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Getting started with Knowledge Management

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Firstly recognise the importance of knowledge

As a consultancy and training company we are increasingly being asked about the ITIL Knowledge Management process, Knowledge Technology and how to implement Knowledge Management generally across organisations.

The general opinion is that organisations are wasting a lot of knowledge and this is occurring on a regular basis - especially when staff leave, or move to different roles within an organisation. I recently came across an organisation which believes they had lost between 50% - 75% of its specialised support knowledge due to a series of redundancies and staff jumping ship at short notice.

The cost of wasted knowledge is also rarely quantified, however if it was, I believe that you would find that the cost of 'lost' knowledge far outweighs the costs of establishing an effective knowledge management process and system. So establishing a business case for knowledge management shouldn't be too difficult.

To help get you started, I have combined my thoughts with those of my colleagues. We can't give you all the answers but hopefully we will get you thinking and heading in the right direction.

Implementing Knowledge Management within IT

ITIL has already defined a perfectly useable process documented in the Service Design publication, although the process is applicable across the whole of a service lifecycle, which you can use to create a roadmap for the increasing maturity of knowledge management in your organization and plan the use of different tools corresponding to each level of maturity.

Where do you start?

The first step must be to establish a strategy for knowledge management. It requires management commitment from the very top of the organisation and can be implemented organisational wide.

You will need a set of tools to store and access the knowledge (Service Knowledge Management System - 'SKMS')

The tools employed to underpin knowledge management should provide the interlinking of the different storage areas, e.g. source location to events/errors, messages to operator guides etc. Even a share point portal could be used as a Knowledge Management (KM) framework. The more important aspect of Knowledge Management is identifying re-usable component or knowledge, categorizing them and tagging them appropriately so that it makes sense to prospective users, with strong multi-level drill down capability.

You will need to ensure that you process at least covers:

➡ Defining knowledge & resubmitting knowledge

➡ Reviewing existing knowledge

Tool functionality

There are essentially three types of knowledge management tool functionality found in today's market:

➡ knowledge-base

➡ knowledge querying tools

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➡️ knowledge item life-cycle management tools

Much of this functionality can be found in a number of integrated ITSM tools which are very good at querying the data in their own databases and bringing it to bear on the resolution of an Incident, Support, Change or Request case. Whether that data can be considered to be 'knowledge', in any sense of the term, is highly debatable.

Others tools offer the facility to query external knowledge-bases. Finally, a very few offer some degree of management of the knowledge items themselves.

As well as technology and process you will need to consider people and organisational culture factors that heavily affect the success of such a deployment? You will need to look at your organizational culture with respect to how information is accessed? Identify any issues that organized knowledge management can solve?

All these questions can be answered while you work on deploying and configuring the tool and training. However you may find ways that will facilitate a faster adoption rate by leveraging existing tools and processes by incrementally improving them.

You can show how each increment can benefit each process touched by always addressing existing issues in the related process such as quicker turn around, less approval steps, faster delivery of info to the right audience, self-help capabilities rather than calling a service desk for knowledge, etc...

Knowledge Management Solutions

With time and money as scarce as it is within today's financial strait-jacket, taking the opportunity to see if a Knowledge Management system can help you reduce your expenses and time constraints with a proven and fully integrated Knowledge Management solution should be a no brainer.

Most Knowledge Management solutions contain a number of fully integrated functions that will relieve the workload on your Service Desk, as currently updated knowledge and self-service offerings reduce the number of calls significantly. This will raise resolution rates and reduce recovery times, and empower IT organisations to reach new levels of efficiency. Over time your organisation will benefit from a current and constantly growing wealth of knowledge solutions.

Leading by Knowledge

ITIL sees Knowledge Management as an important way to increase efficiency. Existing knowledge is serviceably recycled, distributed, and therefore continually enhanced. This means it does not need to be developed from scratch. Many integrated ITSM toolsets which incorporate a Knowledge Management module offer fully integrated knowledge management functionalities, including components for managing knowledge and providing it to end-users and support analysts.

Save Time and Money with knowledge driven innovative Self-Service

The self-service component allows end-users to quickly find answers to support questions, allowing users to search for answers before sending a case into the service desk. This reduces unnecessary calls to the service desk allowing your support staff to focus on critical issues and end-users to return to a productive state quickly.

The end-user benefits from an around-the-clock, online service desk and is further enabled to provide feedback on all knowledge articles, thereby raising knowledge quality. The number of calls to the service desk reduces, as end-users are empowered to self-resolve their incident status. You get:

➡️ 24/7 online help desk availability

➡️ Reduced number of calls to the service desk

➡️ Simple search functionalities

➡️ Train the user: learning effect

Save Time and Money with Quick and Competent Support Analysts

The support analyst component of a knowledge system is specifically dedicated to members of your support department. It helps them provide quick and easy answers, decrease talk time, and increase first call resolution rates. The support analyst functionality comes with an intuitive user interface that helps support teams to quickly find solutions by accessing a database of general and company-specific knowledge. The seamless integration with a Service Desk Management module allows support staff to tie solutions back to open incidents and resolve support issues quickly and effectively.

With the support analyst, sharing knowledge between different support departments is easy, as it engages all levels of support with the knowledge base. You get:

➡ Reduced call duration

➡ Increases 1st level solution rate

➡ Train the analyst: just in time training for all levels of support

➡ Process optimisation in accordance with ITIL

Managing Knowledge and Solutions

You will require a Knowledge Management system to allow support groups to easily create and manage knowledge articles available for support analysts and end users. It allows you to effectively manage your knowledge base by modifying standard and custom content solutions or by creating new knowledge articles. You can:

➡ Create new solutions

➡ Update and modify existing content

➡ Delete outdated solutions and knowledge articles

➡ Archive knowledge articles

➡ Use versioning functionalities

➡ Use pre-defined solution templates

No Need to Start from Scratch

Of course you could reinvent the wheel and start from scratch or select a system that is "pre-populated" with standard content from a Knowledge Pack Library containing thousands of solutions for hundreds of applications. Pre-defined solution templates and field formats guarantee consistent solutions and their effective management.

Clear Role Allocation, Clear Content

You need to identify a Knowledge Management toolset that supports administrators, approvers and author roles. One that tracks which solutions are open for modification and tracks when new solution windows are open to prevent multiple authors from simultaneously modifying the same solutions is probably essential.

What's Going on: Auditing and Reporting?

All changes made to an existing solution should be recorded in the solution history table. This audit trail provides information on the author, the status, the audience and the last date modified. The "Quick Facts Dashboard" gives an overview over usage and solution creation to support the establishment of productivity, usage, and content quality.

So what now?

I hope this insight has been of use. If you would like further information about how Purple Griffon can assist you in developing or improving Knowledge Management within your organisation or for general information about Service Management training, consultancy and ITSM software sourcing then please contact us.

Steve Lawless

CEO - Purple Griffon

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