentation, the best place to begin designing the dream org chart, I thought, might be in our collective nightmares. So I decided to gather some data and pulled together a Google form asking a short set of questions, and sent it out over Twitter and the uwebd mailing list. Out of curiosity, how many of you in this room filled out this questionnaire?

Survey Results: <http://bit.ly/heweborg>

Preliminary analysis:
<http://blog.aaronrester.net/search/label/higheredorgchart>

I figured I'd get maybe 15 or 20 responses, just enough to give me a taste of what different schools are doing. Instead I wound up with exactly 100, which was just so exciting, for a number of reasons, not least of which was that it made figuring out percentages super easy. But the enthusiastic response also made it abundantly clear that there was a real hunger for this sort of information in the community. It also made it clear that just about every school has reinvented the wheel on its own in terms of how web departments are set up.

What size is your institution? (n=100)

- ❖ Under 1,000 students: 5%
- ❖ Between 1,000-5,000 students: 40%
- ❖ Between 5,000-10,000 students: 14%
- ❖ Over 10,000 students: 41%

How centralized is the production and maintenance of the web at your school? (n=100)

- ❖ 1 (very centralized): 21%
- ❖ 2: 17%
- ❖ 3: 29%
- ❖ 4: 24%
- ❖ 5 (very decentralized): 9%

How many people work for the group that does the majority of web work at your school? (n=100)

- ❖ 1: 14%
- ❖ 2-5: 60%
- ❖ 5-10: 17%
- ❖ Over 10: 9%

What kind of tasks does that web group perform? (n=100)

- ❖ Website Development 94%
- ❖ Information Architecture 87%
- ❖ Visual Design 87%
- ❖ Content Strategy and/or Production 77%
- ❖ Social Media Management 61%
- ❖ Application Development 58%
- ❖ Server Administration 36%
- ❖ Other 9%

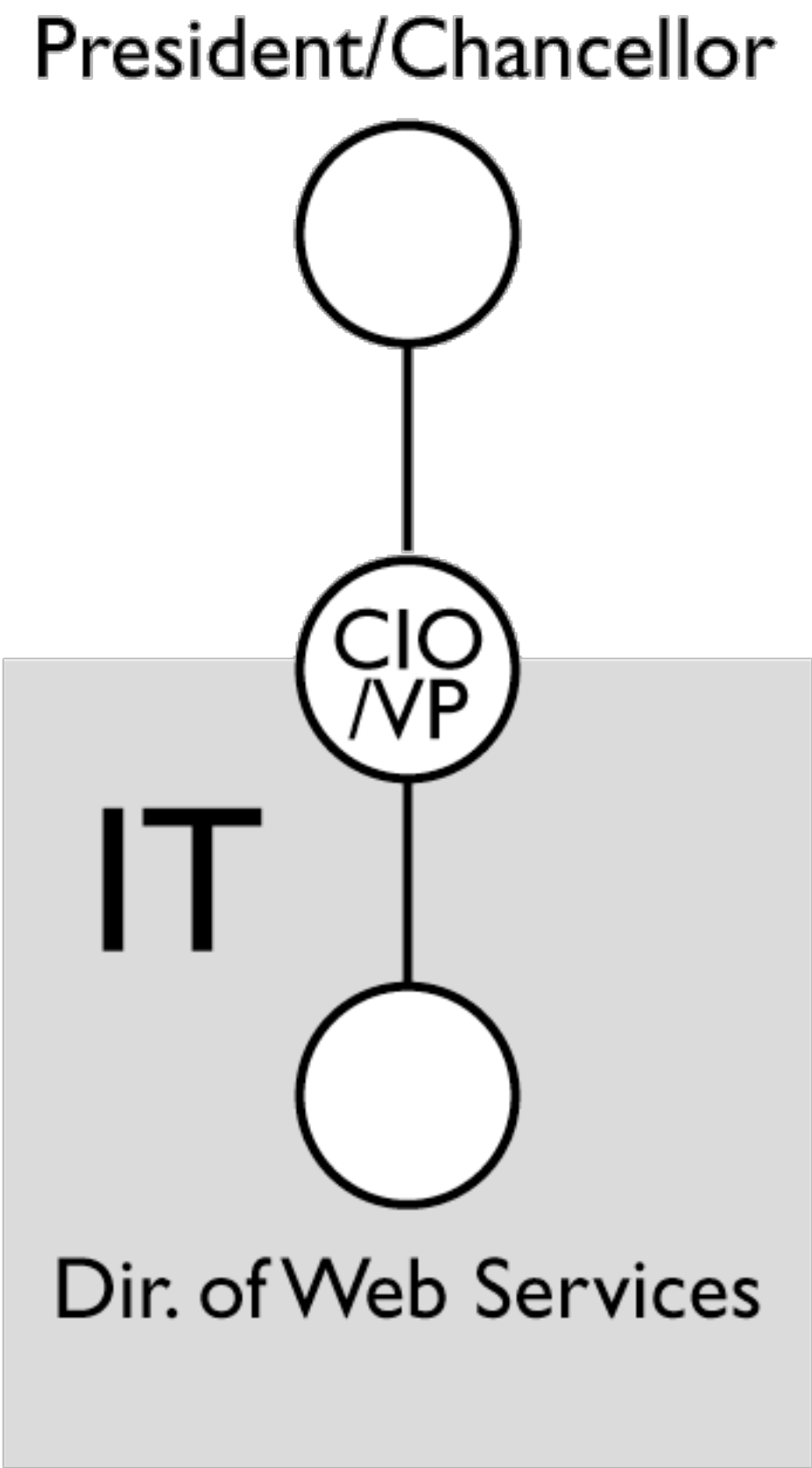
The group that does the majority of your institution's web work is part of (n=100):

- ❖ Marketing/Communications/PR: **59%**
- ❖ IT: **23%**
- ❖ Some combination of the above: **12%**
- ❖ Other: **6%**

Average levels of hierarchy between President or equivalent and head of web department (n=69): 1.8

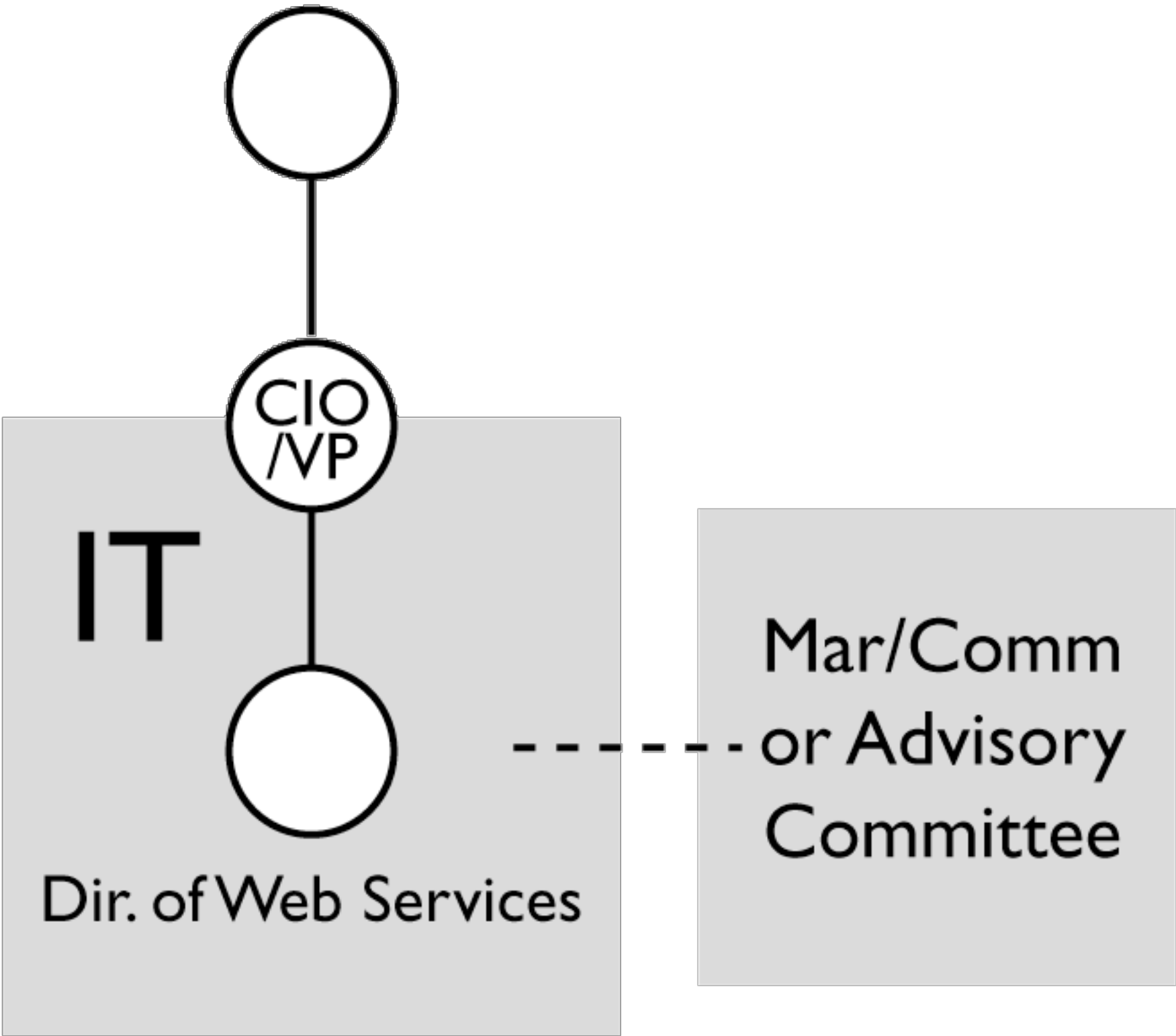
Now we start to get to the heart of the matter, which is where the web department lives in the institutional org chart. Re: hierarchy, unsurprisingly large schools tend to have slightly more levels than small schools.

Let me ask: anyone else surprised that nearly a quarter of these schools still house their web departments under IT? It's not totally absurd, IT was probably where all of our schools started on the web, and there's still plenty of overlap: difference between marketing content and applications like registration is blurry to most users, but it seems to be a model that's on it's way out.

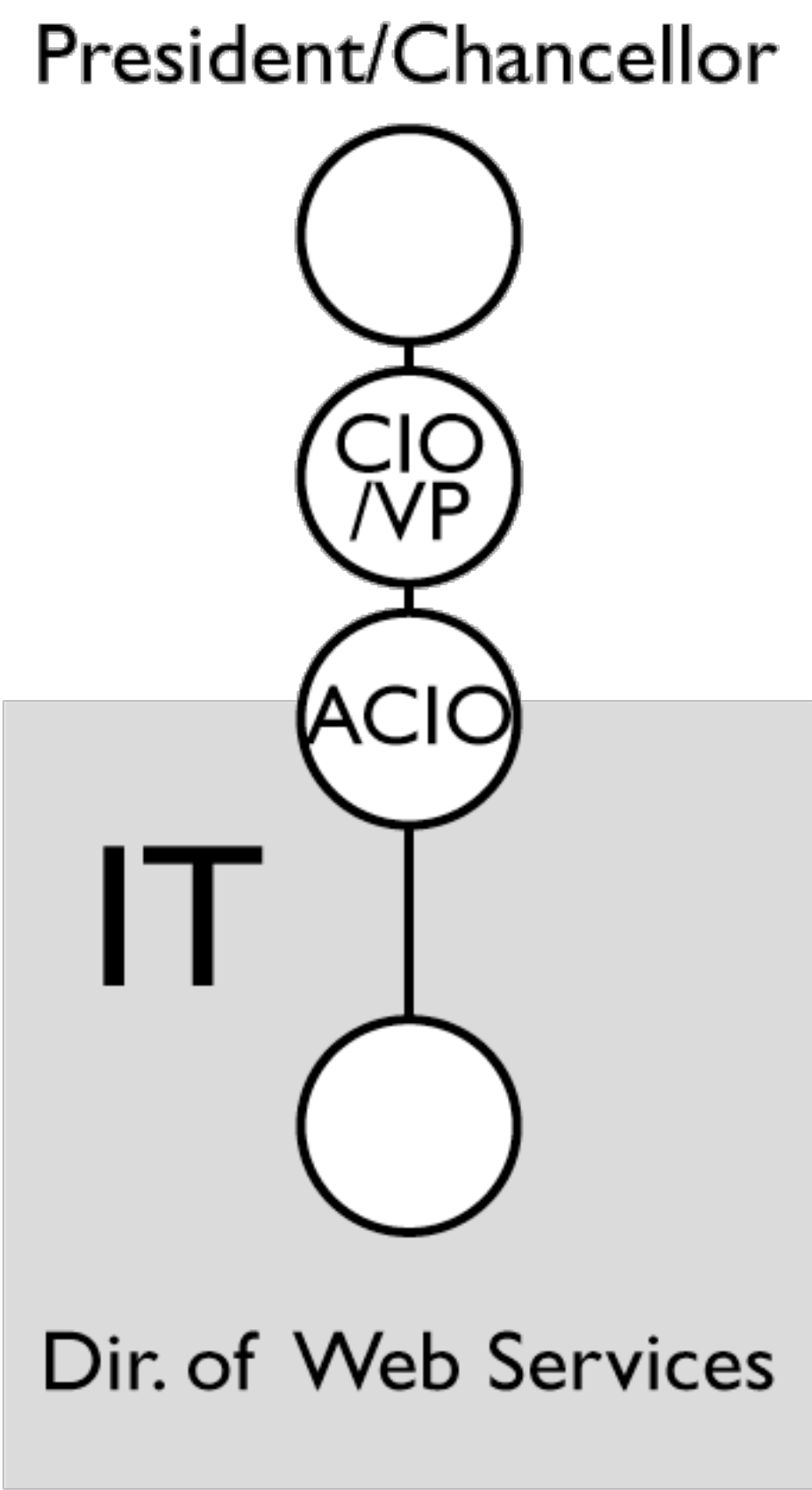


So what do org charts for web departments in IT look like? Arrangements like this were not uncommon.

President/Chancellor

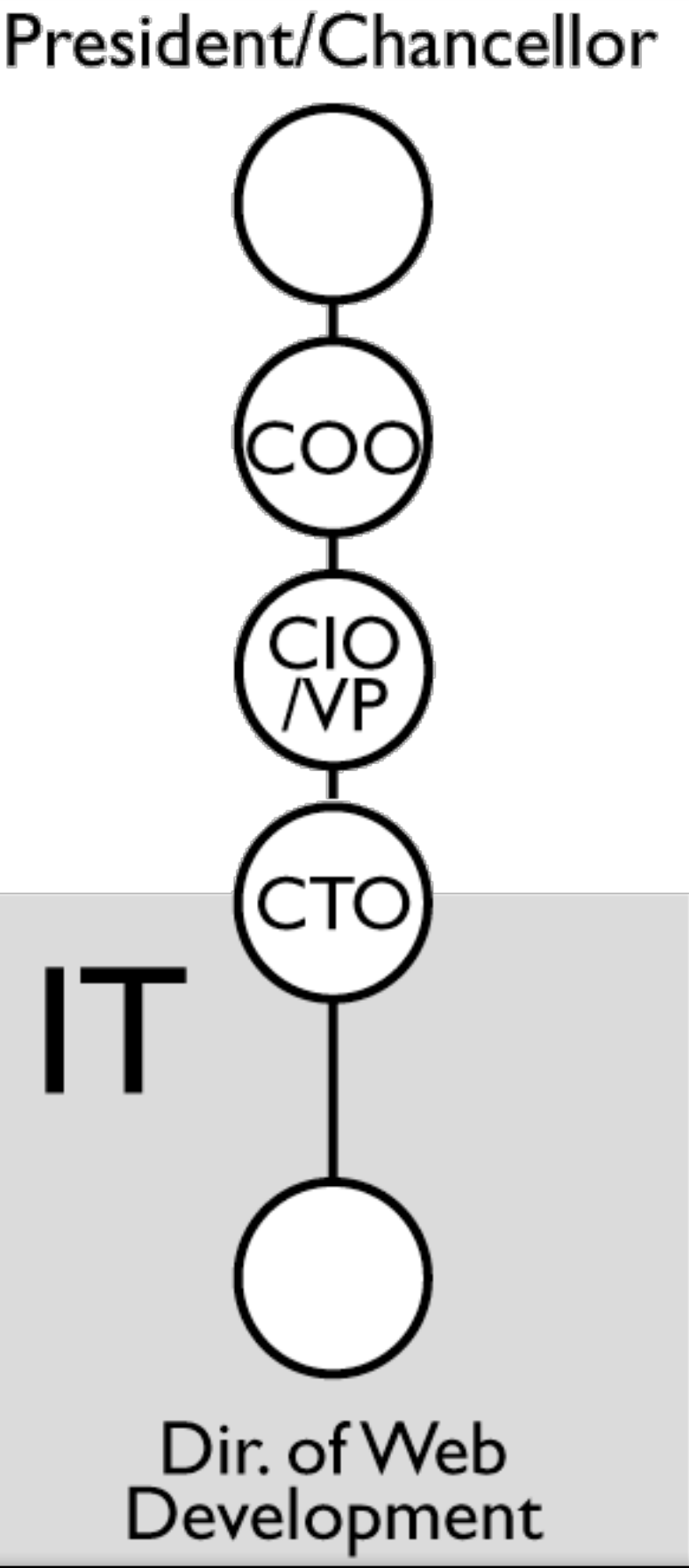


There is frequently some input from Marketing or an advisory committee.



Web departments contained in IT actually had on average fewer levels of hierarchy separating them from the top than on average (1.5), but you do sometimes see organizations like this...

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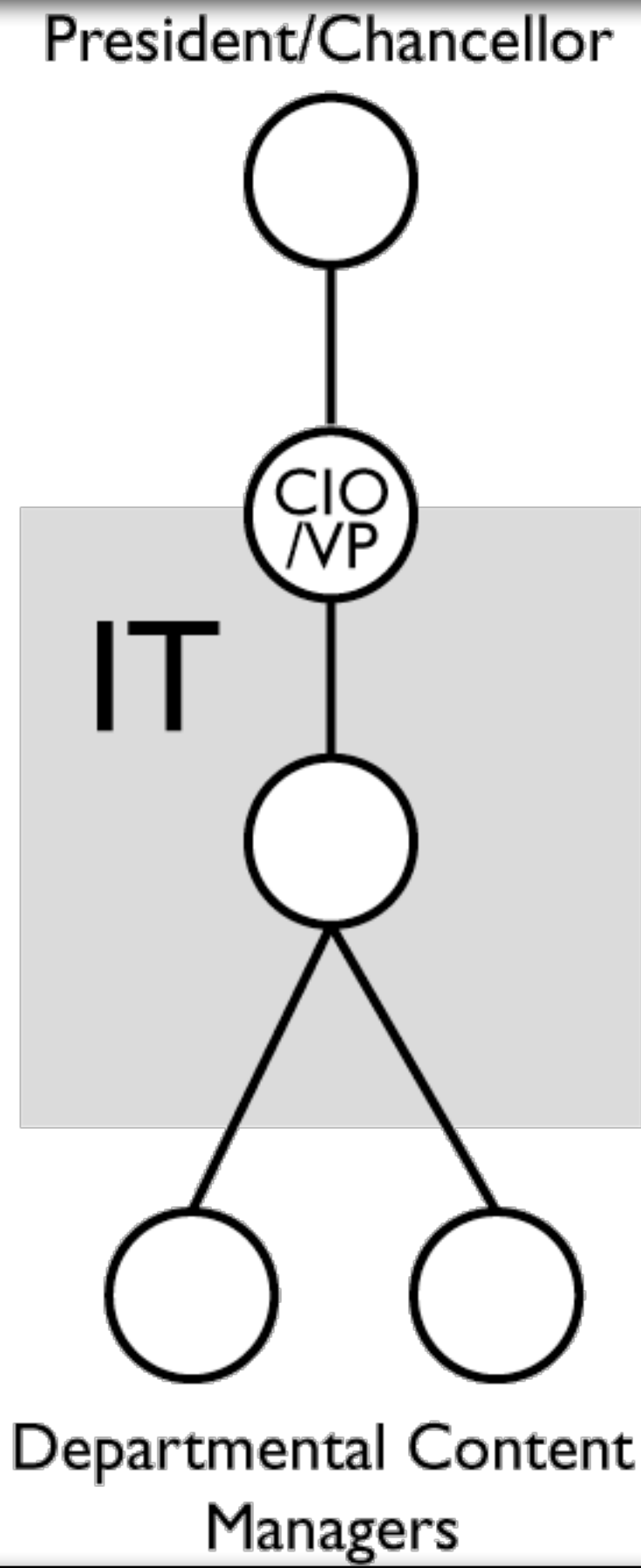
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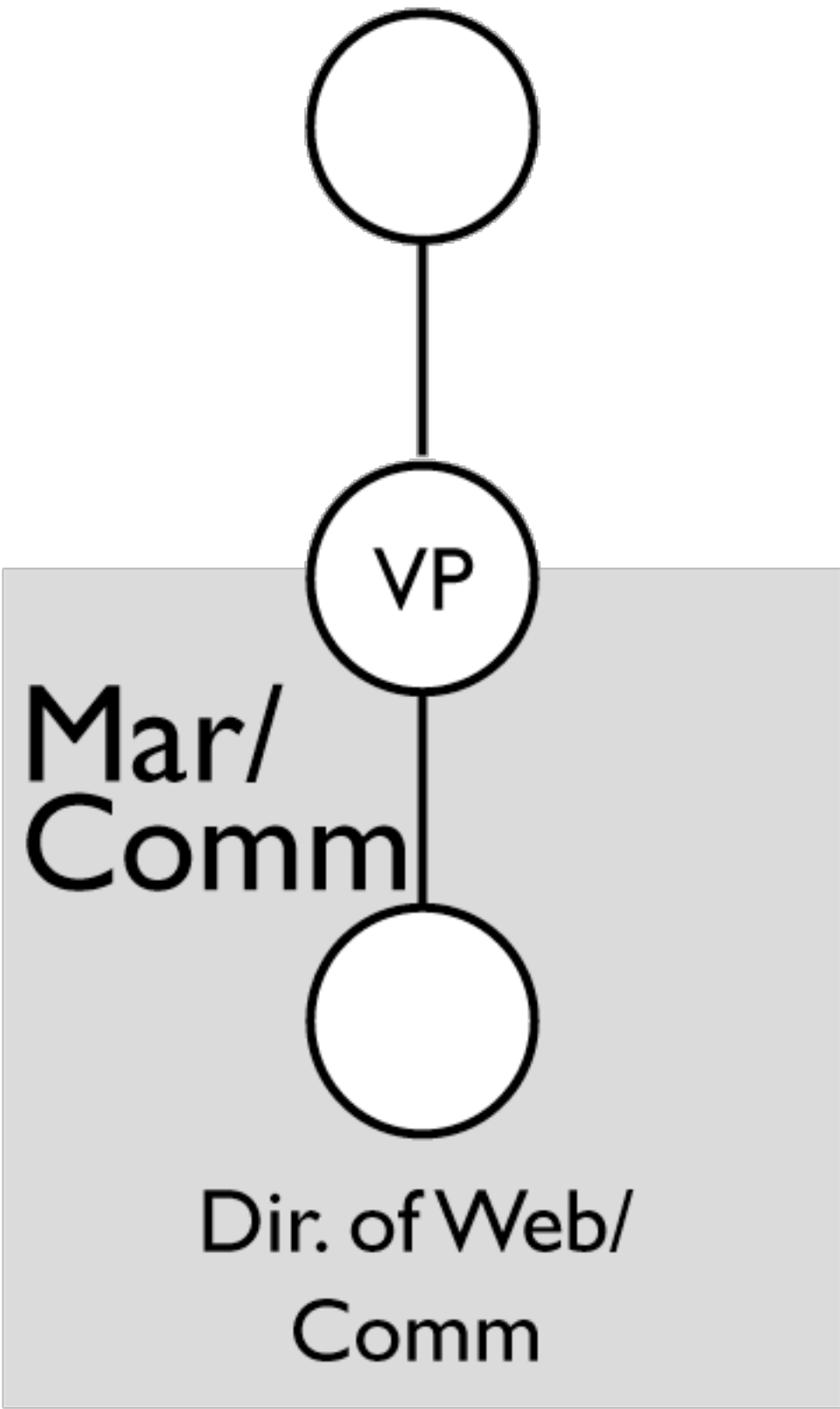
... or even this.

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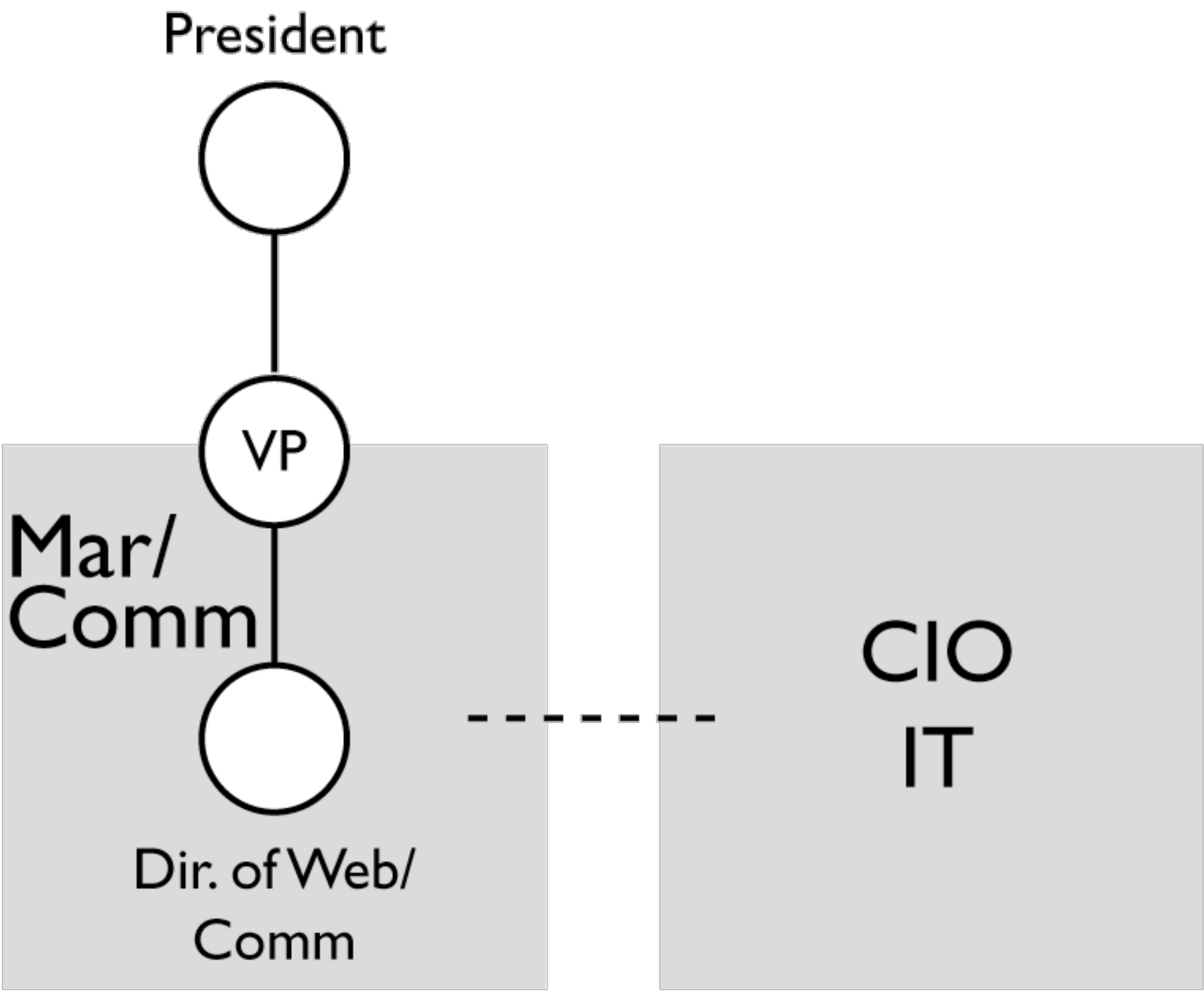
There were some interesting anomalies, as in this set-up, where Departmental Content Managers live outside of IT but report to the head of the web department.

President/Chancellor



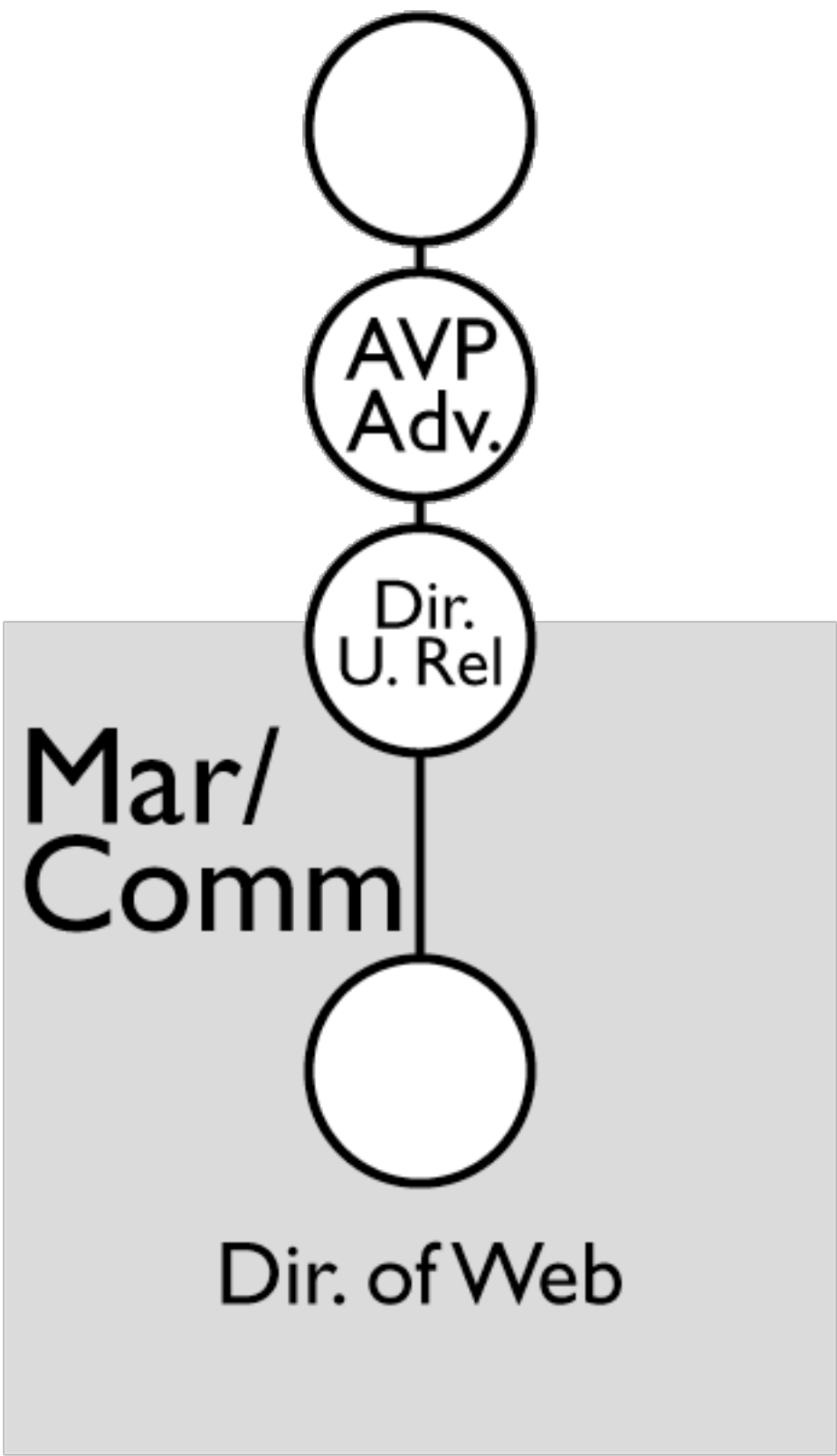
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Web departments living in Marketing or Communications weren’t all that different in terms of where they sat in organizational structure. The biggest difference seemed to be what the wide variety of people to whom the head of Marcomm reported; included Advancement, Enrollment Management, External Affairs, Community Outreach.

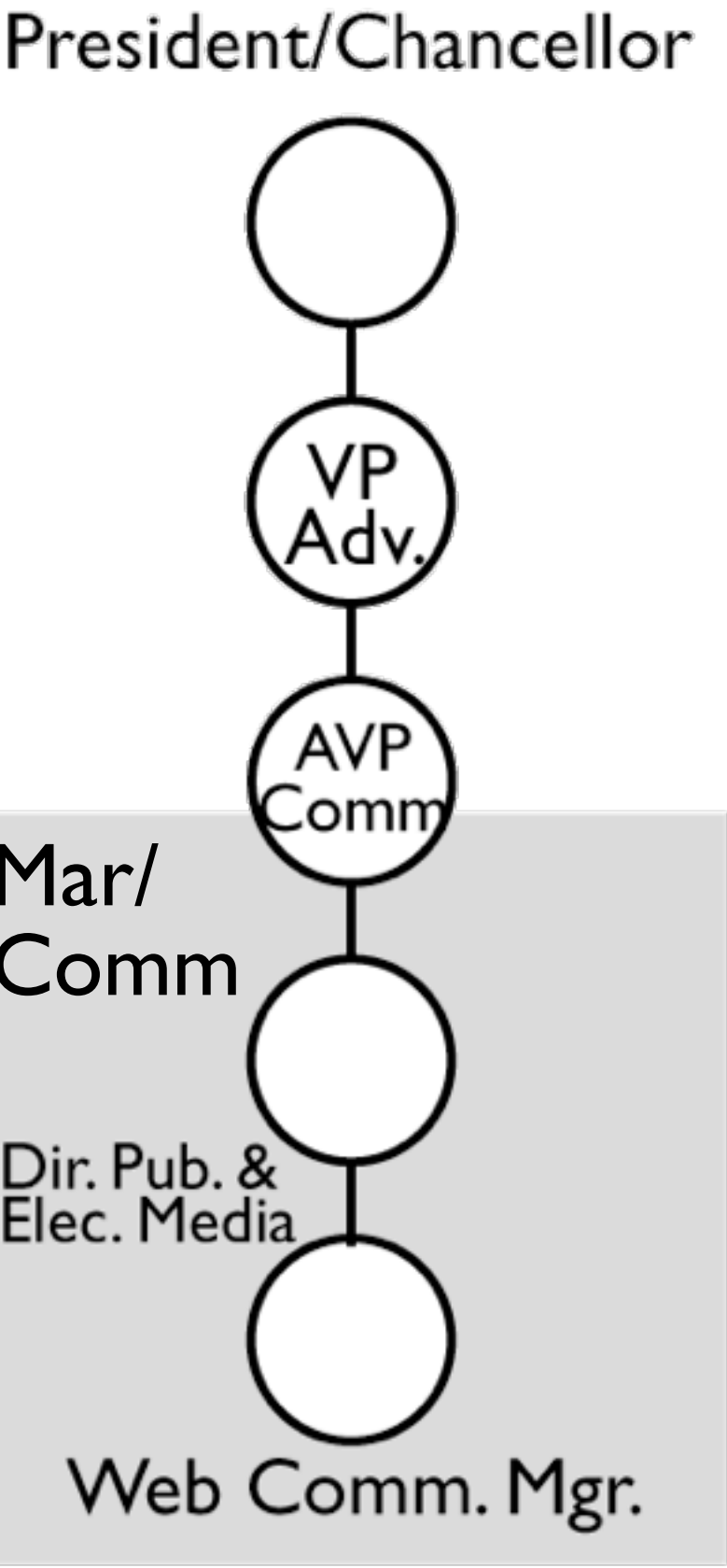


As we saw in looking at IT, there is frequently some sort of overlap, whether a dotted line reporting or some sort of close collaboration. This is what it's like at the University level at Chicago, where the content people live in Communications and the people who build and maintain websites live in IT.

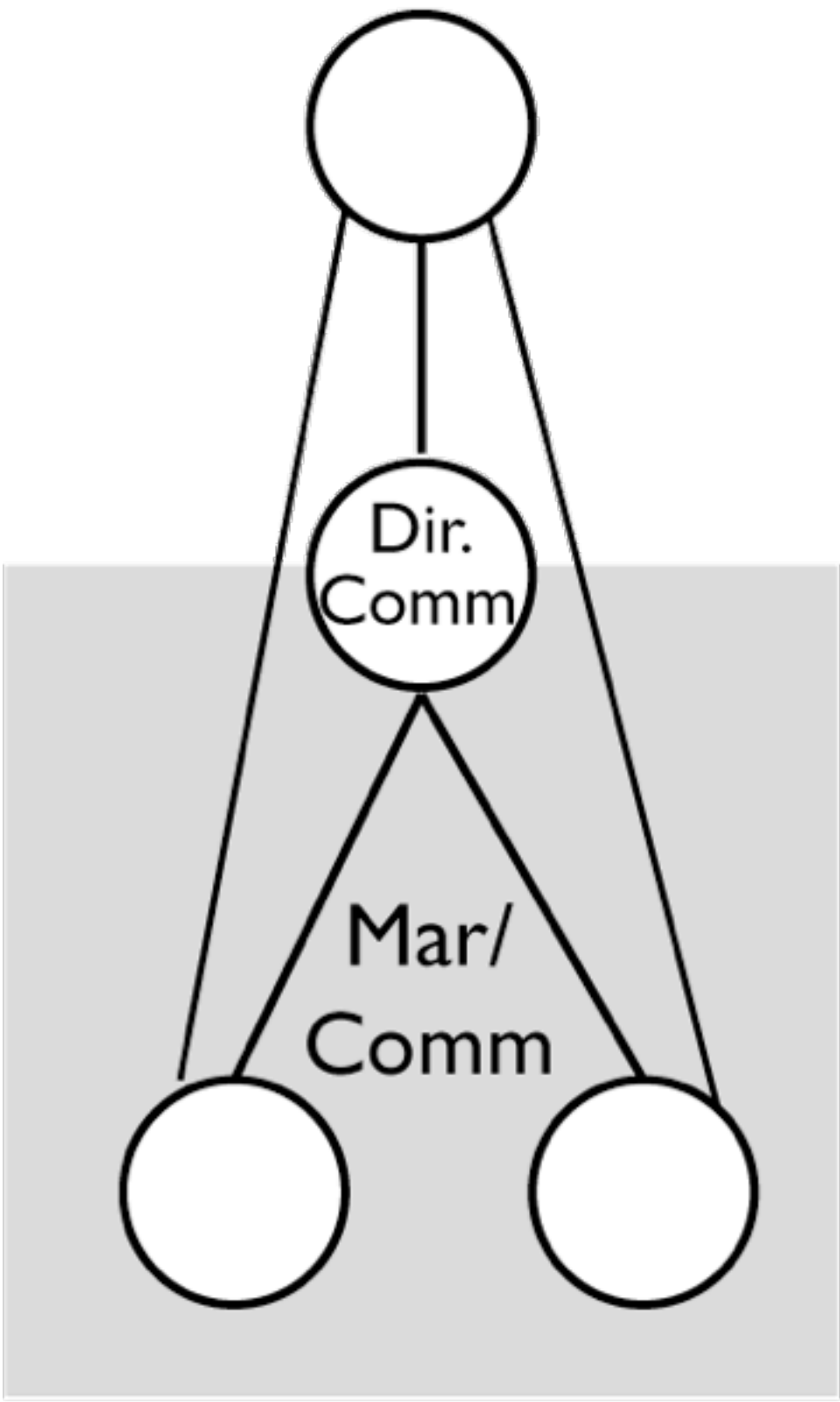
President/Chancellor



And, as in IT, we did see some monster bureaucracies.



President/Chancellor



And again, there were some interesting anomalies, as in the case of this school whose flat reporting structure allows anyone to bring issues directly to the president.

Problems

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So after poring over all of this information, I sat down to try to figure out what, if I was building it from scratch, would my ideal org chart look like. The first step was identifying the problems that we seem to often have in the existing setups. The first is decentralization; leads to a lack of brand consistency, a lack of coordination, and the wasting of resources as efforts are doubled or tripled in different places within the institution.

Problems

Decentralization

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photo by flickr user cyborgsuzy

“SILOS.
Knock those
m*****ers
down.” @bpmore



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Problems

Decentralization

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But there’s another problem... too much centralization. Can be inefficient, causing bottlenecks; results in frustration for downstream units if central processes are not transparent.

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Centralization

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Jeffrey Zeldman, “Let There Be Web Divisions”

<http://www.zeldman.com/2007/07/02/let-there-be-web-divisions/>



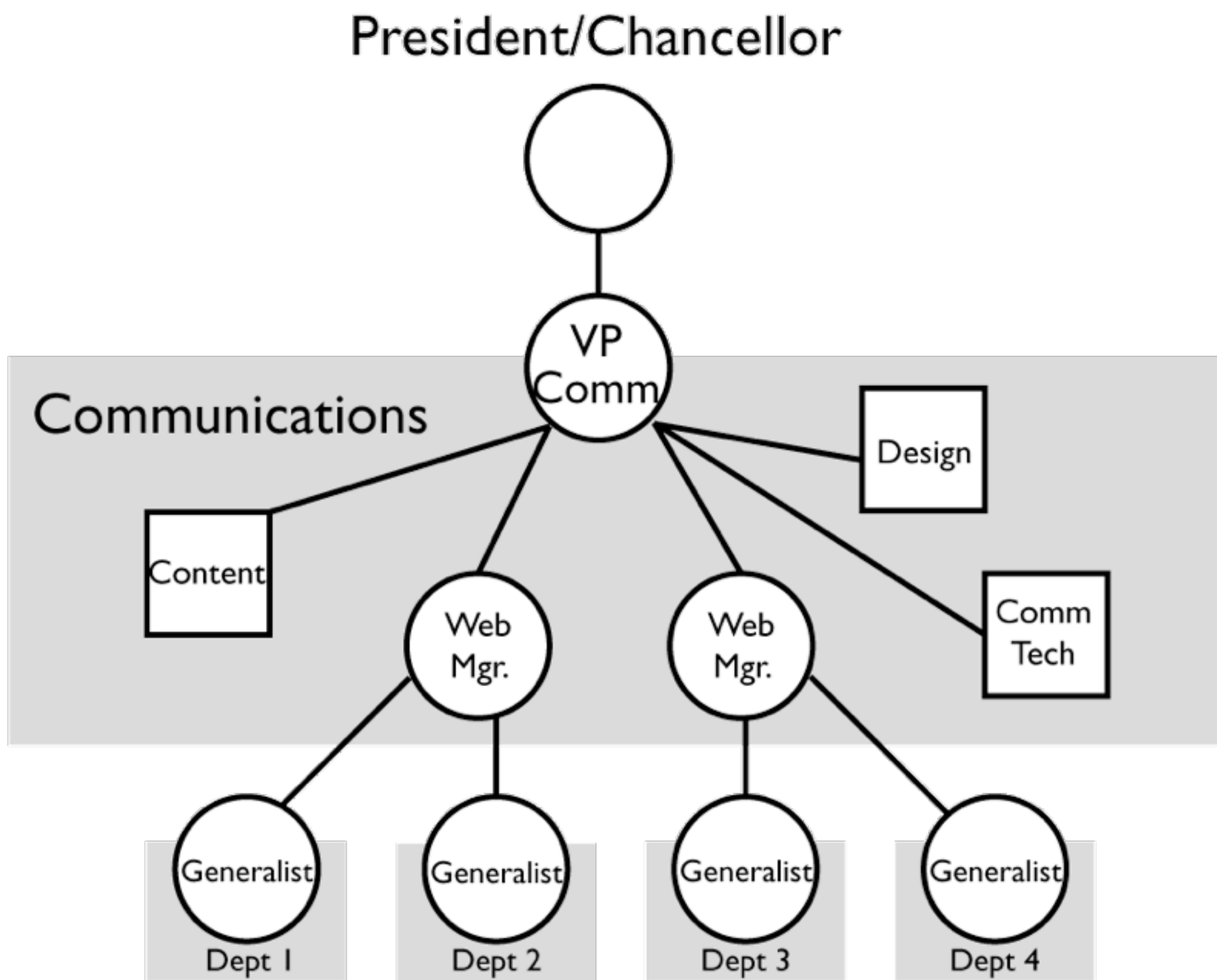
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One of the first things that occurred to me in thinking about this was Jeffrey Zeldman’s post “Let There Be Web Divisions.” Back in 2007 he wrote “Business and non-profit decision makers, for your users’ good, consider this request. Stop separating the members of your web team. Cease distributing them among various (often competitive) divisions led by people with limited web expertise. Let the coders, designers, writers, and others charged with creating and maintaining your web presence work together. Put them in a division that recognizes that your site is not a bastard of your brochures, nor a natural outgrowth of your group calendar. Let there be web divisions.” I’m not sure that will ever happen in higher ed, but to be honest I’m not sure I think it should. The web is not a stand-alone enterprise, it’s inherently cross-disciplinary. So what do I think that our institutions’ web organizations should look like?



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Something a little bit like this. I think the web usually ought to be contained within a communications division, the web is at its core just one of a number of communications media that all organizations need to ensure are working together. However, it’s time that leadership recognizes that the web -- and here, I should be clear that we’re really using web as a shorthand for all kinds of digital communication -- is probably now the most important communications medium out there in terms of its scope and its necessity to the educational mission. So how I have this organized is a VP for communications who reports directly to the president -- we’re making sure there is only one level between the web and the topmost level of the institution. Under the VP in the communications department are a number of sub-departments, represented by squares here; there may well be others, but I think it’s especially important to have content, design, and communications technology represented. What is comm tech? I think it’s time we recognize that coding and server administration has very little to do with, say desktop support and setting up projectors for professors. So comm tech would consist of developers and the support of networks and hardware that directly impact the mission of communications.

Then you’ll see, reporting directly to the VP, what I’m calling here web managers. These are roles that would have as their responsibility several related departments, for example social science academic departments, or admissions, financial aid, and student services; they would serve both as strategists and project managers, translating the institution’s strategic goals into their particular departments’ idiom and also coordinating the content, tech, and design departments in projects for their “clients”. Their most important job, though, would be talking to each other, finding out what’s going on elsewhere in the school and collaborating with each other to identify strategic and tactical overlaps and disconnects among the various departments. Finally, reporting to the web managers are what I’ve called here “generalists.” These would be jack-of-all-trades types who work for the communications office but are embedded in individual departments, able to take care of everyday issues like making updates in the CMS, ensuring brand standards are followed at the department level, and so on; they also serve as an important bridge between the upper level of the institution and

Does the group that you identified as performing the majority of web work at your institution charge other departments at the institution for its services? (n=27)

- ❖ No: 81%
- ❖ Sometimes/It depends: 11%
- ❖ Yes: 7%

Finally, a word about resources. A follow-up question that I asked of those who shared their email with me was about whether their web departments charged other departments in the institution for their services. I was honestly rather shocked to see that over 80% said no. I can see both sides of the argument for or against chargebacks; on the one hand, we're all working for the same organization, adding a layer of having to move around imaginary numbers just makes us less efficient and makes your colleagues feel like they're being nickel and dimed to death. But on the other hand, if you don't charge, people tend to greatly undervalue services perceived as "free," and have a tendency to waste your time on stuff that has very little bearing on the strategic goals of the institution.



“Trying to be a strategic web team while operating under a client services model is a recipe for failure. You can't do both well.”

- @radiofreegeorgy

Ultimately, I think I come down on the side of Georgy Cohen here, who says...

Anyone disagree with this?

So what's the solution.

Credits

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I would argue for, instead of a traditional chargeback system, a system of credits that could be based on the actual pool of person-hours that the communications department has available to them. These could be doled out equally to the various departments who make use of your services at the beginning of each year, or if necessary the administration could provide direction on areas of strategic importance that might require additional attention and therefore be budgeted additional hours. This has the benefit of not costing resource-strapped departments actual cash, but still showing them that your work has value; it also allows smaller and less-resource-rich departments greater opportunities to become contributors to the school’s communications.

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So what about this model do you think would work? What wouldn't?