Shift IT Service Management Priorities Toward a Continuous Improvement Mindset

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A survey of 89 large-enterprise Chinese infrastructure and operations organizations reveals the fundamental ITSM challenges commonly faced in Asia/Pacific. I&O managers should encourage proactive behavior toward ITSM process and service improvements and design user interfaces to be customer-focused.

Key Challenges

- The most commonly used IT service management (ITSM) channels are people-intensive. When used extensively for routine, low-end tasks such as regular service requests, the ITSM staff tends to become fatigued, bored and less proactive.

- Gartner's survey of infrastructure and operations (I&O) teams in China shows that, in most cases, strategically service-oriented and business-partnering I&O doesn't stretch beyond per-ticket inputs on customer satisfaction and feedback, and customer-satisfaction-checking systems remain largely transactional.

Recommendations

- Promote and reward proactive behavior toward ITSM process and service improvement, and the innovative use of IT service and support management (ITSSM) tools, features and functionalities among the service support staff.

- Promote self-service and social media platforms for more cost-effective ITSM and mature people management strategies that free up human talents from low-end, routine tasks and support creative and value-adding work.

- Encourage ITSM staff to become more customer-focused and to engage their business users more deeply — for example, in designing the user interfaces of ITSM tools.

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Introduction

A Gartner survey of 89 large-enterprise Chinese I&O teams was conducted to determine the state of ITSM best practices. In this research, we analyze people management and suggest action items and best practices for a customer-focused future state.

The Gartner survey reveals several trends in people management practices and current-state challenges of Chinese I&O teams. Most of these apply to more than 90% of I&O teams in the Asia/ Pacific and Gulf regions, as per the inquiries received from these regions. Fundamental challenges such as lack of proactive, continuous process improvement mindsets are reported by most I&O leaders across these regions. Therefore, the best practices to tackle these challenges will work for I&O teams across the Asia/Pacific and Gulf regions.

Analysis

Promote Proactive Initiatives on Process and Service Improvement

Survey results on perceptions of the service desk by I&O teams and their leaders show that 36% of IT service desk (ITSD) staff are considered service-oriented and 27% are considered business partners (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Describe Your Organization's ITSD
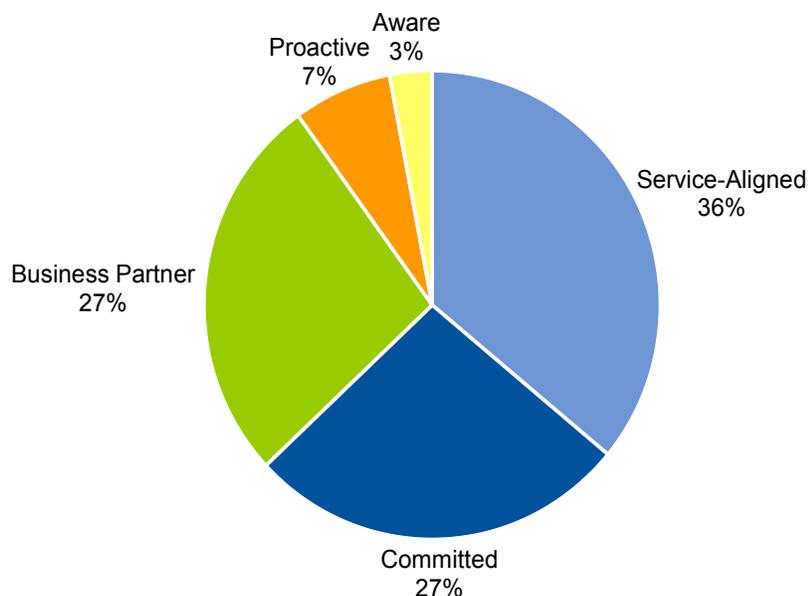
Source: Gartner (October 2013)

The relatively high percentage — 36%, which is high compared with global observations — of perceptions about service orientation indicates that there is misunderstanding regarding the real meaning of service alignment, as this is reflected from Gartner client inquiries in China and other Asia/Pacific regions. Proactive improvements and commitment to continuous service improvement (CSI) are hardly visible as mainstream ITSM practices. However, without proactive improvement initiatives, real service orientation remains elusive. A similar observation holds for the business partner perception as well, because CSI initiatives are imperative for that, as they need to be tied to improvements in business outcomes that are protected, enabled or supported by IT services.

A variety of actions will promote proactive improvement initiatives among your I&O staff. First, define and reward appropriate behavior. A target behavior is first defined as "proactively taking process/service improvement initiatives." Then, it should be communicated extensively by leaders, with rewards and recognition announced for contributing and displaying this behavior. Review and realign performance metrics to shift from plain efficiency or volume measures (for example, the number of tickets handled), to effectiveness measures (for example, percentage improvement in mean time to repair [MTTR] and mean time to restore service [MTTRS] in a set of critical services) that directly result from initiatives proactively undertaken by a concerned ITSD analyst or group.

Establish the roles of service managers, to drive the strategic service orientation goal. Align the CSI initiatives as an integral part of the IT service and support managers' personal performance goals and team goals. Leave the choice of methodology to the managers, but focus on the results of the improvement initiatives, during all performance reviews, in a cascading manner. For example,

managers should be evaluated on how their teams performed in CSI and the improvements that have been realized. Then, managers should evaluate their team leads and so on, based on the contributions they've made to these improvements.

Promote and Popularize the Self-Service Functionalities of ITSSM Tools

The survey data in Figure 2 shows that:

- Most (84%) interactions with the ITSD involve phone calls or email contacts.

- Other equally or more people-intensive (that is, costly) channels, such as chats and walk-ups, constitute another significant portion.

- The use of most cost-efficient and economical, technology-leveraged facilities, such as self-service and social media, is minimal.

Figure 2. How Your Organization Most Often Communicates With Internal Clients or Business Users
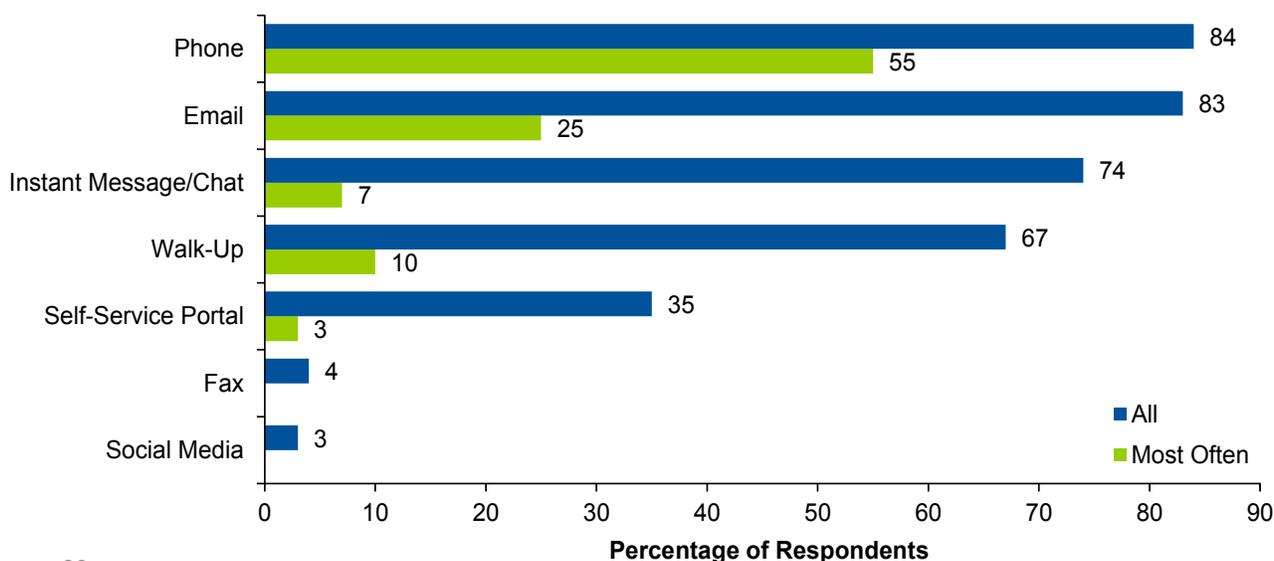
n = 89

Source: Gartner (October 2013)

As shown in the survey, the most used channels are phone calls, emails and chats, which are definitely not cost-efficient. Hence, there is clearly an untapped opportunity to improve the financial efficiencies of people management practices by leveraging and promoting the self-service functionalities provided by mature ITSSM tools. Major ITSSM tools from vendors such as BMC, CA, HP and ServiceNow provide medium to strong support for self-service for routine tasks and service requests.

Enterprise social media is also a cost-effective route for more-efficient collaborative problem solving, rather than multiple to-and-fros in an overly structured, workflow-based service model. The

significant benefits of self-service can also be realized in the standardization of services, better communication with the business, better understanding of business requirements and agility.

The following actions will help manage the scaling of services provided by service desks more effectively. Furthermore, people skills can be focused on analytical and creative endeavors, rather than on routine tasks that can be consistently automated via self-service. If the I&O staff can be freed from routine activities by promoting the use of self-service and enterprise social platforms, they can invest their time and energy in more value-adding and sustainable service and process improvement initiatives.

To promote self-service and the use of enterprise-level collaborative social platforms, consider several actions planned by I&O leaders in China and other Asia/Pacific and Gulf regions. Design the self-serve facilities in the enterprise portal on IT services to be easy to use and to navigate — that is, a structurally simple and common-sense format that isn't burdened at every step with technical jargon, such as, "Is it a system configuration issue?" (how would a business user be able to answer that?). It should not involve too many clicks — for example, following a design principle such as "not more than two clicks to reach the relevant alternative solution to a problem as described by the user or customer."

Explain the technical solutions in lay terms as much as possible. It is a critical success factor for the ITSSM tool interface that the teams involve different categories of users in evaluating the efficacy of the interface. Otherwise, I&O teams are at risk of making a UI that is too technical. Different groups of users have different comfort levels and acceptance of tools, and IT must not just assume it understands them all by default. Involving customers and users in the design also helps "sell" the idea versus pushing it on to them.

Communicate extensively to the internal customers (that is, the business users) about the quick and easy self-service functionalities and how these can speed up request fulfillment and resolutions and, therefore, improve the user experience. This should be done through interaction channels such as phones and emails, as well as enterprise portals, bulletin boards and social media. For example, when a business user reaches out to the ITSSM staff for a resolution that's already available in self-serve mode, let the staff point it out to the user, along with the benefits (such as faster resolution, minimal interruptions and quicker restoration of business user's productivity). This is possible by making this proactive interaction from the service desk analysts a mandatory step in their typical user response models. This is also easier if the business users are engaged by the I&O staff in the design and testing of self-serve features in the tools. I&O teams can pick the superusers or core teams so they can funnel the business's ideas to the I&O organization and help market ITSM best practices back to the business users.

If it's already available in your organization, then integrate the ITSD with the corporate social media. Use advanced technologies that are readily available (such as unstructured data processing) — for example, using Splunk to mine out solution workflow patterns from previous resolution descriptions captured in the incident records (an innovative feature of Wipro's FixOmatic tools). This way, the I&O teams can leverage the discussions and bulletin boards to assimilate and disseminate IT service knowledge that resides in the experience of the business users.

Design special promos and reward systems for business users who are employing self-service and contributing to the discussions using social platform integration. These incentives will motivate users to use more economical and efficient channels for interacting with the IT services people.

Train and Encourage ITSD Staff to Engage With Business Users

Survey data reveals that less than one-third of the Chinese I&O teams use the more extensive and involved methods for taking customer feedback (for example, focus groups). Most depend on the ticket-closing survey that's typically available with most ITSM tools (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Methods Your Organization Uses to Measure Internal Client or Business User Satisfaction for the IT Service Desk

Currently measure internal client or business user satisfaction for the IT service desk

No
4%

Yes
96%

n = 89
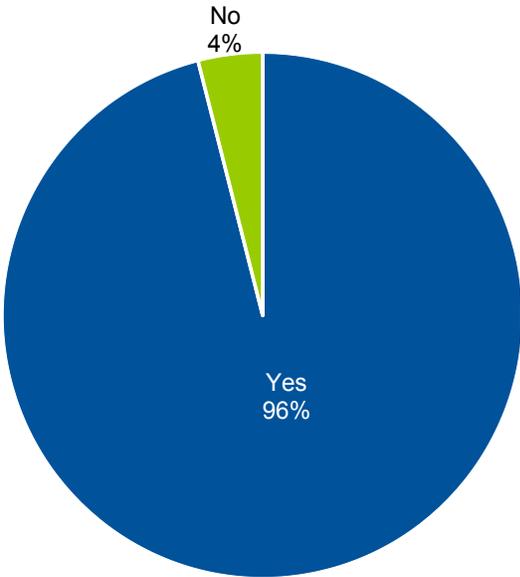
Methods used to understand IT service desk satisfaction

Method	Percentage
Send a satisfaction survey when a ticket is closed	58
The satisfaction survey is on our intranet and can be filled out anytime	46
Send a satisfaction survey once or twice a year, etc.	34
Have focus groups among internal clients or business users	31

Percentage of Respondents

Source: Gartner (October 2013)
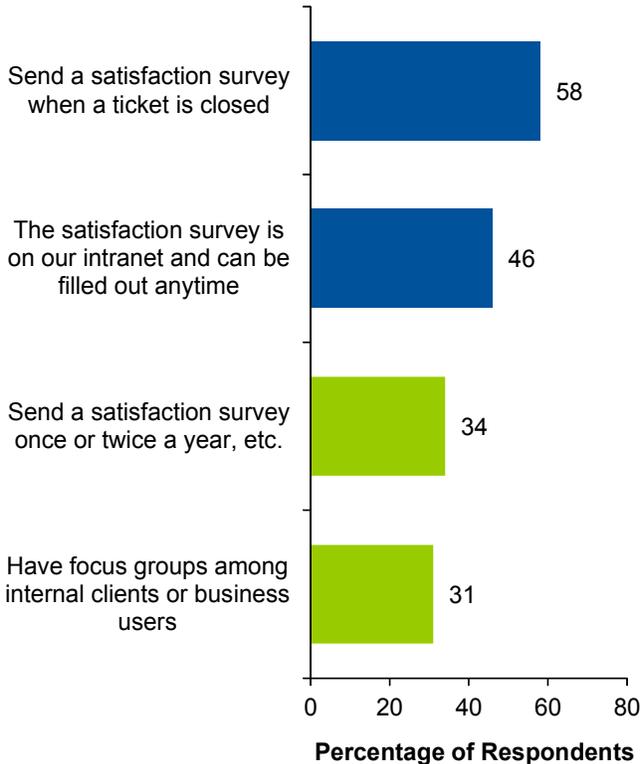
These practices are not unique to I&O teams in China, but reflect the ITSM realities in the Asia/Pacific and Gulf regions, based on client inquiries received from these regions. The first step toward

real service orientation and business partnership of I&O is customer focus. Customer focus manifests itself in the ways that I&O teams engage with the customers and the degree of involvement of customers or business users, especially if the target state for I&O is a business partner image.

Therefore, the I&O staff should take planned and committed steps toward getting its users more involved and collecting more meaningful and action-oriented feedback from users, based on discussion forums, focus groups, joint improvement projects and so on.

Action Items:

- Integrate ITSD employee performance with the customer satisfaction scores. Link ITSD employee performance to the customer satisfaction scores captured. Ensure that you are capturing scores in meaningful ways — for example, correlate the scores received at the polls by the end of a call with the quality of previous interactions, using a business relationship management process.

- Perform predictive improvement analysis — what went right, what can be done better, and what's the correlation between response time and response quality, as perceived by the business users.

- Train your ITSD staff on customer service and soft skills — customer communication, follow-up, relationship management best practices and so on. Have these training programs designed with specific, measurable, actionable, relevant and timely (SMART) objectives, such as "Post training, the customer satisfaction scores of ITSD L1 staff should improve by at least 20% in six months" (see "Improving Service With SMART Objectives in I&O").

- Leverage your ITSSM tool vendors or implementation partners in designing and delivering training programs in a cost-efficient and effective manner. Communicate to your vendors and service providers that, if they show a stakeholder mindset toward the success of the tool in your specific organizational context, then that will be a key differentiator, and they will be rewarded. A few specialized service providers (for example, Vyom Labs) that are BMC Remedy implementation partners provide this type of end-to-end ITSM — that is, tools plus training services.

- Perform behavioral profiling of users based on their ITSD staff response preferences, and plan to treat customers by their specific profiles and preferences, including interface and communication channel preferences (for example, who prefers emails to phone calls). This specific information can be documented within the end users' profiles in the ITSM tool. The same mechanism can be used to specify whether an end user is technical or nontechnical, enabling the service desk agent to change tone and jargon accordingly.

- Define and implement customer satisfaction surveys in a formal, regular and structured manner, as well as through informal and unstructured feedback loops. For example, focus group discussions can elicit ideas from participating business users regarding their ITSM challenges and priorities, as well as information not captured in routine surveys. A quarterly focus group with targeted power users and/or key business users can facilitate a strong, action-oriented feedback loop.

A common issue faced by organizations is that low participation in satisfaction surveys occurs when end users feel their responses don't mean anything. I&O teams must report on the actions taken, based on the inputs provided by the business users (see "Satisfaction Surveys: You've Measured It, Now What?"). Teams must leverage multiple survey methodologies, including quantitative, qualitative and informal methods, because different survey types will yield different types of feedback. Transactional surveys are great for getting an emotional response to a specific end-user issue, while an annual survey will provoke them to think more about the changes in levels of service over time. For example, create a survey that asks questions clearly focused on creating better business-based services (see "How Gasco Created an Effective IT Satisfaction Survey for Business Users").

Gartner Recommended Reading

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

"Infrastructure and Operations Maturity: How Do You Compare?"

"Do More With Less: Seven Examples of How ITIL 2011 Processes Can Help Reduce I&O Costs"

"ITIL Training Is Necessary, but Is Not Sufficient for IT Service Improvement"

"Leverage ITIL 2011 to Build Process Capabilities for Effective Management of Cloud-Based IT Services"

"Use Six Sigma With ITIL 2011 to Improve IT Operations Processes and Effectively Leverage the Cloud"

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