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Los Alamos National Laboratory - DOE Best Practices

The AskIT Service Desk: A Model for Improving Productivity and Reducing Costs

Overview

Los Alamos National Laboratory provides a single point of contact, the AskIT Service Desk, to address issues that impact customer productivity. At the most basic level, what customers want is for their calls to be received, to get a response from a knowledgeable analyst, and to have their issues resolved and their requests fulfilled.

Providing a centralized, single point of contact service desk makes initiating technical or business support simple for the customer and improves the odds of immediately resolving the issue or correctly escalating the request to the next support level when necessary. Fulfilling customer requests through automated workflow also improves customer productivity and reduces costs. Finally, customers should be provided the option to solve their own problems through easy access to self-help resources such as frequently asked questions (FAQs) and how-to guides.

To accomplish this, everyone who provides and supports services must understand how these processes and functions work together. Service providers and those who support services must “speak the same language” and share common objectives. The Associate Directorate for Business Innovation (ADBI) began the journey to improve services by selecting a known service delivery framework (Information Technology Infrastructure Library, or ITIL). From this framework, components that contribute significant business value were selected. Added values were found in the following areas:

1. Develop processes to allow functional and organizational units to work more seamlessly with each other.
2. Design roles and responsibilities so that “who does what” is clearly understood within processes.
3. Implement the tools necessary to execute defined processes.
4. Assess and validate processes and tools for continual improvement.

Strategic vision of service management improvement required execution of these tactical elements:

1. Develop the support center model as a single point of contact for intake, resolution, and escalation of issues for customers.
2. Define service offerings, who owns the service, and who provides the service to customers.
3. Implement an online catalog of customer-facing services.
4. Develop processes to resolve defects and fulfill requests for technical and business services.

5. Implement a consolidated service management ticketing tool to replace multiple standalone tools.
6. Build knowledge into the service catalog for customers and technicians.
7. Improve services based on defined success factors and measured performance indicators.
8. Improve the customer experience of using support services.

Benefits

Benefits from service management are derived from the AskIT Service Desk and the online service catalog in these ways:

1. A focus on investing in our staff as well as continual improvement of processes and tools.
2. A single point of customer contact makes it easy for customers to know where to go to find help.
3. Responds quickly to incidents and requests.
4. Reduces costs.
 - a. The use of a common service management ticketing tool reduces costs related to licensing, maintenance, operation, and training.
 - b. Work intake, escalation, and resolution (including both defects and requests) are managed through a single tool. Automation, workflow, and process improvement lead to more effective intake, triage, escalation, and resolution of work.
 - c. Work is scoped to ensure that the appropriate labor performs the correct tasks, freeing up subject matter expert time to improve existing services and deploy new services.
5. Services are uniformly defined so that customers easily determine how to obtain service and support without the need to know which organization provides the service.
6. The online service catalog promotes the following:
 - a. Self-service: For most services, the service catalog includes knowledge that can be used by customers to resolve issues without support assistance. (The catalog received 1.3 million hits in 2015, many of which were customers looking at this self-service information). The catalog is updated frequently; outdated information is changed quickly because customer input is a significant element of the improvement loop.
 - b. Faster service: Many services in the catalog include self-service FAQ information as well as links to initiate a service request that creates a work order that is automatically assigned to the appropriate fulfillment team.

7. Links to articles provide analysts and technicians the knowledge they need to provide efficient, effective, consistent, rapid, and friendly support.
8. The service onboarding process ensures excellent support. Before the service is offered to customers, the onboarding process is used to ensure that answers to FAQs are available, all levels of support personnel are trained, the support escalation process is understood, links to service requests are available, and the service owner and provider(s) are known.

Resource Requirements

Staffing: The IT Service Management initiative requires the following staffing levels:

1. AskIT Service Desk management and staff: 15 full-time equivalent positions (FTEs)
2. Tools Team: 2 FTEs (for technical administration and development)
3. Service Catalog and Knowledge Manager: 1 FTE
4. Service Automation Analyst: 1 FTE
5. Report Management: 1 FTE

Training: AskIT trains new analysts in a wide array of process and service knowledge. The majority of this knowledge is also available to customers and technicians from the service catalog. Furthermore, the service management ticketing tool training is generally offered and available to Tools Team staff and to Service Request Definitions Analysts. IT Infrastructure Library framework training is available to staff who work with process implementation or improvement.

Annual Licensing for Service Management Tool: A very low annual maintenance renewal cost of \$24,000.

Implementation

Prior to 2010, services were managed and delivered at the organization level. Information about services was available through web pages offered by the organization responsible for the service. Web pages lacked formality, consistent updates, and were rife with jargon, acronyms, and inaccuracies.

Issues were recorded in numerous ticket management databases, but service often began with dispatching a technician onsite (often effective, but nearly always inefficient and expensive). Each organization had a service desk with a separate phone number; this model was expensive to maintain and customers had to determine whom to call. Customers often bypassed the desktop, network, or applications service desks due to long wait times and “phoned a friend” instead (i.e., placed a call to a known subject matter expert— again, sometimes effective, but inefficient and expensive).

New services were often deployed with little thought to initial or lifecycle support, so the service desk either learned “on the fly” or acted as a call center, referring most questions to expensive subject matter expert labor.

To improve services, the implementation of processes, tools, and training began in 2010 with a cross-organizational design and implementation team tasked with achieving these goals:

- Develop processes to yield better service delivery and management. These processes emphasize a service-based support model rather than an organization-based support model.
 - Incident Management, or defect resolution, includes management of both normal and major incidents.
 - Request Fulfillment involves producing and managing work orders for service requests.
 - Change Management improves service processes and tools.
 - Knowledge Management improves training and encourages self-service.
 - Service Onboarding validates that a new or revised service is ready for release to customers.
- Install and configure a single service management ticketing tool to track defects and requests to completion across different organizations. Ensure that the right tools are deployed to help with both work ticket management and knowledge.
- Consider the needs of the customer first and keep support tools and processes simple and consistent.
- Establish a single point of contact service desk (AskIT) to simplify the service processes for customers, with a goal of returning customers to full productivity as quickly as possible.
- Develop, publish, and maintain an online service catalog to locate service, knowledge, and request fulfillment information, promoting user self-service as much as possible.
- Define Service Owners for all services to provide an accountable point of contact in the case of service defects or changes.
- Reduce and learn from “self-inflicted wounds” (i.e., those changes that resulted in defects for customers).

The Incident Management process, AskIT Service Desk function, and service catalog began in December 2012. New processes, services, and improvements continue to be added to service management. The next processes and tools to be implemented will be the significant expansion of Request Fulfillment in August 2016 and the addition of Configuration Management (available in Q4 2016). All processes focus on continual service improvement, ensuring that the new processes and tools continue to meet customer needs.

Although AskIT provides a single point of contact for customers, customer contact may originate as a telephone call, an email, or from the AskIT web portal. Managing these three queues increases scope, complexity, and volume of issues received by AskIT, but satisfies our objective of simplifying the process for customers and improving the economics of our services.

Work tickets resolved by AskIT represent the low cost resolution option of \$15 to \$20 per resolution. AskIT resolution also results in cost savings due to improved customer productivity (savings are a function of service wait time and customer productivity loss; a conservative estimate of these savings is \$230 for each AskIT resolved work ticket).

Nominally, each AskIT analyst performs intake and triage of 500 work tickets per month and resolves 200 of these. AskIT analysts add value at each step of the process. Work that is not resolved is triaged so that the next level of support does not start from the beginning; this reduces the amount of time required to resolve most escalated tickets. Experienced AskIT analysts are assigned projects to improve processes, develop knowledge, mentor colleagues, or to assist the AskIT Manager or technical leaders.

Improving the work ticket management tool was a necessary element for improving efficiency; for example, the work ticket management tool guides the AskIT analyst when escalating work to the field to ensure accurate assignment once the work ticket leaves AskIT.

Processes and tools are in use or development that will yield less intake work and more resolutions (e.g., service requests that generate auto-routed work orders). Services are adopting processes (primarily Configuration Management and Change Management) and tools to improve reliability to reduce demand spikes for AskIT service.

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