



## IT Operations Management – Just Do It!

By Don Curt – CIO Services, LLC

The biggest problem today with IT operations management is that there are too many methodologies. Name your favorite acronym; ITIL, CMMI, whatever; all bring confusion and a sense of bureaucratic-fear to the folks in the trenches who just want to Do It - keep things running.

As an experienced CIO and C-level IT consultant currently, this writer has seen tremendous results in IT operational improvements by simply facilitating and encouraging basic practices of communications, direction setting (leadership) and recognition. To understand why such a simple approach works, one must first understand the typical IT operations environment. It is an area of business where expectations are extremely high (we talk in terms of six nines services 99.9999). It is an area that gets no attention from senior management when things are going ok, but the direct wrath of the CEO when even the most insignificant incident gets brought to his/her attention by a customer. It is an area where many personnel are more comfortable dealing with things (IT infrastructure) than with people and processes. And, it is an area that has prided itself with having individual silos of technical prowess. All of these attributes combine to make for an organization greatly in need of communications, leadership and recognition (CLR).

Providing CLR is specific to the environment. This is not the soft, interpersonal, sensitivity stuff. It is bidirectionally communicating realistic expectations with internal and external clients which are tied to the actual business needs and objectives, not expectations driven by some third party methodology. It is communicating with customers about escalation procedures that truly give them results, vs. raising all issues to the top management level. It is fostering communications across the silos even within IT – such as between operations and development – in a manner that preserves technical prowess, but shows the greater performance and responsiveness that can be achieved through cooperation.

The leadership part of the CLR actions should be focused on guiding the operations team towards business objectives and processes to get there, without condemning all existing processes and objectives. This is usually where many consultants have tried to redefine everything in terms of ITIL or another methodology. And usually the result is bad. ITIL, Cobit and the others are excellent end-goal scenarios; the problem comes with the implementation. No one wants to be told that what they have been doing for the last five years for example, is incorrect because it does not meet 100% of an ideal process, when in fact it may be doing 80% of everything correctly. Experience has proven that tweaking the existing processes and goals towards ITIL for an example, without ever even mentioning ITIL until after results are achieved, and allowing the team to recognize after the fact that they have achieved the equivalent results “on their own”, not only gets the desired results, but gets subsequent buy-in to ITIL through a better understanding through experience. In other words, gently implement the tweaks, and then slowly introduce the methodology that was just used.

An example of this leadership CLR can be cited from a recent consulting engagement. The operations group knew they were not doing an adequate job in monitoring customer incidents, and in managing the service desk in support of customers, especially in light of an upcoming governance audit. It would have been easy to pull out the Cobit control objectives in these areas and pointed out what needed to be met. Instead, the group was encouraged to take it on their own to develop their own framework for monitoring which they considered to be

ideal for their business situation. There was ownership and empowerment to get their approach completed and “sold” to management as the way to go forward. Subsequently, after making great progress the team was shown the ME1.1 control objective from Cobit, and was amazed how they easily exceeded the requirements. Guiding vs. forcing a process was the key to a great step forward in this organization. There was no wasted time training and educating another “new” methodology. The team really knew all along what was needed for successful operations monitoring and just “got it done” with the gentle guiding of a knowledgeable IT management consultant.

The third area of CLR, recognition is particularly important and specific in implementation with the operations team. Technical successes and advancement of technical prowess are strong motivators. The need for meeting a business objective is recognized and understood, but make that objective technically state-of-the-art, or the process to get there enabled by some cool new application or hardware and you will go way beyond understanding to passion for the goal.

Lest any misunderstanding is left, this writer is not against IT operations methodologies. They in fact are welcomed and necessary guides for improvement. The benefit however is in the implementation of the goals and processes sought by the methodologies, not the methodology itself. So, use the principles and the names with the auditors, but for the implementations, focus on the CLR to get results with your operations team.

<http://cioservices.us>