White Paper

Mark Twain once said, “I would have written a shorter letter, but I did not have the time.”

The same concept applies to the development of business and IT Service Management processes. It is far more difficult to develop processes that are simple, well understood, and easily followed than to define processes that simply meet basic requirements.

With President Obama’s appointment of Vivek Kundra as the Federal CIO, more emphasis has been placed on the use of technology to improve performance and lower the cost of government operations. It is readily accepted within the commercial world that the use of repeatable and standardized processes to create, deliver and support IT related services has dramatically improved operational efficiencies, reduced operating costs, and improved the overall quality of IT services. For a living example, look no further than Red Box. This company has successfully exploited the use of technology to simplify the process of renting a DVD and reducing the consumer’s cost to one American dollar. Brilliant. You can even go online and reserve your DVD before heading to a conveniently located Red Box kiosk. This could not be possible without very efficient business and IT service management processes such as service level management (SLM), availability management (AM), change management (CM), and incident management (IM). Without tightly integrated business and service management processes, Red Box could not guarantee a level of service (SLM), ensure the availability of the service (AM), successfully implement improvements to the service (CM), or quickly resolve service disruptions (IM).

This same type of innovation and efficiency needs to be applied to all IT supported Government services. While the use of well-defined business and IT service management processes within the Federal Government is a step in the right direction, there is a tendency for both government and commercial entities to over engineer business and IT service management processes. Over-engineered processes usually defeat the purpose for developing the process in the first place…efficiency. Processes that are over-engineered are usually more expensive to maintain, difficult to understand, and are not naturally followed or used. This is not unique to government. In the commercial world, we are all too familiar with examples of complex processes associated with the use of technology. Sticking with our DVD example, we all remember what it was like to program a VCR. With a sharper focus on the desired outcome from a user’s perspective (watch a program at some later date in time), we have seen tremendous improvements in designing processes used to program a DVR.

With regard to government, Vivek Kundra clearly recognizes the risks associated with over engineering processes as indicated by his remarks that "one of the biggest problems in the federal government is that process has trumped outcome, and the biggest reason for that is that everybody is focused on compliance and nobody is thinking about innovation and how to drive change within the government…"

So what can be done in the world of government to ensure that business and IT Service Management processes, used to deliver IT supported services to all Americans, are not over-engineered?

From the start, we need to clearly define all IT related services from a *user's* perspective rather than from a *technology* perspective. Users typically are not concerned about the technology (i.e. applications, servers, and networks) required to provide a service. Users care more about how the combined technologies can be used to achieve a certain outcome or result like renewing their vehicle registration. If the process to go online to renew is easy to follow and is quicker and more convenient than driving to the DMV office, people will naturally use the process. If the business process to renew is too cumbersome, too difficult to understand, or not described in user terminology, the process will not be followed and efficiencies and cost reductions to achieve certain outcomes will not be realized. Only when one begins to focus on desirable outcomes can service improvements, efficiencies, and cost reductions be achieved.

The same is true with the supporting IT service management processes. If internal IT processes required to coordinate the activities to develop, deliver and support IT-related services are too complicated, compliance will always be an issue and eventually the processes will not be used. Well-designed and thoughtfully developed service management processes are quickly adopted and naturally complied with because they are simple, understandable, and they ultimately make it easier to achieve a desired outcome. These 'natural' processes become institutionalized within a shorter period of time, thereby supporting efforts to improve the quality of service and transform government through positive change.

Another way to ensure that IT service management processes are not over-engineered is through customer/user involvement and meaningful metrics. It is critical that the users that will benefit from service management processes are involved in the development of the processes to the extent that they keep stakeholders focused on the desirable outcomes and what the business is trying to achieve with the use of technology. One way to achieve this is through the use of meaningful metrics. For example, measuring the amount of time required to complete a standard change to a service will indicate whether or not the change management process is properly engineered. The longer it takes to implement a change, the more inefficient the process. Using a baseline measure of the time it takes to make a change, comparisons can be made before and after processes have been improved or reengineered. This same metric can be applied at a higher level when measuring the amount of time it takes to implement a new or enhanced service. In this case, one would measure the end-to-end efficiency of all service management processes that are involved in implementing a new or enhanced service. An organization's ability to deliver new or enhanced services is a key contributor to customer satisfaction. The quicker services can be enhanced, or implemented, the higher the customer's

level of satisfaction. Therefore, establishing baseline measures of time required to complete service-related activities, and properly engineering or reengineering processes to reduce time requirements, will help ensure that IT service management processes are optimally engineered to maximize customer satisfaction and service excellence.

About the Author

Gregory C. Smith is the President and Founder of G2SF, a premier IT service management consultancy to the intelligence and defense communities. Gregory has been supporting and managing the successful implementation of ITIL and ISO/IEC 20000 processes and standards to the Federal Government for more than a decade and is a certified ITIL Service Manager and ISO/IEC Consultant.