Transforming IT Metrics

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A giant leap in quantifying the business value of IT support

IT departments routinely gather and publish metrics. Abandoned rates, call durations, and first contact resolution rates all help IT determine compliance with service level commitments. But do they help the business really understand the value of IT? Do they help IT really understand the contribution of their services to business effectiveness? In order to achieve better alignment with the business, IT must embrace the overall goals and objectives of the business, argues the author. Then IT can put in place a new set of metrics, designed to highlight specific advantage to the business. This transformation of metrics takes concerted effort, but yields great benefit to both IT and the business as a whole. In this paper, Rae Ann Bruno, President of Business Solutions Training, Inc., provides an overview of the small steps required to achieve this giant leap.

Introduction

Do you find yourself continually improving your Help Desk statistics yet find that your team is still under-valued and your accomplishments overlooked? Are you continually barraged with escalations from your boss because people are calling him to circumvent the defined processes? Is getting funding for new Help Desk technology virtually impossible? If you've answered yes to any of these questions, then you need to take a new approach to supporting your business customers. The key to being valued, funded, and accepted by the business is being properly aligned. This can only occur if you understand and align with business goals, speak in business terms, and provide business solutions. Instead of impressing callers with technical know-how, assist them by resolving the business issue at hand. Keeping the business running by minimizing downtime and helping callers achieve timely business results adds value to the top and bottom lines of the company. It also increases the perceived (and real) value of support to the organization as a whole. The first step in this direction is to translate your current metrics into business terms. This step is a fairly easy one to take and enables you to begin a dialogue that is meaningful to both IT and the lines of business. The next step, transforming IT metrics, requires a strategic decision to rethink IT altogether from the vantage point of the business. While requiring a greater commitment of time and resources, this step will significantly improve the role and perception of IT within the business.

The transformation roadmap

Proving to internal customers that IT adds business value is no easy task. They view support personnel as technologists, not business partners. Internal customers believe that IT doesn't understand the business and doesn't have the right sense of urgency for critical business issues. They may be right. Training provided for support professionals centers around technology and skills needed to solve problems. Business process training is rarely included. Often, support personnel are unfamiliar with the business outside of IT. IT tracking and reporting methods reinforce the perception of IT as technologists. When categorizing calls and reporting progress, support teams focus on technology impact and performance metrics, and this is what is communicated to the business segments. By focusing your support team on the same end results as the business people and prioritizing, categorizing, measuring, and communicating in business terms, you can change this perception. Here are the steps necessary to achieve business alignment and communicate the value of IT support within the company.

➢ **Internalize** the business goals and processes within your company. Align IT support objectives with the company and line of business goals.

➢ **Prioritize** service requests based on business priorities and provide business solutions, not technology solutions. The aim is to address the business issue first, technology second.

➢ **Categorize** technology issues based on what is important from a business perspective. Through business-focused categorization, prudent technology, process, and business decisions are made.

➢ **Publicize** your success through reports that are business-focused and that help business managers make prudent decisions. Arming business managers with information that helps them improve their areas and concentrate on their business goals increases the value of IT support.

Through the right prioritization, categorization, and evaluation of information, your team can provide business solutions that directly help the company meet its goals.

Setting business-focused IT goals

Does everyone on your team know the mission or goals of the company? Do their objectives tie to these goals in a way that their individual impact is clear? If so, you're off to a great start. If not, it's time for change. Start by identifying the company's high-level goals as well as the more detailed objectives of your primary internal customers. To align IT goals with business goals, create specific and detailed IT objectives for each individual that support the higher level, business focused goals. Then the "big picture" and how each individual's performance impacts it

are clear. For example, a company's goal may be to increase market share. In support of that goal, the sales team plans to increase sales revenue by 10 percent each quarter. What can IT

do to help achieve this objective?

Here is an example of a sales goal, a high-level support goal, and examples of individual IT support objectives that show ways to help the sales force meet its goals.

Sales goal

➢ Increase revenue by 10 percent each quarter.

High-level IT goal

➢ Keep the sales team productive by minimizing service disruptions and streamlining processes.

Supporting objectives

➢ Implement a break/fix program for sales that meets business needs identified in the SLA. Meet service level targets 95 percent of the time.

➢ Maintain a first-contact resolution rate of 85 percent for sales data recovery issues.

➢ Create cross-functional teams to review problem resolution processes for sales on a quarterly basis. Define and implement a minimum of two process-efficiency improvements a quarter.

➢ Maintain a minimum customer satisfaction rating average from sales of 4.0. Each quarter, increase this average by 1 percent.

Meeting these IT objectives keeps the sales people working, productive, and focused on their customers.

Prioritizing based on the business

Once business goals are understood, you need to determine how technology disruptions impact the business. Then call types can be prioritized in alignment with business priorities. This may require an overhaul to the current prioritization criteria and categorizations used as well as how the results are communicated. Frequently, calls assigned high priority are service disruptions impacting the most employees at one time. What if high priorities were also assigned to specific job types or individuals? From an IT support process and technology perspective this may sound

crazy. But, let's look at it from a business angle.

Consider this scenario…

Joe Salesperson calls the Help Desk frantic because he thinks he has lost two months of bid and product configuration information. He just upgraded the bidding application and nothing works. It is the last week of the quarter and he has several active accounts he needs to manage. In fact, Sue Customer just called and needs a slight revision made to his offer before she places a $200,000 order. She needs the changes within three hours or she will not be able to get the order through this month.

After answering a series of questions, Joe is told that a second level analyst will call him back within the hour. The second level person calls, asks some of the same questions, gives some other suggestions, and tells Joe that she will have to research this further. Because this situation appears to impact only one individual, it is assigned a low priority, with a promised resolution within eight hours of the initial call. He is going to miss his deadline unless he recreates the bid from memory on someone else's PC.

Was this really a low priority call? Not if you ask Joe or his Sales Manager or even the President of the company. Joe happens to be one of the top sales people for the company, working on key revenue opportunities for the quarter. Assigning a low priority to Joe is the same as assigning a low priority to the company goals of increasing market share and revenues. From a business management perspective, an IT resource should be dedicated to getting Joe's issue resolved. If it can't be resolved, a suitable alternative to Joe recreating his information needs to be provided. Prioritization is critical. Once goals and objectives are well understood, IT can determine priorities and validate these with the lines of business and the company as a whole. Training may be required to ensure that IT staff members understand how to determine business problems and identify their true priority.

Creating meaningful categories

At this point, IT should be aligned with the business, but how can you validate this assumption? Are you capturing information in your call tracking application in a way that business and productivity impact can be measured and easily communicated? If not, you may need to re-evaluate the way calls are categorized and tracked.

When defining categories, remember that they will be used to identify recurring issues, trends, and business impact. A combination of categories is necessary to build the "big picture." Categories need to be as intuitive as possible; if they are not easily understood, calls will be categorized incorrectly. This skews report results, and areas that need to have further attention could go unnoticed. Let's take another look at the situation with Joe Salesman. With today's categorization, the call would likely be categorized like this:

Category	Value
Technology	Hardware
Footprint	Laptop
Manufacturer	Toshiba
Model	Tecra8000
Call type	Break-fix

What does this tell us about business impact? Let's use the idea of categorizing by business role and see how the categorization would change. The high level category (in this example, Technology) needs to be somewhat broad. This situation involved a remote sales person, so "remote" may be a useful part of the categorization sequence. However, if the National Sales Manager wants to know how frequently the sales force is experiencing these issues, "outside sales" is a better value.

Subsequent categories and values need to be more specific. "Break-fix" is too general. It would require additional research to determine trends. Here is a better way to categorize Joe's issue:

Category	Value
Group	Outside Sales
Footprint	Laptop
Manufacturer	Toshiba
Model	Tecra8000
Call type	Data Recovery

From this categorization sequence, the following information can be gathered:

- ➢ Call volume from outside sales users.

- ➢ Frequency of outside sales people experiencing laptop issues.

- ➢ Performance of laptops by manufacturer and model.

- ➢ Rate of recurrence of recovering data.

With the original categorization, most of this information would not have been attainable without extensive research into the content of the ticket (service request). With the categorization that identifies business priorities, this information would be apparent in standard reports. This new approach to categorization can also assist IT management in better determining support staffing and process needs.

Defining business-focused reports

Reports are the mechanism for communicating business impact. Delivering business focused reports that provide valuable information for internal business groups is necessary. By analyzing the business impact of service disruptions, IT can make prudent decisions. These decisions influence process, technology, or resource improvements that increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the company as a whole.

Once the foundation for business-focused reports is laid through useful categorization, reports are easier to design. Currently, when upper management asks business impact questions, it takes ad hoc queries, report customization, and research to provide answers. With business-focused categories, standard reports will be much more useful to the lines of business managers.

When designing reports, keep in mind that the purpose is to provide decision makers with enough information to suitably judge performance, identify trends and recurring issues, and detect areas where improvement is needed. The reports need to drill down far enough to accomplish this without requiring extensive research. However, too much information in one report can be confusing.

Report essentials

Get started by determining who needs to have each report, what that report needs to show, and why it is needed. Once the "*Who,*" "*What,*" and "*Why*" are answered, determine "*How*" and "*When*" to report the information. Then, determine what questions the report should answer or the information it needs to provide. Here are some examples of useful questions that help in the design of reports.

➢ What are the mission-critical functions/applications/or business segments for the company?

➢ How could productivity impact be shown for those mission critical areas?

➢ What information would help to improve service?

➢ What information would show success?

➢ What information would help the organization to know where to invest in technology?

➢ What information is needed to identify where to streamline processes and productivity tools?

Once you know your audience and their needs, you can determine how many different reports to define and with what content. Each group, such as sales, purchasing, and engineering, will want to see information specific to their operations.

Report focus

A variety of scheduled reports can be defined that present information from different perspectives. Some possible report angles could be:

> ➢ Frequency and duration of major system outages (e.g., a manufacturing system) by manufacturing site.
>
> ➢ Frequency of remote workers sending laptops in for repair.
>
> ➢ Frequency of business critical data loss.
>
> ➢ Number of employees impacted (and how) by version upgrades or new software/productivity tool releases.
>
> ➢ Volume of "how to" calls on specific applications/technologies.

Value to the lines of business

Line-of-business managers want information that helps them improve their own operations. Here are the kinds of questions a National Sales Manager should be able to answer with information provided by IT:

> ➢ How often are outside sales people calling for support?
>
> ➢ What is the average amount of time they are spending on the phone with support?
>
> ➢ How long does it typically take before they can access needed information or technology?
>
> ➢ What percentage of the outside sales force experiences issues on a regular basis?
>
> ➢ How much customer face-to-face time is being lost?
>
> ➢ Are we having a problem with specific business applications? Specific productivity tools?
>
> ➢ Is there an issue with specific individuals or their technology?
>
> ➢ At what point in the sales process are we having a break down?
>
> ➢ Do processes need to be refined?
>
> ➢ Is the technology IT is providing sufficient? Is the service?
>
> ➢ What impact does this have on reaching sales goals?

By providing the lines of business with information that is meaningful to them, in a way that can be easily interpreted and acted upon, IT not only illustrates its ongoing value but also highlights areas of improvement. Together, IT and the line-of-business managers can make prudent decisions regarding people, process, and technology.

Value to IT

IT management can use the business-focused reports to support decisions related to scheduling technology refreshes, obsolescing hardware and software, performing major upgrades, enhancing business applications, and so on. This information can also be used by IT to determine:

- ➢ Staffing ratios/needs.
- ➢ Whether to make adjustments to service levels or change hours of support.
- ➢ What impact technology changes have on the support teams.
- ➢ Cost per call.
- ➢ Cost saving efforts.
- ➢ Process improvement opportunities.
- ➢ What support tools are necessary to quickly resolve high-business-impact issues. IT gains a significant advantage through this new categorization and reporting process. Functions and projects within IT can be evaluated from both an IT metrics and a business benefit perspective.

Transforming service

By moving your organization to a business-focused approach to IT support, you can literally transform the level of service you provide to your customers. Let's revisit Joe Salesman's phone call.

Consider this scenario, again…

Joe Salesperson calls the Help Desk frantic because he thinks he has lost two months of bid and product configuration information. He just upgraded the bidding application and nothing works. It is the last week of the quarter and he has several active accounts he needs to manage. In fact, Sue Customer just called and needs a slight revision made to his offer before she places a $200,000 order. She needs the changes within three hours or she will not be able to get the order through this month.

After answering a series of questions, Joe can tell that Sandy Support at the Help Desk understands the urgency. Sandy knows that Joe has to respond to his customer quickly or the company may not make its numbers for the quarter. Sandy decides to roll Joe's PC back to a time when everything was working— before the upgrade to the bidding application. With Joe's blessing, Sandy initiates the rollback and Joe's application and his documents are restored. Joe closes the order that afternoon.

How often do you communicate the success of a situation like this? In traditional reports based on technology categories, the impact of this resolution would be lost in the data. This call would be measured by call duration and resolution time. Unless Joe Salesperson shares this story with enough people to get to the National Sales Manager, the value the analyst added may go unnoticed. Even then, it would appear as a one-time situation, not as a way that the support team impacts revenue generation and productivity for the company on a regular basis. With business focused prioritization, categorizations, and reports this value add service can be communicated more easily.

It is important to note that reports aren't always the final answer. Additional review may be needed. For example, if the outside sales/data recovery report showed a high percentage of incidents, additional review would be necessary to determine where to focus and what to change. Further review may reveal a bug in a specific application or a need for updated hardware for the remote end users.

In any case, you will likely want to augment your reports with anecdotal evidence. For example, the number of times support facilitated closing a sale, helped to get product shipped to the customer, restored service to an employee, or improved efficiency in a process by automating it, are report topics that the line of business managers would find very useful. These augmented reports reveal how IT and support add value to the organization as a whole.

Summary

Effectively translating IT goals, metrics, and reports into business benefits can have dramatic effect on increasing the value of IT support within an organization. Transforming to a business-focused culture benefits both IT and the organization as a whole. It leads to more accurate assessment of business processes and technology, better business decisions, and increased efficiency and effectiveness throughout the organization. Committing to this strategic transformation is a big step, and one that has tremendous rewards. Once you have internalized the company's goals and prioritized your efforts accordingly you are already on your way to providing superior service. Categorizing calls and publicizing success will prove the value of your service to all involved.