



Better service from service providers

Tips for service providers.

"It is the customer who determines what a business is."

Peter F. Drucker, *The Essential Drucker*,

The paper at a glance

In this article I provide tips for service providers on how they can provide better service to their customers and in a manner such that both benefit. These tips are written in the context of IT infrastructure service provision, but they are relevant to all service providers.

More and more business activities are now being undertaken by service providers – both external and internal - yet dissatisfaction with the services provided is common and so are the drivers of this dissatisfaction (service failures/disruption, lack of responsiveness, same issues repeatedly).

Dissatisfaction leads to desertion – expensive for both parties. Better to work together on continuous service delivery improvement and cost reduction.

A mutually rewarding customer-provider relationship begins with a proposal that clearly and correctly sets consistent expectations of service scope and quality. It also sets out the parameters for managing a successful relationship – service levels, performance reporting, multi-level communication, collaborative reviews, change management and continuous improvement.

Service improvement (and, if addressed properly, cost reduction) involves listening to your customers and responding; listening to your employees and acting; and, listening to your processes and improving.

Service quality and high customer satisfaction are not, however, solely the responsibility of the service provider. The customer also has responsibility for service assurance with regard to maintaining user competence, keeping work documentation and service documentation up to date, and testing business continuity plans and disaster recovery mechanisms (in conjunction with the service provider).

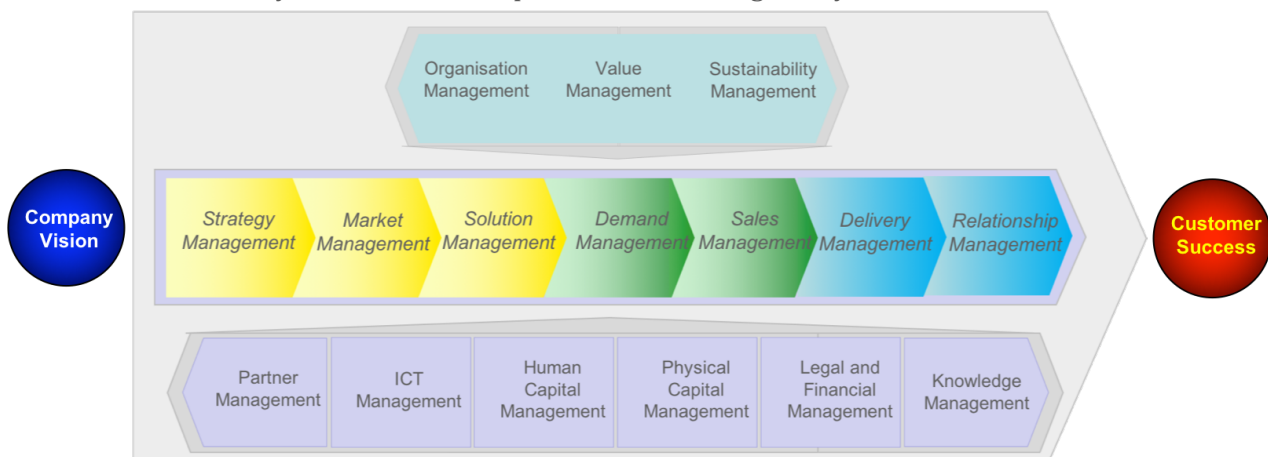
Similarly, the service provider must have quality processes and procedures; staff who are properly selected, trained and led; and, demonstrably reliable and secure infrastructure.

What are service providers?

In the traditional model of a firm there are customers and suppliers, with all operations being "in-house". In the 1980s, service bureaus arose to provide limited marketing, facilities management and data processing services. As outsourcing exploded in popularity, shared services centres became fashionable in larger organisations (particularly for IT and financial services), and when the internet age arrived more and more business activities started being undertaken by external and internal service providers.

Where does service fit in?

Too often, service providers confuse responding to customer issues (through the "service desk") with providing customer service. True and effective customer service (the "customer experience"), however, is a consequence of your complete value chain. The BusinessSPM Value Chain Model illustrates how all aspects of your organisation determine your customers' experience of working with you:



We can see that the quality of your relationship with your customers is determined by everything from your strategy through to how you sell and deliver, as well as your ongoing contact.

But it is not only the "core" value chain elements that impact your customer. All of the elements of the model include interaction – directly or indirectly – with your customers. For example, ICT is responsible for your website and your CRM software; Legal for your contracts and agreements, human capital management for your people competencies and numbers; and, your Value Management approach will determine what your people see as being important when they interact with your customers.

The upshot? To improve your service to your customer, you need to work on all aspects of your business.

Satisfaction with service providers

What's the satisfaction level?

A general, and not insignificant, level of dissatisfaction of customers with service providers is common. This level of dissatisfaction is one which I have experienced in the areas of financial services, payroll services, IT infrastructure services, IT support services and software development services - working with both the customers of services providers and with service providers themselves.

What is a "happy customer" satisfaction level?



The service providers who conduct customer satisfaction surveys commonly find an overall satisfaction in the 70% decile. Survey vendors tend to promote 80+% as "best practice" or "excellence". It may be "best" but it's not healthy (Australian readers will be familiar with bank misbehaviour and lack of attention to "customer interests" that come with around an 80% level of satisfaction)!

Scores of 95+% lead to loyal customers; below that, customers are "indifferent" or likely to "defect".

This graph (left) is from Putting the Service-Profit Chain to Work by J. L. Heskett et al, HBR, Jul-Aug 1994. A classic and "must read" article for all service providers and their customers.

What makes customers unhappy?

The major dissatisfiers I've observed are:

- Poor quality of service (volumes, timeliness, completeness, correctness ...)
- Lack of responsiveness when issues are raised by them
- Same issues arising again and again (especially if they have been told that the issue is "resolved").
- Lack of a "customer service" attitude amongst management and staff.
- High levels of "failure demand" (they call more with problems than with needs)

***TIP** - If you survey your customers, or intend to, ensure you include an update for customers on the activities arising from the survey - your regular service reporting is a good vehicle.*

What are the consequences of having an unhappy customer?

For external providers, the costs of poorly serving a customer are high (volumes of service calls to be answered, rework, etc) and the cost of acquiring a replacement customer after a defection are considerable higher than selling to /renewing an existing customer (estimated by some as being 5 times higher). Here are some of the costs you will, or are, experiencing:

- Doing it all over again, but to their satisfaction
- Provision of a mechanism and staffing for them to let you know they're unhappy (service desk, surveys etc)
- Finding out what caused them to be unhappy and fixing it
- Acquiring a replacement customer if they defect
- Loss of additional revenue when they do business with your competitors
- Loss of potential new customers who pass you over due to a poor reference

- Higher sales and marketing costs for the same revenue contribution (due to poor references)
- Warranty claims, penalties, legal claims, fines etc.

And don't forget you've already spent the same amount servicing your unhappy customers as you have on the happy ones!

The overall cost can be equivalent to 30-50% of your total revenue!

Of course, it's difficult for the customers of internal service providers to defect but it's not impossible! I've seen shared services dismembered and decentralised; prospective business units refusing to take up shared services; and internal providers being outsourced.

Defection often comes as a surprise to service providers – either through an expectation that the customer cannot leave, or through ignorance of how unhappy the customer is (and likely has been for some time).

Building customer satisfaction with your service

Being happy (an "Apostle") is obviously good for your customer. It is good for you, too. In this article I provide some tips on how a service provider can move its customers into the "zone of affection"! These tips are written in the context of IT infrastructure service provision in the small and medium sized business (SMB) sector, but are relevant to all service providers, external or internal, and the Enterprise sector.

Finding a customer

There are many, many IT infrastructure service providers of many different types (I'll call them "xSP"s) operating in Australia. Given this, one would think that customers would be constantly fielding calls and emails from xSPs wanting to talk to them.

Surprisingly this has not been my experience or observation (such a difference from my time in Oracle where the thirst for new customers was almost unquenchable and the Oracle Direct organisation was a phenomenal lead generation and customer acquisition machine)!

Best ways to start looking for a potential customer:

- The traditional marketing and sales approaches that you have been using for some time.
- Direct marketing – similar to Oracle Direct – either using your own staff or a third-party.

TIP - fully "standardise" and "instrument" these process and activities so you can understand their efficacy and can continually improve your ROI.

But an even better way is for a customer to come to you, through a referral. That may mean zero cost of customer acquisition! This will only happen if you're existing customers are satisfied and loyal.

If you have such customers, you must be following the approach I set out below – driving internal efficiency to improve service and reduce your costs by focussing on your customers' needs.

Being asked for a proposal

Governments and large organisations may choose to use a request for information (*RFI*), followed by a request for proposal (*RFP*) or request for quotation (*RFQ*) process but an RFP is sufficient for SMBs and most procurement efforts.

I recommend that organisations seeking the services of an xSP employ a RFP process. I find this to be an effective and sufficient approach for SMBs and most procurement efforts. Of course, this comes at some investment of time, effort and funds by the customer but as they are usually inexperienced in dealing with major service acquisitions, it is quite a worthwhile investment - if done well.

Responding to an RFP involves considerable effort and investment by a you, and I'm sure you would prefer not to be in competition with other vendors as you are with an RFP. But when you are, you want an efficient and effective process that gets your desired outcome (a win!) with the least cost and effort for you.

TIP - Only pursue a RFP process that:

- You have properly qualified as being worth the investment of your presales time
- Provides complete, correct and clear information on the customer's needs and situation
- Makes absolutely clear what the selection criteria will be
- Provides opportunity (preferably face-to-face) for you to ask questions and seek clarification
- Is fair to all participating vendors.

Providing a proposal

Most proposals from xSPs I've evaluated or seen have this structure:

- Who we are
- What we do and why we are different
- Our technology partners and the products we use
- What we think you need
- How much we want to charge you
- A list of reference customers and/or testimonials

This leads the customer to quickly flick through the pages till they get to the fees page. As the technology means next to nothing to them, they assume you can do the job and are stuck on what you want to charge. "*Availability bias*" results in them quickly making an initial assessment on price –and that's hard to budge ("*anchoring*")!

What the prospective customer wants to see is:

- You understand my problem
- You know and can provide the services that will solve my problem
- You can prove that you have solved the same problems for other customers
- You can suggest some options for doing so
- You offer value for money.

TIP - Do some A/B testing with your current proposal structure and the one suggested here and measure the difference in success rates.

Most importantly they want to know about your **services** not the **products** you use within those service!

Proposals are also an opportunity for you to present an image of quality and professionalism.

The presentation of the document should have these features:

- Plenty of white space
- Display quality graphics
- Free of errors (proof-read)
- Consistent typefaces and font sizes, no underlining
- Neat tables (don't just cut-and-paste your Excel worksheets)
- Use PDF unless the client specifies Word or Excel.

One IT vendor I worked for employed a proposal writer to take care of all this. The quality of the documents really caught the prospects' attention (see "anchoring" above)!

TIP - Engage a professional proposal writer or service.

If you can't employ a proposal writer, then:

- Engage an appropriate consultant to develop your house style including templates and Word styles
- Train your administrative and/or presales staff in sound use of MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint (or similar) and desktop publishing application

Customer-Provider Agreements

Master Service Agreements

Your Master Service Agreement (MSA) should facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a mutually beneficial relationship with your customers. Ensure your lawyers draft it with that in mind (that's not their normal mindset)!

TIP - Use simple everyday language rather than legal prose for your MSA - your prospects will welcome it and it'll reassure them of your practicality and customer-orientation.

Service Level Agreements (SLA)

A Service Level Agreement (SLA) is an "agreement between an IT service provider and a customer. A service level agreement describes the IT service, documents the

service level targets, and specifies the responsibilities of the IT service provider and the customer" (*ITIL*). Some incorrectly refer to service level targets, e.g. "response within 24 hours", as "SLAs").

TIP - Review my [article](#) on getting the most benefit from an SLA.

You should employ, and provide to your prospective customers, a standard SLA as part of your response to the RFP. It should include your service offerings related to their stated service needs, providing details on:

- Scope of service (functionality, hours of operation etc.)

- Quality of service (performance, availability, security etc.)
- Service assurance (complete and correct delivery)
- Monitoring and reporting of service delivery
- Change control
- Fees and charges
- Review and improvement.

TIP - ITIL provides some good advice on defining IT services and this can be applied quite easily to non-IT services.

Service Guarantees

Service guarantees are common in the consumer world ("100% satisfaction guaranteed, if not - your money back!") but not as common in business-to-business relationships. It's obvious why a provider would not be keen on providing such guarantees, but there are benefits for both parties:

- Focus by the provider on the service aspects that are critical to the customer
- "Hard" measurement of the quality of the service provided
- Balancing of the level of investment by the customer with the impact of service disruption.

In practice, service guarantees are levied in terms of a service charge credit to the customer rather than a refund.

TIP - Negotiating service guarantees can be time consuming and intense and not to be pursued in all cases, but for critical services they are worth considering.

They may offer a competitive advantage, particularly if you can show, over time, that you have rarely if ever have had to honour a guarantee, and in tight contests where critical services are involved, they may be the differentiator you need.

Well structured, service guarantees can be a much lower risk to your revenue than you might think, particularly if you are in control of your service delivery and you

TIP - Use service guarantees to help you be your best.

have properly invested in assuring the provision of critical services in accordance with your commitments to the customer.

Incidents and Service Requests

Complete and correct data on an incidence allows sound analysis and continuous improvement, so provide your customer with a formal procedure for logging an incident. Using it effectively is critical to you being more successful (in market share and financial terms).

TIP - Data on incidents and service requests from your service systems is process data "gold"! Mine it!

What's the difference?

An **incident** is an "unplanned interruption to an IT service or reduction in the quality of an IT service" (e.g. "my login failed") whilst a **service request** is a "formal request from a user for something to be provided" (e.g. "please reset my password") - definitions from [ITIL](#).

Most customers do not know the difference between service requests and incidents (and problems).

Most service providers do understand the difference but, in many respects, treat them as being the same. This is to their detriment as they miss an opportunity to “shine” with service requests and to have clean data with which to pursue improvement of incident resolution times and to reduce incident occurrence.

Why distinguish?

Incidents, being unplanned, have uncertainty associated with them and so there is some justification for a xSP being unwilling to commit to a resolution time (although the justification is diminished if it's a familiar incident and a workaround is available). Service requests on the other hand should have firm fulfilment times committed to by the provider.

Your customers internal processes must be consistent with your service request fulfilment commitments (for example, if “adding a new employee” has a service level target of 5 days, make sure their recruitment process includes submitting the request at least 5 days before the start date of the employee).

What should be in an SLA?

Service Level Agreements should clearly state:

- **Response times** for incidents and service requests – the time between a user raising the matter with you and your support team telling the user “we’re working on it” (not by automatic email).
- **Resolution times for incidents** – time to address the cause of the incident or to restore the service using a workaround (e.g. use a “guest” login temporarily); there should be no reason for you not making such a commitment even if it is qualified (“95% within 2 business days”) or segmented (“within 24 hours for Outlook 365 glitches”). The key is for your commitment to be commensurate with the customer’s real need and with their acceptance that this may incur additional cost.
- **Fulfilment times for each type of service requests** – the time between the user making the request and the request being carried out to completion (e.g. 1 hour for a password reset, 3 business days for a new employee being fully provisioned).
- **Customer responsibilities** on which the above commitments are based.

***TIP** - Ensure your customer aligns their internal processes with your service request fulfilment*

Problems

ITIL defines a problem as a “cause of one or more incidents” and you should be collecting related customer experience and process data and solving the problem (and so reducing the cost associated with handling repeated occurrences of the same issue and annoying your customer(s)).

Problem status should be reported to customers, perhaps along with data on “incidents prevented” by your problem-solving.

Service Delivery

Customer technical staff

Some of your customers will employ internal IT staff to supplement and support your service provision. This role will usually encompass:

- Liaison with your technical staff
- On-site assistance to users with IT-related matters
- Testing of new, upgraded or modified services and/or equipment
- Implementing local “workarounds” while you pursue incident resolution
- Conduct of IT-related projects that are outside the scope of your agreement.

Such staff can be very useful to a service provider by:

- Facilitating the day-to-day relationship between your staff and the customer’s staff
- Observing how your services are used providing real-time feedback on any challenges your customer encounters
- Saving you from sending key staff on-site to investigate service issues
- Briefing customer staff on changes to technologies, services and procedures related to your services.

***TIP** - Involve your customers technical staff in some of your employee programs such as induction and training.*

It is to your advantage that these internal technical staff be trained in all the technologies, services and procedures relevant to the service you provide. Their skill levels should be maintained as the service evolves and technology changes.

Service reporting

You should regularly provide your customers with reports on the services provided to them and the items reported should be consistent with the service commitments made in the SLA.

***TIP** - Include descriptions and benefits of your standard reporting in your RFP response and confirm them during contractual negotiations.*

The purpose of service reporting is to ensure consistent understanding between you and your customers of the extent, timeliness and quality of service delivery.

Reporting should:

- Be regular and frequent (monthly is a good interval)
- Be service-oriented not equipment-oriented
- Clearly show performance over time against commitment (preferable graphically with tabular data in support)
- Highlight variance from commitments and the status of any action taken to address the variance (or explain why no action has been taken)
- Comment on any trends that indicate action may need to be taken (e.g. “free disk storage will be below 10% in 3 months”) with options and a recommendation

- Notify of any events that require action to be taken e.g. software license expiry
- Set out additions/reductions to agreed monthly charges e.g. service guarantees.

Reporting should not:

- Simply show this month's performance only or this month and the last month/same month last year
- Reproduce system reports e.g. malware scans.

***TIP** - RPA can help here, on top of the reporting capabilities of your service application and key infrastructure such as endpoint protection software reporting.*

Service reviews

You should regularly conduct reviews (quarterly is good) with your customers of the

***TIP** - Upon contract signing, use your desktop calendar software to invite all attendees to the next 4 service reviews.*

services provided by you, and the review items reported should be consistent with the service commitments made in the SLA and the MSA.

The purpose of service reviews is to ensure that the services provided continue to meet your customer's needs and that you are receiving sufficient recompense to ensure that you are able to continue to meet your needs.

Reviews should cover:

- Any agreed actions from the last review
- The most recent service report (or a special report for the review covering the period since the last review)
- Actions arising from the service report
- Notification by the customer of changes in demand (e.g. new employees)
- Notification by you of changes to the service and any related charges
- Continuous improvement activities – new, active, completed
- Advice by you of any future events that will materially affect the services provided, the cost of those services or required capital expenditure (e.g. replacement of obsolete equipment)

***TIP** - Leverage reviews to help your customers help you improve your service and reduce your costs (as well as theirs).*

Reviews should be:

- Scheduled well in advance
- Attended by necessary and authorised officers from the customer and provider organisations
- Formally conducted
- Minuted and minutes/actions distributed very soon after the meeting.

Service improvement

Structured and formal service improvement is necessary for the services provided to continue to meet your customers' changing business needs and to take advantage of advances in technology, making your customer satisfied, loyal and referenceable.

To do this, you should apply proven continuous improvement tools and techniques to ensure effective and permanent improvement at optimum cost. The customer-driven improvement industry is experiencing a "refresh" at present with "customer journey mapping", "customer impact management" and "customer experience management (CX)" all gaining popularity and penetration. Some of you may also be running TQM, Lean and/or Six Sigma initiatives. If you are employing any of these approaches to customer satisfaction and loyalty improvement, please continue! You can use this paper to help review progress.

TIP - If you and your staff are not already using CX, Lean and/or Six Sigma and so forth, you don't need to launch such a complex and time-consuming company-wide improvement program - just learn and apply some simple improvement tools and techniques such as the [Seven Basic Tools of Quality](#).

You should:

- Commit to participation in service reviews and service improvement activities
- Involve your customers in your existing continuous improvement activities, and request your customer to involve you in their existing continuous improvement activities
- Review all continuous improvement activities in the service review meetings

Apply proven continuous improvement tools and techniques to ensure effective and permanent improvement at optimum cost

Key to continuing alignment of services and needs is regular interaction between customer and provider and at many levels. There are three key levels of interaction:

1. **Strategic** – this would normally involve the CEO/Owner of the customer organisation and similar from the service provider, depending on its size. As its name indicates, these are concerned with strategic change and improvement and are less frequent than service reviews (see above)
2. **Tactical** – these are the service reviews discussed above
3. **Operational** – day to day interaction between customer and the provider; most commonly this is at the user and/or technical staff level, and with service centre staff and other support staff from the service provider.

Issues would hopefully be resolved at each level although may escalate from operational to tactical to strategic as required.

TIP - Upon contract signing, establish a formal operational-tactical-strategic reporting/review/change management/improvement communication structure with your customer.

Working on improvement

As described with regard to the "Value Chain Model", many people in all sorts of roles are in contact with your customers. This provides you with continuous information on not only your customers' satisfaction with the services you are delivering, but also

with information on what services they are using, when they are using them and how well they are using them. The information also illuminates matters other than service delivery. For example, a disagreement over “service hours” may highlight problems with the wording of your MSA and SLAs, and it may also indicate issues with how you measure and report “service hours”.

But hearing (or reading) such feedback is not enough – you must listen to, and act upon, it!

Listening to the "Voice of the Customer"

Surveys are cheap and easy to conduct nowadays – CRM systems often include the capability and tools such as SurveyMonkey are cheap and easy to use. But don't

***TIP** - If you intend to survey customer satisfaction or experience, make sure that's the last piece of your "CX program" that you put in place.*

survey your customers until you have internally committed to acknowledge and act upon any feedback received, have established formal processes for doing so, and have assigned responsibility for doing so

to the people who deliver the service (whether it be Operations, Legal or IT).

Listening to the "Voice of the Process"

Surveys provide “experience data” whilst your internal systems (such as IVR, CRM, ERP, ECM) provide “operational data”. Operational data is not useful in its raw state (e.g. customer calls per day, revenue per customer) but is useful if it is converted into “process data” by considering it across time, across customers, across services etc. Listening to process data can alert you to what's really happening – how well you are really delivering services – without and in advance of surveying (and possibly annoying) your customers.

In particular, the data in your Customer Service system can provide invaluable insights into where your customer experience is potentially driving them to your competitors.

*Examining whether calls to your 1300 number reflect “value demand” (a customer seeking information on additional services, for example) or “**failure demand**” (“demand caused by a failure to do something or do something right for the customer”).*

Further examination of the source, nature and rhythm of failure demand will point you to all manner of opportunities to improve your service and to reduce your costs.

***TIP** - As a first step, using your service system data, plot a month's call data. Reflect on the rhythm of calls and identify any patterns and anomalies and investigate them.*

Listening to the "Voice of the Employee"

I've mentioned a number of times how people throughout your organisation are regularly and sometime frequently in contact with your customers. Their experiences represent a trove of valuable information on how well you are serving your customers. Don't waste this!

***TIP** - Establish regular team meetings where each week every functional team reflects on the conversations and interactions they have had with customers in the previous week, and encourage them to identify, highlight and address any opportunities for service improvement (and celebrate compliments)!*

Service Assurance

Ensuring that your service delivery and customer experience capability continues to meet your customers' needs is not just about good proposals, good delivery, likeable staff and reporting and reviews. There are certain fundamentals of your business approach that set a firm foundation for consistent and correct service provision.

There are basics you must address to maintain your internal capability:

- Document your processes and procedures
- Select, train and lead your staff
- Keep your services available to your customers.

Similarly, there are basics your customers must address to maintain their internal capability, and that you must promote to them:

- Documenting their procedures that are relevant to the efficacious provision of your services
- Training their users
- Testing their business continuity and disaster recovery plan.

Service Assurance – Your customers' responsibilities

Document service-related processes

Processes through which your customer engages with you should be documented and kept complete, current and correct by them. Not only will these provide a sound basis for continuous improvement, they will help your customer help you to serve them more efficiently and effectively.

TIP – Provide customers with template procedures for key processes such as logging an incident, requesting a new service and so forth.

User training

The money your customers spend on your services will only be fully and effectively utilised if their users are competent in the use of the hardware / software / network / dataware products involved.

You should make it clear to customers what training and competences you believe are required in their side to ensure they meet their commitments to you and that you are in turn able to meet your commitments to them.

Of course, it's problematic to include training in a proposal – it adds cost and not all your competitors will prescribe training, putting you at a potential disadvantage.

In the IT vendors I've worked for, training costs were the first casualty of proposal reviews – sales people did not want to risk losing the deal because of training costs causing "sticker shock" – yet in reviews of problem customers, lack of training would often be slated as a root cause).

TIP – Establish a relationship with a training provider who might submit an independent training proposal in association with your submission.

You should also encourage your customers to:

- Not use existing staff to train new employees; they need to have formal training if they are not to pick up bad habits
- Regularly bring in experts to provide refresher training and to identify and eradicate any bad habits that may have developed.
- Seek keen members of staff to be “super users” of desktop software applications such as MS Excel and MS Word , and business software applications such as accounting software, publishing software etc.

Test business continuity and disaster recovery

It's important your customers consider the capability to survive disasters and disruption to their business operations.

TIP - *Include discussion of BCP/DR in your annual review with customers, whether they are part of your service or not.*

Even if this is not part of the service you are contracted to provide, you should raise the need with them.

Service Assurance – Your responsibilities

Processes and procedures

Your services are provided to your customers by your internal processes, with service delivery involving the execution of a sequence of processes. For example, a Desktop Management service will involve an “add new user” process, a “distribute software” process and many more. The quality of your service delivery thus depends on the quality of the design and implementation of the processes, and the quality of their application.

Process management is an “engineering” endeavour and too broad and complex a subject to be addressed here, but all your services should be documented as a set of

TIP - *Make the management of your service delivery processes a key responsibility of the relevant team leader or manager.*

processes; your processes documented as a set of related procedures, work instructions and standards etc; and, your processes owned and managed by the team that uses them.

This documentation is essential to the training of your staff (see below) and therefore must be fit for purpose. Adherence to process by staff in their day-to-day work requires documentation simpler than a formal procedure. Here a work instruction (one page, using graphics and text) is more suitable.

TIP - *Deploy work instructions that are clear and concise and that visually describe the sequence of work, the typical cycle time of one application of the process, required inputs (nature and quality) and the expected output (nature and quality)*

Staff selection, training and leadership

Let's assume you have designed and developed a set of services that meet the needs – in terms of scope, quality and price - of your customers, current and future. Let's further assume that you have in place the necessary infrastructure to support the deliver those services as designed. Assume also that you have procedural documentation that, if followed completely and correctly, will deliver the services as designed.

The quality of the service you deliver is now completely dependent on the number, assignment, competence, motivation of the staff that deliver those services.

- **Selection** – New employees should be selected on the basis of skills, experience, aptitude, attitude and “fit” with your organisation. Selection of staff is an important decision with regard to the quality of the services you provide, and so must be a carefully planned and thoroughly executed process.

*TIP - Make selection of staff the responsibility of the team into which the new employee will be placed and help them use a formal **decision-making** approach to do so.*

- **Training** – Your new staff should undergo an extensive induction period during which they receive formal training in the systems, tools, and procedures they will use to serve your customers. They should also be given training in customer service (interpersonal) skills. Their competence should be formally assessed.

Use supervised iterations of *Document – Demo – Do* to build the competence and confidence of staff and check the integrity of your procedural documentation:

- **Document** – have new staff read relevant documents (from your Vision statement to detailed procedures) and formally assess their understanding and competence
- **Demo** – demonstrate appropriate processes to the new employee, with them checking the demonstration against the procedural documentation
- **Do** – have the new employee undertake the task whilst checking their actions against the procedural documentation

The points, above, relating to user training are equally applicable to your staff with regard to service delivery and management software:

- Do not use existing staff to train new employees; they need to have formal training if they are not to pick up bad habits
- Regularly bring in experts to provide refresher training and to identify and eradicate any bad habits that may have developed.
- Appoint keen and competent staff to be “super users” of your service delivery and management software.
- **Leadership** – in customer service, leadership is primarily a matter of motivating staff to apply their skill, expertise and character to the complete and correct use of appropriate tools and procedures. If you have provided your well-selected, fully trained staff with quality procedures, systems and tools then you are well on the way! All that remains is motivation.

TIP - Make the induction and development of staff a key responsibility of their team leader or manager, either to train employees themselves or to contract specialist trainers.

***TIP** - Your dedication to high levels of customer service must be embodied and emphasised in all your writings, utterances and actions.*

This motivation should be **intrinsic**, not **extrinsic**. People cannot be motivated, in fact; they can only motivate themselves. Money doesn’t motivate; once people feel they are appropriately and equitably remunerated, money does not affect their performance. What **motivates** them is a sense of purpose, the freedom to do their work without constant direction, and the opportunity to build their skills.

Service availability - business continuity and disaster recovery

Just as you would advise your customers to undertake business continuity planning and ensure their ability to recover from any disasters, so too do you need to be sure that your service to your customers will not be disrupted or denied for any reason. This will also assure your customers that your services will be there always when they need them. It may also prompt them to seek similar services from you.

TIP - Publicise to your customers the nature and results of your own BCP/DR testing.

Service availability - cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is a critical aspect of assuring service delivery to your customers and all xSP proposals cover the various aspects of internet cybersecurity. However, I've not seen an xSP who provides proof of their level of cybersecurity, such as through penetration tests (and few customers request it). Again, there is business opportunity and competitive advantage in employing some form of proof of cybersecurity.

TIP - Publicise to your customers the nature and results of your own cybersecurity testing.

BusinessSPM works with you to transform your total organisational performance - sales, service, operational support and customer relationships. We boost revenue and profitability, market share, and customer and employee satisfaction.