



Service Desk Success: An opportunity for differentiation

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White Paper

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In a world of multi-media and globalization, it is a constant struggle for organizations to stand out in a saturated marketplace. Be the business financial, educational, private, health or not-for-profit, the need to positively differentiate from competitors is the only way to gain an edge over the ever-present competition.

Promoting a culture of service management, both internally and externally, is the key to being more relevant to customers within any market vertical. This allows organization to shape its products and service based on the specific requirements of its customers and encourages business confidence by providing more reliable service and support.

Internally, IT service management encourages a clear understanding of actual IT capabilities, and promotes IT service continuity. In most cases, the largest percentage of the IT spend is in on the day-to-day support costs and this can be reduced by an effective service management process.

Service management ensures IT resources are aligned with business requirements, and allows the IT department to appropriately identify points of flexibility and adaptability within the services they provide. This ensures service issues and change requirements are handled efficiently and effectively, to keep organizations running at an optimum level.

The Service Desk

The point in service management where people, process and technology blend to deliver a business service is at the Service Desk. The service desk provides the essential daily contact between Customers, Users, IT service and any relevant Third-party support organization. The main objective of the service desk is to drive and improve service support to, and on behalf of an organization.

This Customer-facing support service is a single point of contact that provides advice, guidance and rapid restoration of normal services to its customers and users. It handles Incidents, Problems and Change requests. More than this, it also manages maintenance contracts, software licenses, and provides Service Level Management, Configuration Management.

The successful implementation of a service desk results in a professional service that builds business confidence and provides greater customer satisfaction. This is a result of the professional service that is positioned to provide a consolidated and fiscally positive business activity that impacts all aspects of service beyond the IT department. The key to service desk success is the employment of professional people, well-defined and repeatable processes and good tools, which in turn makes the product or service being supported, to some degree, immaterial.

Adopting a service management approach results in benefits across all level of any business:

- Customers – obtain a sustainable, reliable, secure, quality service
- Line Management - achieve greater control over the change management process
- Senior Management – can monitor performance and adjust resources appropriately
- Boards - gain confidence from the adoption of best practices service, which in turn are mitigate personal risk
- Business Partners - provides greater control over inter-business risks.

Customer Loyalty

To differentiate from the competition and make a business more critical to its customers, an organization can use customer feedback accessed through service and support, to shape the company and product/service direction. By responding consistently and appropriately to customer requests, a loyal customer base is established. This enables the business to succeed through the sale of related products and service to existing customers.

New business can also be won through the ongoing referrals from satisfied customers, and the research and development process for new products and services can be enhanced by a greater understanding of the customer base needs and wants.

To be successful at this endeavor, organizations can use technology to enhance the business process, by harnessing IT to deliver improved customer satisfaction. Businesses can employ service management best practices and measure its service results, in an effort to promote an environment of continual improvement, in order to build trust and maintain customer loyalty.

Employee Satisfaction

A service management culture also motivates staff and engenders job satisfaction through a better understanding of capability and improved management of expectations.

An investment in IT service management, illustrates that organizations value its people more than just tangible assets, as it uses technology to support, not just monitor employee performance. It allows staff to be hired and trained relative to their capabilities, which is relevant across all areas of an organization, and allows employee rewards to be linked to performance.

Employee satisfaction is also linked to customer satisfaction, which in turn fosters loyalty, profitability and accelerates business growth.

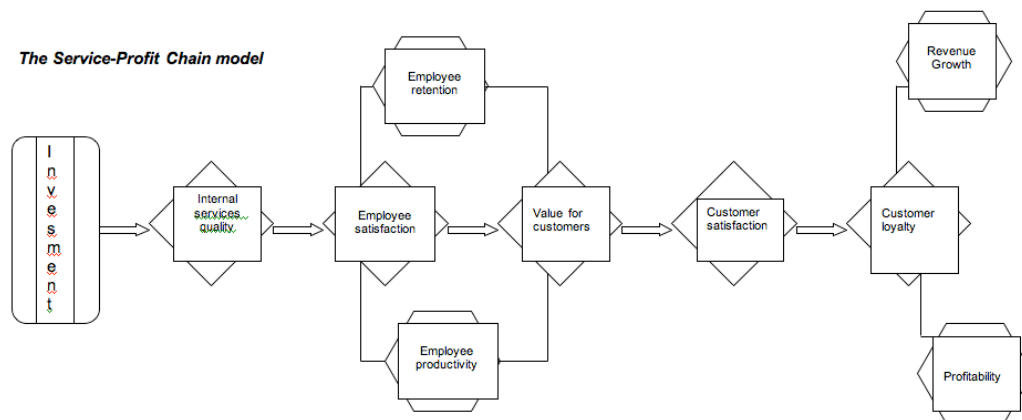


Figure 1: The Service-Profit Chain Model (Pg 28 OGC book)

ITIL and Service Management

Service management is a generic concept and the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) provides guidelines for organizations to readily improve its IT operations and business processes. Although it makes no sense on its own, ITIL helps businesses to focus on the things that matter, by aligning IT infrastructure with business services.

ITIL guidelines are scalable, therefore relevant to any sized organization and can be applied to distributed or centralized systems, be they supplied in-house or outsourced. The standards based approach, allows enterprise-specific controls to be developed and implemented, in an effort to promote a culture of continuous improvement. This approach saves money when IT service management is central to an organization but is not the organization's core business.

The ITIL guidelines consist of five libraries of information:

1. The Business Perspective
2. Managing Applications
3. IT Service Delivery
4. IT Service Support
5. Infrastructure Management.

The following information deals specifically with IT Service Support.

Improved service support

At the point organizations are judged based on the quality of its service support, businesses need to assess how its IT services, meet the customer and business requirements. Where a support service already exists, an organization needs to ask the following questions:

- Does our support team log and understand the technical nature of customer difficulty at first point of contact?
- Do they respond relevant to degree of urgency stipulated by the customer?
- Does the support team communicate with the customer regarding the follow-up activity? Do they meet the expectations outlined to the customer?
- Do they complete work with the minimum disruption to the customer, and in a positive and professional manner?
- Is customer follow-up action taken? For example, ensure the issue is resolved and the customer is happy.

Organizations need to know that all service requests are handled in a consistent manner and with good communication as business confidence is gained when customers know that a support service are managed in this way. Confidence is lost when service requests appear to go

into a “black hole”. That is, a customer service request is dealt with using an unpredictable and inconsistent process.

The inconsistency may be due to the support team having no formal processes or standardized procedures. This means the staff cannot rely on their colleagues for assistance, as no-one really knows what is expected of them. In this situation, the service staff have no real idea how their role affects the organization as a whole.

To successfully differentiate an organization within any market, high quality and predictable IT service is required to drive increase business and revenue. However, this requires the IT service support process to move from an ad-hoc, chaotic process to an ideal of value-add service.

Achieving service support

To build a service support culture that underpins the success of an organization, strong leadership and vision is required. To develop a business based on service, an organization must:

1. Understand its current position. Is the service offering: Chaotic? Reactive? Proactive? Service? Or Value?
2. Set the goal, regarding the level of service management needed to best support the business.
3. Set the right personal performance metrics and rewards that will encourage staff beyond fire-fighting and reactive support mode
4. Dedicate time and training to document repeatable processes and become proficient at their execution
5. Continually review the service, to ensure an active predictable service quality is maintained.

The implementation of formalized processes provides cost-effective and consistent IT services, which allow organizations to handle service requests and change in an efficient way with minimal disruption to customers. Such improvements to the quality of service and support, allows IT service to become a true business asset.

For organizations to successfully capitalize on the potential of IT services they must:

- Develop a culture of IT operations excellence
- Create well-defined, repeatable processes that undergo continual refinement
- Build an organizational structure that underpins the processes
- Measure and report on the success and future of the processes.

Selecting a Service Desk application

Many service desk tools are available to capture and manage the service support processes for Configuration, Incident, Problem, Change and Service Level Management. With such variety, thought must be given to what works best for the business. The following questions can be asked regarding possible tools of choice. Which tool:

- offers the degree of control required for your business, so that adjustments can be made easily when maintaining an environment of continual improvement?
- ensures that the organization can implement best practices when it comes to the service support processes?
- allows the organization to easily map the desired workflow/s for each of the processes and adjust as required?
- allows the service manager to effectively monitor the service desk performance against service agreements?
- integrates tightly between the change management process and configuration management – to the extent that data can be drawn from an asset management discovery tool, and automatically create a change request before being entered into the CMDB?
- is so easy to use, it requires minimal training to use for customers and users alike?
- does not require a full time administrator?
- capitalizes on the organization's current infrastructure?
- includes reporting capabilities to monitor performance against service agreements?

Other questions to be considered include:

- How is the tool configured, through the user interface or the back-end?
- Is the application fully accessible from anywhere?
- Can the application's functionality be extended using other programs or web-services?

Conclusion

The implementation of service support standards provides organizations with the opportunity to differentiate its business and service offering from its competitors. To be successful, an organization must make an honest assessment of its current position and use this as the basis for planning its future achievements.

To successfully provide predictable, high quality service, businesses must develop formalized processes that are constantly monitored and reviewed. In order to achieve this, the service desk

application adopted by the organization must tightly integrate Incident, Problem and Change Management with an easy-to-use workflow engine and the Service Level Management process. To ensure the cost-effectiveness of IT infrastructure, an embedded CMDB must be easily accessible to the change management team.

To guarantee the service desk is running at an optimum level and meeting its service targets, reports should be easy to generate and readily distributed to the relevant parties. And as customer communication is paramount for maintaining satisfaction and this can be provided through multiple channels, including email and a customer portal. A central port of knowledge should also be readily accessible to re-cycle useful information and solutions, but also empower customers to provide their own fixes.

The change process required to implement a culture of service and support, requires support across the organization as a whole. A standards-based approach such as ITIL provides the guidelines for making the change, which result in the alignment of business objectives and customer needs with IT infrastructure that provides benefits across all facets of the organizations and ultimately to the bottom-line.

For more information:

For more information about LiveTime Discovery or to discuss how LiveTime can assist you in your Discovery or Service Management project, please visit our website or contact us at info@livetime.com.

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