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J. Heine

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End-to-End Customer Support Demands Integrated Service

Customers of IT infrastructure services often obtain support services from various internal and external organizations. Linking typical sequential tasks can provide a more-satisfying end-to-end customer support experience.

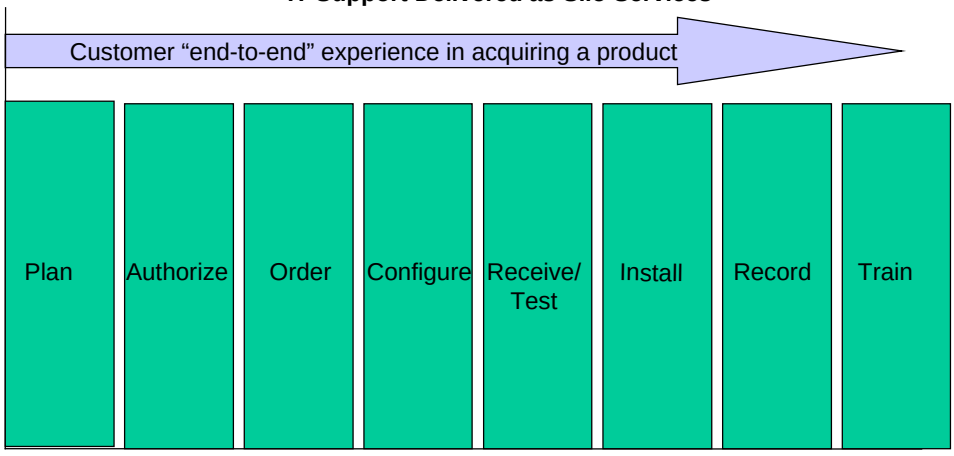
Core Topic
Business Management of IT: Service Management Strategies

Key Issue
What best practices will drive integrated service management to manage the service impact on the enterprise?

Strategic Planning Assumption
By 2003, IT infrastructure support services will be viewed as an end-to-end customer experience, requiring the re-engineering of existing stovepipe structures to provide a more-satisfying customer experience (0.8 probability).

Customers of IT infrastructure support services are often faced with a number of silo organizations that provide only a portion of the support required to address typical multiactivity tasks. For example, the life cycle activities associated with the acquisition of a PC require approximately eight separate activities (see Figure 1). If IT infrastructure support is provided by a mixture of internal and external organizations, the number of separate "contacts" required by a customer can be time-consuming and, at times, confusing. As IS organizations consider the myriad of sourcing opportunities available in the marketplace, extra care must be given to ensure that the customer's end-to-end experience is taken into consideration. The downside of providing infrastructure support by "specialized organizations" is the increased likelihood of communication breakdowns and the expectation that, should problems arise, the customer will coordinate the activities of the supporting organizations.

Figure 1
IT Support Delivered as Silo Services



IT support activities required to deliver product

Source: Gartner Research

The Importance of "Shared Data"

The key ingredient to improving the customer's end-to-end experience is sharing customer data. This can be accomplished by sharing systems access, sharing data only or, at minimum, providing manual "task routing sheets" among infrastructure support providers. Shared data provides the linking mechanism to initiate sequential support tasking and ensure technical compatibility with the infrastructure environment.

An Example of Linked IT Products and Services

For illustrative purposes, we have defined eight common subprocesses associated with the acquisition of a standard item such as a desktop PC.

- *Plan:* The process of developing a technology acquisition plan and establishing a financial budget
- *Authorize:* Provides funding authority for moving forward with the acquisition, and all subsequent expenses necessary to make the acquisition functional
- *Order:* Covers supplier selection and order placement
- *Configure:* Addresses items such as software loading, installation of special features and accessories, and initial factory testing
- *Receiving/Test:* Includes taking physical possession of the items, storage, initial incoming inspection and testing
- *Install:* Covers all activities required to install and test hardware/software at the customer's location
- *Record:* Includes asset recording, warranty initiation (if applicable), system access verification and other record-keeping tasks
- *Train:* When required, this includes self-taught and formal classroom instruction necessary to ensure customer familiarization with equipment and functionality.

Figure 1 shows the typical IT processes associated with the customer acquisition experience and the "silo activities" required to fulfill the "end-to-end" acquisition process. If these activities are delivered independently, the customer will likely be faced with initiating numerous contacts, completing a variety of forms and resolving the communications "disconnects" that will inevitably occur. For example, if the authorization, ordering and configuring activities are not linked with other configuration management activities (e.g., recent upgrades to the network or migration to an updated operating system), the customer may

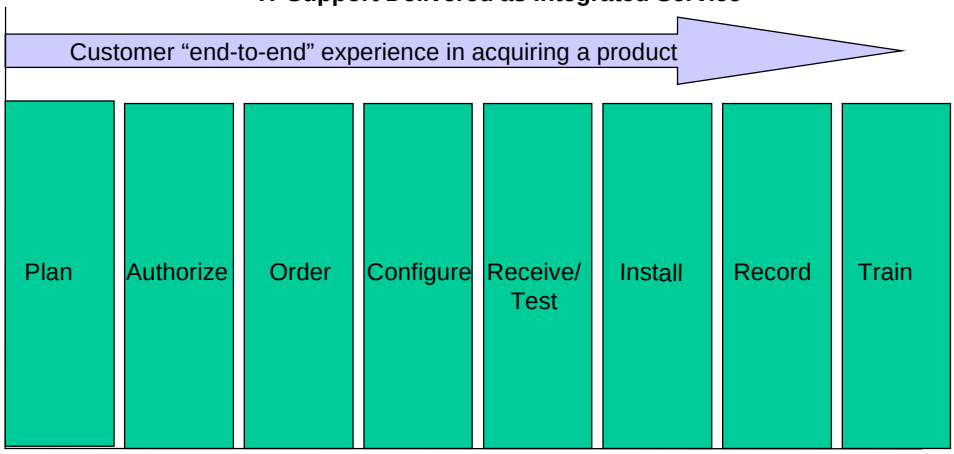
find certain equipment/software configurations when installed will not function as planned. This condition can be most prevalent when services are provided by a variety of contractors.

Impacts on IT Service Provisioning

IT managers need to be concerned about an "end-to-end" service view. Unfortunately, most IS organizations still view IT service provisioning as a collection of "stovepipe" activities, as depicted in Figure 1.

In Figure 2, six of the eight subprocesses have been *logically* combined to enhance the customer experience by capturing the required information in a single step — as if all these functions were being provided by a single organization. Using this approach, the service providers (whether internal or external) are responsible for coordinating the various services to ensure a satisfying customer experience. Although the IT support groups may still deliver these subprocesses in a "silo" fashion (i.e., various skilled specialists actually accomplishing the tasks), from the customer perspective, these activities appear seamless because the sequencing and communications required to initiate the tasks are set in motion by a *common* initial transaction. In the example shown, this would be the submission of an order form for a PC. Standardized services that are linked to a preceding event are easy candidates for streamlining or combining. This approach can be applied to many other IT infrastructure support activities.

Figure 2
IT Support Delivered as Integrated Service



IT support activities required to deliver product

Source: Gartner Research

Bottom Line: One of the simplest ways to improve the customer experience is to reduce the number of individual "transactions" required to initiate a standard set of sequential activities. This can be accomplished by improving data capture upfront and

establishing better data sharing among the service provisioning groups.