

Processes Case Study: Pro-Active Problem Management

A medium-sized IT Production department was able to achieve immediate benefits from the introduction of a basic Problem Management and resolution process, introduced in a pragmatic way and making optimum use of the client's skills and resources.

The Challenge

A UK company quoted on the FTSE 100 index had a well-run incident management process and very client-focused Service Desk, which succeeded in delivering very effective and well-valued levels of service.

However, an audit investigation highlighted that the IT production activity was focusing on the short-term resolution of incidents, with less emphasis on Problem Management or identifying root causes.

In the medium or long-term, an exclusive focus on just "quick fix" solutions was unlikely to result in a reduction in the number of incidents being raised, since no strategic corrective action was being taken.

Although the company was delivering short-term service resolutions, it was clear that in the future the business would require a more pro-active approach. As the business grew, and began to acquire additional companies, it was unlikely that sufficient resources could be made available to continue the reactive culture; it was necessary to adopt a more pro-active approach in order to respond to business issues.

Our Involvement

Dennis Adams Associates were approached to provide an interim IT Manager role with specific remit to introduce Problem Management to the company.

The organisation had already identified ITIL as a valuable framework for problem management and had sponsored a series of training courses for key individuals who could contribute to this new approach.

The consultant from Dennis Adams Associates was chosen because of his mixture of technical and management skills. The client was keen to see an interim manager who not only understood the ITIL problem framework, but could also tailor it to the client's culture and specific needs. The consultant had to be an IT process "doer" as well as a "thinker".

In addition, the consultant also had to have a broad technical appreciation of what IT Production was like "on the ground".

Dennis Adams Associates was chosen because they specialise in providing consultants who have an experienced and pragmatic understanding of Managing IT Production – both the Management and the Technical aspects.

Approach

The first area where the consultant's expertise was shown was in the approach used for defining and rolling out new processes.

Although it is relatively easy to define new processes in an academic way, the key to delivering the client's expectations in the long term is to ensure that the in-house staff have a clear understanding and commitment to the final process.

This commitment was achieved by running a series of Problem Management Workshops. These were used to engage key technical and non-technical team members to look at specific problems that were visible to the Service Desk at the time.

These workshops drew on the internal knowledge of the systems and applications that the in-house team possessed. This was married up with practical training in basic analytical techniques, so that workshop attendees were not only solving problems but also learning at the same time.



In a very short time, there were some clearly identified “quick wins” which the Problem Team could demonstrate. Again, the consultant ensured that these were widely publicised so that the team effort was recognised and the enthusiasm and momentum continued.

Although the ITIL Problem management process was used at a basis for problem management at this client site, practical experience at other clients suggested a number of changes to the standard ITIL model:

- Create a Problem Advisory Board to govern the process; so ensuring the problem management is retained as a strong focus for the future.
- Extend the Problem life cycle to incorporate any resultant recommended requests for Change (RFC). Problem analysts were therefore involved in the full end-to-end solution to problems.
- Incorporate the review of Major Incidents as Problem Analysis task, thus ensuring ownership of any significant outage, and encouraging a client-centric view of problem analysis.

The combination of workshops, piloting the process, identifiable quick wins and pragmatic changes to the standard ITIL model led to strong acceptance of the new Problem Management Processes. This was reinforced by a focused communication of successes and ongoing involvement to bring other teams into the process.

Benefits

From the beginning, Problem Management was conducted in a pro-active way, and benefits were tracked and measured. The following are just some examples.

- Significant reduction in networking team incident-based work, achieved by sponsorship of service desk call resolution training in basic network issues.
- Numbers of “how-do-I” calls addressed by delivering user-focused training material via the web, thus contributing to a reduction in incident calls.
- Sponsorship of significant software enhancements in mail and messaging systems, justified by the expected impact on number of call incidents.

From a consultancy perspective, the most satisfying aspect was that problem management continued to be part of the culture of the company.

Further Information

Dennis Adams Associates does not disclose any client names, details, or any commercially sensitive data with third parties.

For further enquiries, please contact us via our web site at <http://www.dennisadams.co.uk> or email to info@dennisadams.co.uk.