Taking a holistic approach to ITIL processes

A holistic approach

If you want to increase the value of your own organization or those that you service then you must focus on delivering outcomes that meet customers' expectations and offer real value. This goal is complicated by the fact that outcomes change and what would have been acceptable one week may not be acceptable the next.

This is where scrutinizing and continually modifying your processes is the key to achieving optimum outcomes. By introducing Business Process Management (BPM) into your service desk environment, you can immediately begin to embrace a CSI culture, a key element of the ITIL Service Lifecycle. But if you want to achieve service delivery that is business-focused and value-driven, then you need to adopt a top-down holistic service culture.

Key challenges

Achieving a holistic service culture is easier said than done. Inertia and reluctance to change established procedures can sometimes mean that bad rather than best practices can prevail. Bottlenecks in the operation can often hamper good service but understanding why these occur can be trickier to assess.

In particular in larger companies where there are multiple services and a complex array of back-office systems, there are often delays in service due to the fact that the support desk is having to run through a series of long-winded processes to come up with a solution. This is not only costly in terms of time and resources but it also means that IT staff are often pre-occupied with fire-fighting so they don't have the time to concentrate on more proactive tasks that will maximize the return on investment in IT services over the longer term.

The role of business process automation

Breaking down the procedures into individual steps or processes can help shed light on service quality issues. By focusing on BPM, a service manager has all the tools necessary to identify areas where service management is under-performing and address these by adding new processes that increase quality of service.

So how easy are new processes to implement? Managing change is often met with resistance, but BPM gives you a mechanism that allows you to continually evolve your service desk operation without the normal 'pain'. This is done by automating processes, so that IT staff don't even have to think about new ways of doing things.

Automating processes also gives you greater control over quality because you know that the correct procedures are being followed throughout the organization. Of course you also need flexibility to meet changing requirements and the advantage of BPM is that you can introduce a process almost instantly with 'drag & drop' functionality. No time-consuming coding is required and new processes can be applied for particular staff or across the entire organization at the same time.

Positive and measurable outcomes

Once a new process is introduced you can then measure the impact on outcomes. So if the new process results in a more positive outcome and greater value, it could potentially be applied to other parts of the business. This means that you can learn and profit from your experiences, building a model for service excellence.

Likewise, many IT support issues can be resolved faster if there is easier access to key data or knowledge-bases. Typically, however, this type of information is secreted in back-office systems and is difficult to retrieve. By introducing processes that automatically link into the relevant information silos, the day-to-day quality of service can be vastly improved because all the relevant data is immediately at hand via a single screen. Alternatively this information can be automatically fed into a self-service portal for customers, freeing up valuable time and resources.

The author recently worked on a project with a telecommunications equipment vendor that wanted to improve its customer service. By introducing automated processes for Incident, Problem, Service Level and Configuration Management the company decreased its average incident resolution time by 26%. At the same time they were able to reduce the number of missed resolution deadlines from 4% to 1.5%.

Automation can also have a big impact on improving the efficiencies of IT departments for medium to large companies. One company in the banking sector was recently able to reduce the number of incidents caused by errors in IT infrastructure by 78%, whilst the automation of approval and planning processes speeded up changes in the corporate information system by 43%.

The heart of the matter

For ITIL to have a meaningful impact on improving IT services, you need to live and breathe it. When IT resources are stretched it can sometimes be difficult to balance ITSM with the principles of ITIL and the wider business benefits. Automation of business processes can make it easier and less cumbersome to put ITIL at the heart of your strategy. It helps on-going development of best practice for IT professionals and promotes better outcomes for customers and measurable returns for an organization.
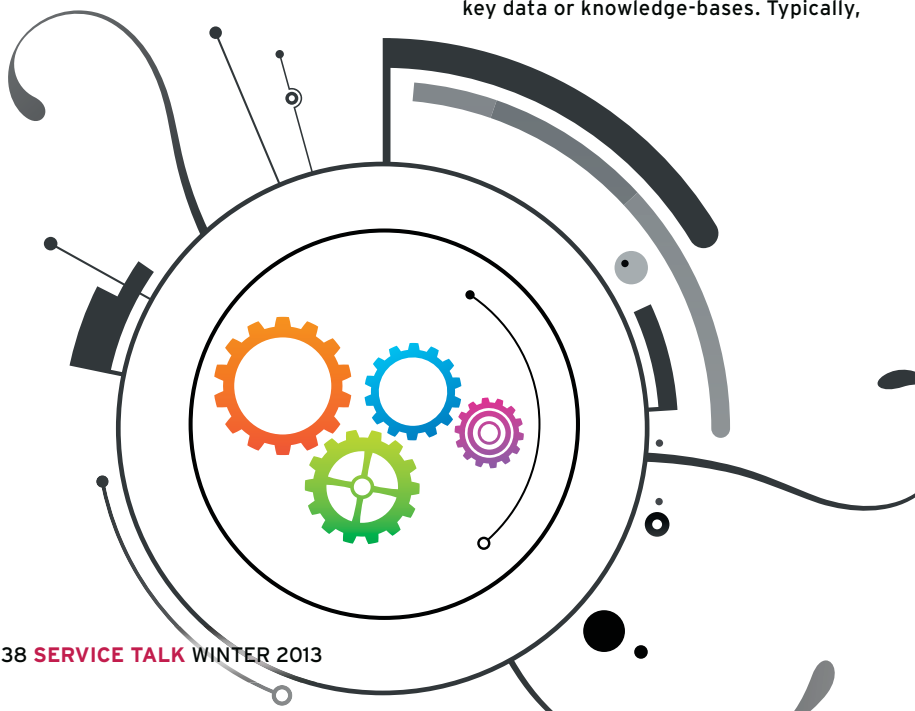
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