

Agile Service Management: A Checklist

Here are several practical examples on how to make your service management more agile:

Make Sure Everything You Do Adds Value for the Customer

IT departments usually place a good deal of work into tasks that have little actual value for their customers. For example, a colleague of mine recently visited an organization where its IT department had written an extensive manual for a new smartphone it offered. While this might sound useful, most of the information was already available to users on the internet. That and next OS update would have made the manual outdated and useless.

Plainly speaking, this is a waste of time and resources. There's no need to replicate work already done and content that is readily available anywhere on the web. Taking a focus on agile, a better way to go may have been of documenting information to keep the manual limited to what is strictly necessary, and provide these instructions to a small test group. In doing so, only describe company-specific information, such as how to synchronize your work email with the new smartphone, and respond to the documentation based on the feedback you receive from your test group. Following this feedback, you are able to update the documentation before you officially begin to supply the smartphone, for example.

Always Work Closely with Your Customers

As it designs its services and processes, service organizations must make many assumptions about the needs of its customers. For example, for years a facilities organization encouraged its customers to log a call when something was wrong in the office building. Recently, it discovered that customers were annoyed to receive five or six status update emails after they log a call—one reason many customers stop logging calls altogether.

In agile service management, you always involve your customers as soon as possible with everything you do. Using the example above, come up with a solution together with customers. When customers log a call, they can tick a box saying they want to receive status updates. One question and a single checkbox can spare a great deal of frustration.

The Right People in the Right Place

Many IT organizations lean heavily on processes, unfortunately, but their goal is to guarantee consistent quality of services, no matter who supplies the service. While good in theory, in practice it matters who supplies a service. For example, an unmotivated service desk likely probably leaves a less-than-positive impression on your customer

than a happy, motivated employee. You simply can't cover this outcome with a "process."

An important part of the agile mindset then is providing enough time and attention for your team members, which only functions well with people who are good at the work they do and when the work they do makes them happy. If a team member is no longer motivated, talk to the employee and see if you can find a role where they'll be happier, and better able to support the organization as a whole.

Make Your Processes as Flexible as Possible

ITIL processes are usually not flexible, to say the least. Change management is a great example. A request for change must go through a set number of predefined steps. The only choice you usually have in the process is approve or decline the change. There's no room to change plans and if you want to change them, you need to stop the process, make a new plan and get approval. Plan, change, stop with obstacle. Plan change and plan all over again. Not efficient in most cases.

Your design and planning must remain flexible enough to address ever-changing organizational demands. This, however, doesn't mean you need to implement every single planned change, and you also must allow your team to deal with new processes as they see fit.

Design, Implement and Improve Your Services Step by Step

New software or services implementations can take up months and even years. When the implementation is finally done, you've gained new insights and probably want to change many things, but by that time there's likely little budget left or the project team members have moved on and it's up to the application manager to process all the feedback on their own.

Delivering new services in an agile way means you deliver something workable as soon as you are able, collect feedback and use this feedback to improve the product. The process isn't perfect, but that's okay. While you continue working on the next process, you can receive feedback to improve your incident management.

Keep Your Services and Operations Straightforward

Requests for services often contain a good deal of unnecessary management authorizations. In many cases, IT department leaders assume that department management wants control over every individual request or, alternatively, the IT department doesn't carry any responsibility. This creates a process unnecessarily full of authorizations and a manager who gets loads of emails with authorization requests.

Nothing should be this cumbersome. Things will be much smoother when the IT department members ask managers how much control they really want or need. They

usually don't really want to receive a number of emails, but there is an alternative solution: Requests don't need to be authorized and managers can receive a monthly overview of the costs. This way, the manager still has control over costs, but he or she doesn't have to process numerous emails. And the employee, the user, is helped much more quickly.

Making Your Incident Management More Agile

Where do you need to start when you want to work with agile? The response to this question depends on the organization. The best approach may be starting with taking a look at your current services and compare these with agile principles. For example, where's the friction? What improvements are easy to implement? That's where you begin. Then you start by making a small improvement, ask for feedback and move on to the next improvement.

Incident management is the most important process of a supporting department. It's also quite straightforward, but how can it be made more agile? Simply start by stripping out everything from the incident management process that has no customer value. Take a critical look at your current processes and evaluate each step by asking yourself if every step of the process adds value for the customer. To answer this question, you first need to know what your customer want, which is probably nothing more than a quick solution.

Every step in your incident management process must contribute to how quickly an incident is processed. If there is a step along the way that doesn't contribute to your goal, remove it. Eliminate everything wasteful from your process.