



SERVICE MANAGEMENT: BEST PRACTICE 'NOT ENOUGH'

Computing SA
27 July 2005

With major software vendors – such as Heat, Computer Associates and Remedy – all embracing "best practice" methodologies in their latest help desk offerings, the spotlight is now on growing marketplace demands for better service management solutions.

Edward Carbutt, a director at Quintica, the local supplier of Marval IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) based service management solutions, says process based tools represent only part of the requirements for delivering a quality service. The real answer comes from aligning all service related products and systems within an ITIL framework.

The growing trend, as evidenced by new releases from major help-desk software vendors, is to embrace "best practice" methodologies in their offerings.

This represents an important step towards the broader acceptance of service management as a key discipline by large corporations.

Service management solutions are designed to align IT resources and processes to directly support the most critical business processes. They are also key to facilitating compliance with government regulations and defined industry best practices.

However, it is argued by many industry watchers, that this does not go far enough to in terms of addressing the complex technologies surrounding service management and its optimisation.

IT Infrastructure Library

This is where IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) technology steps in. ITIL goes beyond a set of "best practices" for running an IT organisation.

ITIL's use actively forges a bond between IT, management and external customers by offering them a single language and defined channels for communicating with one another.

Organisations that are serious about their service improvement programmes should look at ITIL.



Service Desk

One of the most important areas within the corporate structure where “best practices” are crucial to customer satisfaction is in the “help desk” space.

Historically, vendors addressing help desk applications have limited their focus to reactive incident management programmes, handling so-called ‘trouble tickets’.

It is not surprising that organisations have outgrown these first generation tools – along with legacy software management systems - as they progressed through the stages of service excellence, from “chaos” to “structure” to “being proactive” thus resulting in them having to implement modern Service Desk technology.

Reduce Costs

If a key objective for companies is to add value to their businesses then there is a complementary need to limit the risks associated with many traditional operations.

At the same time there is always a requirement to reduce the costs associated with IT implementations.

This is resulting in demands for traditional helpdesk vendors to realign their products with ITIL requirements.

In terms of risk reduction, ITIL streamlines the resolution of problems associated with traditional IT operations and that usually clog the processes of the help desk.

For example, a series of incidents that involve both processes and management issues often be linked in ITIL terms and be reflected as a single failure, obviating the masses of administration common to most problem resolution processes.

More significantly, ITIL is able to assist in predicting failures, based on past occurrences, to be seen as a proactive business tool rather than one limited to basic operations.

Challenge of Change

The challenge that many of vendors face is that they have legacy functionality from the previous era, which makes it difficult to deliver fully process integrated business solutions.

From an ITIL point of view, the configuration management database (CMDB) is a critical element of the overall solution. It which contains the infrastructure of the organisation. Tightly integrated with the CMDB goes the processes of change and configuration management.

When changes are not efficiently introduced with proper release management, incidents result, which, if not measured and controlled effectively by service level management, could result in substantial financial losses.



Total integration of ITIL processes will allow business, and not only IT, to understand the impact and risk of changes and/or the non-availability of business services at a glance.

Service management solutions, which are often cumbersome to use, are most likely to be blamed for the lack of good infrastructure management. This becomes more evident as operational silos fail to communicate efficiently in "synergising initiatives" to successfully implement projects.

The importance of dependencies on the CMDB of often overlooked or missed. And when presented in data format are not seen as useful.

Maturing Industry

In South Africa, industry is now maturing and accepting second- generation ITIL tools, such as MSM from Marval. MSM was designed, by the co-authors of ITIL and the BS15000 standard, as a fully integrated Service Management tool from the start.

Their goal was to deliver ITIL functionality standard "out of the box" as an off the shelf product, yet with the flexibility to configure standard ITIL processes to accommodate business specific requirements.

With this in mind, staff education is also important to spread the ITIL message and skill people appropriately. After all it is "great people who deliver great service", so investing in staff development will give a far higher return on investment than software applications with limited scope.

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