

To: Department Of Biomedical Informatics
From: Daniel John Sullivan
Regarding: Resignation

I must state that there are many reasons why I do not want to resign. I would like to have better memories of this experience at the UW. I would like to avoid looking for work in an economic climate like this. I would like to avoid an uncomfortable employment event on my resume. I also know that I do not qualify for unemployment if I resign and so the wolf is truly at the door and by my own choosing – but somehow I think this is better than simply being too afraid to speak.

Most of the people I have worked with since I started at the UW last July have been hard working and of good character. I believe that the informatics professionals here at the UW mostly want to direct their efforts towards solving difficult and value impacting problems. You have, in your employ, men and women like Faisal Mirza, Richard Veino, Andy Smith, Shannon Bailey, Mike Kuffle and others who work day and night to keep the systems going. They are people who could be doing brilliant work if it were not for the fact that they spend much of their time keeping Microsoft Amalga from crashing. It would be amazing to see what they and others might accomplish if they could spend more time on the informatics and less time on the triage of this terrible octopus – Microsoft Amalga.

Microsoft Amalga is the worst software system I have ever seen. It clearly has the price tag of an enterprise system, but it is:

1 – unreliable/fails/crashes often (please review the Amalga email threads if you don't believe me)

2 - not transparent

3 - has very badly designed user interfaces (like the 'console')

4 - Amalga is filled with vendor lock-in

5 – It contains none of the features you would expect to find in a scalable, contemporary data warehouse. I was able to document and demonstrate a 50% reduction in data foot print by just moving from the current 'amalga way' of storing data to a Kimball model. The Microsoft engineers said they would get back to me at a some point in the future concerning this. I'm sure they will.

6 – It's data model looks like something built by someone new to databases and data warehouses. It's a horrid combination of misapplied HL-7 and a kind of homage to the 'spreadsheet' way of doing things (they call it post relational, I call it GSI GO – Good Stuff In, Garbage Out). The data is stored in the most naive and least efficient way possible and all of it is tied together by azAEID and the amalga id system (I hate to use the word system here because I have respect for the word 'system').

7 - It cannot be audited effectively for its quality

8 – On the topic of the “amalga id”, I think this is the principal way in which Microsoft achieves vendor lock-in.

I have made all of my technical assessments public on the Amalga intranet Sharepoint site – please review that material for greater specificity.

Accepting the job at SLU/BMI was a moral failure for me. I should have resigned last fall and looked for employment elsewhere outside the sprawling UWMC system. I think my mom passing changed things and threw everything in my world into chaos. Accepting this job from Dr. Anderson and Dr. Stein was wrong and for that I am sorry. Dr. Anderson is a good boss and intelligent researcher. He and I have a very serious (from my perspective) professional disagreement. I wish this disagreement had a clean solution, but it does not. He is my boss, if he wants me to use a tool or technology – even if I think it is the less effective solution – he has a right to order me to use it. I also have a right to resign.

A former Amalga team member let me know by phone call, a few weeks ago, that no one on the Amalga team wanted to work with me. A few weeks before that, while going to attend a meeting concerning indexes on Amalga, I was told by this same person 'I was not welcome'. I think, to his credit, he was being honest. His statement grants me the freedom to feel no professional regret with respect to the UW or the state of this project if I leave now.

Dr. Anderson let me know Friday night not to expect a good reference. I completely understand this. I seriously doubt I will ever be a good reference to anything I have seen at the UW since July of 2010.

In summary, these are the reasons I am resigning:

- 1) I don't see a way to work with the Amalga team given what I know about the system they manage. I don't see a way to work with them when I have documented evidence of an animosity and or hostility towards me emanating from that team. The comments from my co-worker mentioned above are only part of a documented history. This project needs someone who can work in a collegial fashion with his peers on the Amalga team, what my co worker said puts that into question.
- 2) I have a professional disagreement with Dr. Anderson. He has the authority to direct how this project is implemented, I have personal ethics and professional values that demand that I raise the alarm if what we are doing is going to be less accurate, less efficient and less effective than what could be done if we focused primarily on solving the problem and less on making sure we use some particular technology. I have serious issues with the design of i2b2, but at least it doesn't have a license fee. Dr. Anderson's response to my attempt to propose a different course of action is a concrete example of our impasse. He needs this project to use i2b2 in its current form, I think in its current form and earlier incarnations it is an inferior and buggy solution to this problem. I don't see how we get past this disagreement.

I wish the UW good luck and I hope it greater wisdom in its purchasing and acquisition of software. I hope the next time they decide to buy or build a clinical data repository that they get better advice. Mostly, I hope that the UW wastes less money on crap like Microsoft Amalga and uses more of that money to help patients.

Dr. Anderson would like me to resign immediately -- I'm OK with that. I let him know I would have my desk clean by Monday, 9 AM.

Daniel John Sullivan