

Q: How much of this financial information do you think we should share with the business?

A: Well it depends on what financial information you're looking at. Certainly every organization, whether it's a large IT shop or a small business, has internal financial information that they use to manage themselves, e.g. P&Ls, budgets, cost-saving efforts. For an IT organization that's part of a larger organization, budget/P&L are approved by finance. The bottom line question is whether you are reducing the L in the P&L.

Any information shared with the business needs to be based on practical approach. And, pilot with the customer before you move forward. Also, if you're not in a charging environment, make it very clear that you're either planning to move towards a charging environment, or that you're intending to make costs of IT services visible. It's important to be clear that what yesterday they perceived as free really isn't. Manage the information and share it on an as-needed basis. Be very careful about over-promising and under-delivering.

Q: Since legacy systems take so many resources to maintain, do you have any suggestions for ways to help organizations move to more productive, cost-effective systems?

A: The answer is the old ITIL answer, "It depends." Some legacy systems do consume a lot. Depending on the size of organization, there may already be some systems in place that can do some of that. If it's a replacement of a system, in this time more than any other, it's very important that you present a strong, factual business case. Start to look at your support costs; being able to monetize support costs really starts to bring you into the ROI towards replacing a system. You need to be able to bring in monetized cost of support, and, especially, of unplanned work.

Q: What suggestions do you have to help us show management that in these economic times, not to cut our training, as in the long run it will help us to be more efficient?

A: This is a question near and dear to my heart. In difficult times, the thought of abandoning programs such as service management and training programs is almost a natural reaction. That brings to mind the old term MBRA (Management by Running Around). In times of crisis we tend to lose our discipline in reacting to things that are out of our control. All we can do is control the environment we are in. If you're not going to keep training your staff and looking to increase their knowledge, what's the alternative. If your Service Management initiative is going to improve your ROI, continuing to improve Service Management is a better investment than looking at adding more tools, more shelf-ware, or doing that MBRA. If you look at discipline in the military and in other high-performing organizations, they keep marching on. Education is very, very important. If we're in crisis do we stop educating our children? No! Instead, we continue to invest in their education so they can propel us into the future. Organizations should look to leverage the best practices and the knowledge that are out there to help them to reduce their costs.

Q: We're having a hard time getting support for ITSM-related projects... what can we do? What's the best way to approach this with limited resources?

A: IT Service Management has never required extensive resources. The best way to keep your organization focused on Service Management is to have them look at the alternative. Demonstrate the ROI. Perhaps demonstrate the value of models to make the organization much more efficient. When you talk about efficiency, it tends to feel somewhat vague, but you can start to monetize that. You can start to challenge management to look at FTEs and where they're engaged.

Organizations should absolutely be looking at that, because the road to financial health is to reduce costs while improving your quality and providing value-for-money services. Otherwise the business as a whole is going to suffer. Before you can monetize, every organization that hasn't gotten their organization trained needs to hop on right now. That's what IT Service Management is all about.

Q: Which is the best among the following: 1) First Create Processes and buy tools or 2) Buy tools first and then create processes?

A: You need to develop the process first. This approach is in every framework and has been proven time and time again. I'm as guilty as anyone else. When I was an IT director, I would sometimes buy a tool to get a process. But the reality is that a tool can only complement a process. The process has to be internalized and just become "that's the way we do it here." You can incur a lot of additional cost trying to make a tool fit your organization's maturity. Start simple. Take measurements and benchmark where you are today. Then your processes will mature and your technology can mature along with them.

Q: What techniques can we use to track unplanned work?

A: Incident Management has a great deal of information about that. A good first step is to look at escalations. I'm not saying that all escalations are bad – that's certainly not the case! But particularly beyond Level 2, when you're escalating to your technical experts and your suppliers, then you're starting to see the amount of unplanned. As Donna Knapp says, "Incident metrics are the center of the universe." The second part of this is to talk with your staff and ask them questions like: "How much work are you doing that's predictable?" and "How many interruptions are you getting?" Look into how many projects are missing milestones, primarily due to unplanned work. When you start to do this you should be able to flush out where your unplanned work is.