

The Keys to an IT Best Practice
Reporting Framework

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A Reporting Framework Puts Your Measurements to Work!

There is a lot of detail in ITIL 2011 about designing the proper measurements framework, but without a timely and effective *reporting framework* to sort this data, convert it to information, and present it in the right format at the right time to the people that need to know in order to make better decisions, a measurements framework will be of little use.

Most business and organizations rely heavily on IT services. They naturally want assurance that IT is meeting their needs and expected service levels. Without a reporting framework that conveys this value, customers won't appreciate the value of IT services being delivered. Your reporting framework ensures regular delivery of quality, value-based reporting to customers and other stakeholders during regular service review meetings, so that IT can express the value to customers effectively, and also note any areas that are off target and being addressed.

In many ways an effective reporting framework becomes part of IT's marketing capability. Without a reporting framework that delivers regular reporting on performance and value delivery to all stakeholders—customers, IT teams, users, and senior management—customers won't appreciate the value, internal teams won't realize their contribution, and organizational management won't see the value or recognize the return on investment from IT.

It's also a reporting framework that converts information into a format appropriate to the stakeholder—periodic high-level presentation for executive management, periodic service level monitoring charts for customers, scorecards for IT management, and real-time dashboards for frontline practitioners.

A good reporting framework also ensures that the *right information gets to the right people at the right time*, effectively and efficiently, for improved decision making.

Reporting is also a critical element in the ITIL continual service improvement (CSI) process. Without an integrated reporting framework, all you have is data being gathered via a measurements framework. Data by itself is of little value; it must be formatted, processed into information, and analyzed to deliver knowledge for improved decision making and performance. This requires a quality reporting framework.

Effective reporting enables process and service owners to proactively assess performance against target service levels on a regular basis – daily, weekly, and monthly. To ensure they stay on track with commitment, and to inform other stakeholders. It's reporting that enables assessment of performance against SLA targets, and without such reporting, the service desk, IT technical and application teams, and IT service management can't be assured they are consistently delivering required levels of service availability, capacity, and continuity.

Good reporting enables IT practitioners and managers to identify gaps in performance and opportunities for improvement in service delivery. When large and chronic gaps appear, which indicate a structural or process issue, a proactive service improvement plan (SIP) may be submitted to management to address these issues. Without a well-designed, graphical reporting framework that makes these opportunities apparent, such opportunities will likely fall by the wayside and never be taken advantage of!

In sum, a well-designed, highly automated reporting framework that utilizes a balanced approach, effective graphics, clear targets, and real-time and periodic reporting, along with analysis and recommendations, is absolutely essential for IT service management to be effective in delivering quality services, as well as reporting the value of such services to the organization.

Reporting Enables the Organization to Move Forward

An effective reporting framework must deliver timely, continuous, and accurate feedback to decision makers, managers, and support staff at three levels:

The Strategic Level – Reporting delivers the periodic feedback on the results of long-term strategies and policies that high-level, IT strategic management needs. Reporting also provides critical readings regarding progress on new services, in development and in live operation; customer satisfaction levels; and financial performance of services in live operation

With timely and effective reporting, leaders can adjust as necessary the overall strategy for the organization and the services it offers. Course corrections can be conveyed to IT managers, and plans for service designs, transitions, and operations can be optimized.

The Tactical Level – To reach strategic goals and objectives, IT must deliver tactical projects that introduce new/upgraded services, improve supporting IT infrastructure, streamline processes, or make other cost-effective improvements.

It's here that an effective reporting framework delivers feedback on the results of customer and user satisfaction with *service designs*: the performance of new and changed services in operation, whether they are meeting the intended performance targets (availability, capacity, and so on) and delivering the value intended.

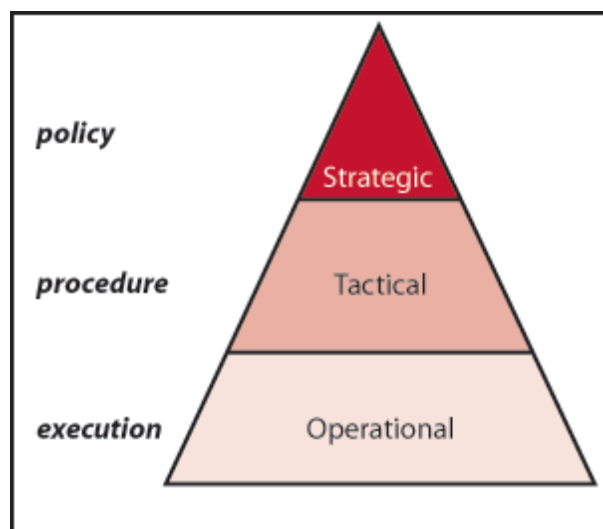
Reporting provides feedback to service design and transition teams on:

- The results of testing prior to launch;
- The effectiveness of a change (did it work as intended, or not?) via change evaluation reports;
- The performance of a pilot in the final stages of transition (is it meeting intended performance levels?); and
- The level of customer and user satisfaction during testing, pilot, and in the early stages of rollout.

As a result, service design and transition teams can assess the effectiveness of new/changed services and act accordingly to improve them as necessary. Service transition teams can also optimize the risk involved with change management, improve testing performance, and ensure that release activities are on target with customer and user expectations.

The Operational Level – It is reporting that informs service operation teams about whether service quality and performance is on target with expected service levels (or not). The service level targets (SLTs) are the guiding factors for performance, and become reporting targets for the delivery systems and teams in service operation.

Here the reporting framework gathers the data and processes it into an acceptable format. For example, this occurs with automated performance monitoring systems in IT operations, gathering the availability



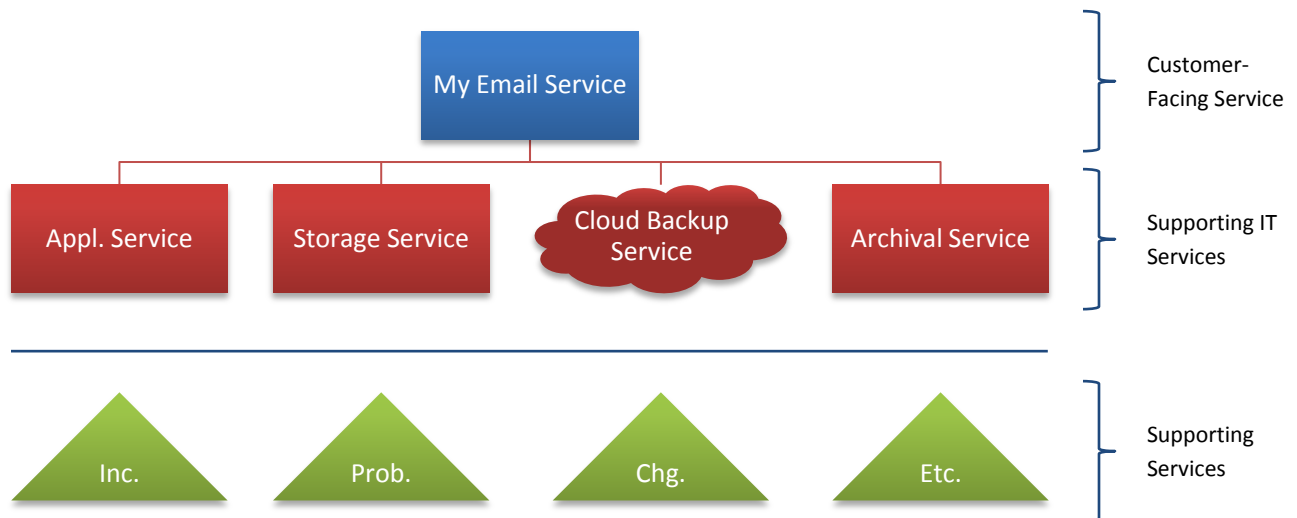
and capacity levels of supporting network, server, and application components. Reporting also plays a vital role in communicating the performance of service availability, capacity, and continuity to target levels, as well as the level of customer and user satisfaction. As a result, team leads and managers are able to analyze trends for any gaps in service or component performance, and thus identify opportunities to improve services or supporting processes.

With such real-time and periodic feedback, operational managers can quickly take action to get a service or component back on track. Opportunities for process or infrastructure improvement can also be identified, and put forth to management in the form of improvement plans.

Reporting at Three Levels: Service, Technology, and Process

An effective reporting framework must include monitoring and reporting at three levels, and in two forms. The three levels of monitoring and reporting pertain to customer-facing services that directly support business processes, the supporting IT services and components that make up those services, and the performance of the processes that keep those services available:

Customer-Facing Services – The end-to-end service the customer is actually using must be monitored and reported on, since that is what the customer and IT is most interested in assuring the performance of. For example, the customer is interested in the high availability of email as a service, not in the high availability of the network that delivers the email, or the storage service that stores the email, or the backup service that ensures backups are done. Yet without the performance of these supporting components and services, there would be no email.



Supporting Technology Components – These are the hardware, software, and other supporting IT service components that play key parts in delivering the customer-facing service (e.g., network services, storage services, computing services, etc.). Without monitoring and reporting on the performance of supporting IT services and components, it is impossible to assess the performance of the top-level end-to-end service.

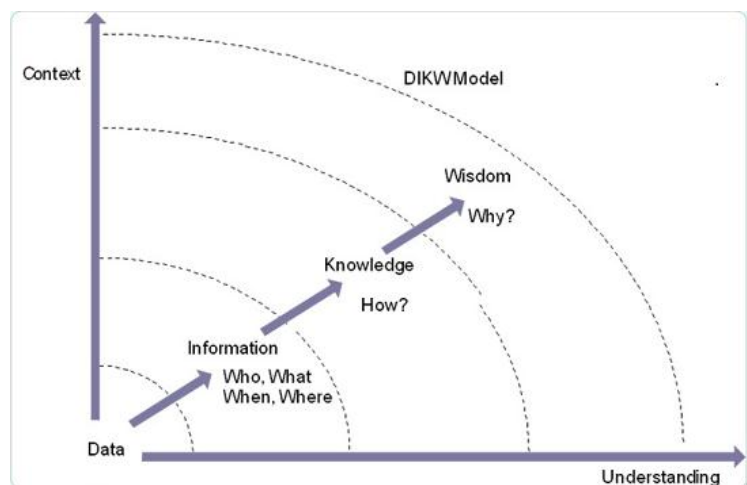
Supporting Processes – Reporting on selected metrics and KPIs must also be in place for every supporting ITSM process. Process owners and managers must be able to detect that their process is delivering on-target performance, and address any gaps in performance. Incident management, for example, will be responsible for consistently hitting such targets as “75 percent of incidents resolved at level 1” or “user satisfaction consistently achieving 4 out of 5 points.” Reporting provides the timely intelligence service operation depends on.

Data is gathered regarding the performance of components and IT supporting services via automated monitoring systems run by IT operations, as well as at the service desk and by supporting service operations teams (networking, server team, applications support, etc). The reporting on the performance of supporting processes (incident management, problem management, etc.) is the responsibility of assigned process manager, who must ensure that each process is achieving its performance targets consistently. Processing data into a usable format should also take process in service operations, and in an automated fashion as much as possible. Reports can then be analyzed and presented to decision makers for action.

Reporting must also take into account both quantitative and qualitative measurements. *Quantitative* metrics pertain to objective numbers (e.g., percentage availability (uptime), average resolution time for incidents reports, etc.), while *qualitative* metrics tell us about perception (e.g., customer or staff satisfaction levels). It’s essential to collect both types of metrics and report on both to arrive at a complete picture of performance, whether that is for the IT service provider, a particular service, or a process.

A Reporting Framework Transforms Data to Wisdom

An effective reporting framework plays a key role in enabling knowledge management, another critical process within the ITIL framework that should benefit all stakeholders, from top to bottom. Without reporting’s key activities of data gathering, processing, and analysis, all you have is data—and that is of very little use to anyone. To be of value, *data* must be organized and formatted into information and captured for analysis: Who did what, when, and where? Once that’s been accomplished, the *information* can be analyzed to gain *knowledge*: Why a certain event happened, and what might be done about it (*wisdom*).



For example, data should be gathered continuously in a service desk environment, and via IT operations system and component monitoring. Input should be received from users via multiple channels at the service desk: phone, email, web, chat, etc. IT monitoring systems should be gathering data on network activity, critical components, and so forth. Such data should also be organized and formatted (either manually or automatically) into records, which can provide information on what happened (type of event), to whom (the affected users), when, and what was the impact.

With such information, the service desk and other IT support teams will be equipped with knowledge about the event, and can take wise action to deal with the event, incident/request, or problem, and restore service operations to normal per agreed upon targets (wisdom). Wisdom is enabled when reports are run at the end of a period to examine any trends in performance with respect to target service levels. Because information has been properly formatted, analysis can show trends, enable the detection of anomalies, and form the basis for proactive process or service improvement plans.

ITSM Processes That Rely Heavily on a Reporting Framework

Although all processes within an ITSM organization can benefit from effective reporting, certain processes within the ITIL framework rely heavily on an effective reporting framework in order to achieve their objectives.

Business Relationship Management (BRM) and Service Level Management (SLM) – As the customer relationship manager, the BRM requires regular reporting on the performance of services to documented customer needs, as well as reports on customer and user satisfaction. A closely related role—service level management—focuses on delivering to promised service levels (uptime performance, response, and resolution time performance). The service level manager relies heavily on service level reporting (at an end-to-end service level, as well as on supporting components) in order to provide timely and complete information to customers through regularly scheduled service review meetings.

Event Management – A process mainly driven by IT operations, event management uses data gathering, filtering, and correlation analysis to detect certain types of events relative to a service or supporting components, in order to achieve its purpose of providing early detection of situations that might affect service and component uptime and performance. Some of these events, of course, may trigger incidents in the incident management process, to be resolved by the service desk, desktop support, or other groups.

Incident and Problem Management – Relies on real-time and periodic reporting to identify gaps in performance with respect to consistently achieving service level targets (incident/problem response and resolution times).

Availability and Capacity Management – Both of these processes depend on data gathering, processing, and reporting from IT operations and event management. Availability management is interested in assessing whether target availability times are being delivered at both a service and



component level. If target service levels are not being met, the availability manager ought to take proactive steps to determine what the underlying issues might be that are compromising service/component availability. Is there a chronic problem with a component? Is a recovery procedure/system not up to par?

In a similar fashion, capacity management is interested in determining whether sufficient capacity exists at a service and component level to sustain changing levels of demand on services and their supporting components. Depending on reporting results, capacity management might undertake a load-balancing operation to sift transactions to another part of the network, or engage in a performance-tuning exercise.

Without an effective reporting framework, these processes will be limited in terms of achieving their full effectiveness.

Critical Success Factors (CSFs) for a Reporting Framework

Like any best practice process, an effective reporting framework depends on a number of CSFs to ensure the success of the final product. Essential elements include:

A single focal point for ownership, with wide participation – A single point of accountability should be established in order for an organization-wide approach to reporting to become a reality. The owner of the reporting framework, like generic process owners, should be the one responsible for seeing to it that standard reporting policies and procedures are documented and communicated to all, that proper reporting systems and data gathering tools are in place, and that the reporting framework is tightly integrated with the adopted measurements framework. The reporting framework owner should also see to it that a continual review and improvement process is in place for the framework itself.

Based on a sound measurements framework – Without a sound measurements framework to provide guidance on what to measure, a reporting framework will not have the content that is of most interest to target audiences. Aligning with the vision of the enterprise (step 1) and defining what we should measure (step 2) are critical foundational elements to an effective reporting framework.

A sound measurements framework will include linkage from measurement to vision, metrics both quantitative and qualitative in nature, and measurement at three levels: on the supporting processes, on the technology components that make up services, and on the end-to-end services themselves

Effective data gathering and processing systems – Quality data gathering ensures the accuracy and integrity of the input, and includes both manual data input (eg., at the service desk), as well as automated data gathering (for example, with the automated component and service monitoring systems found in most IT operations centers). Process the data into usable information, using automated systems or manual methods. Careful attention must be paid to ensure that noise is filtered out and only meaningful information is captured. The accuracy and completeness of the information must also be ensured to enable effective analysis and presentation.

Timely information targeted to the right audience – Because outdated information is of little value in decision making, and information provided to the wrong audience doesn't do much good either. Real-time dashboard reporting should be targeted in continuous real time to frontline support staff, team

leads, and technical/application managers. Periodic scorecard reporting should be targeted at regular intervals to IT departmental management, customers, and senior management

A format that clearly communicates – For example, utilize charts and graphs to accompany the detail. And by all means, clearly show the target on the report! Provide results in both snapshot format (to assess the current status), as well as trend analysis formats (showing performance to target over time) for gaps analysis purposes.

Consolidation of multiple input sources – If possible, look for reporting systems that enable you to combine multiple sources of data if needed. For example, incidents may be reported via phone, email, web, or chat; a reporting system than can combine input from each of these multiple data sources will facilitate ease of processing incident-related performance statistics, analysis, and presentation of the results.

Reporting that is available in a choice of media formats – This enables you to tailor your delivery to the desires of your target audience. Gain agreement with target audiences on their preferred format, and consider including a choice of outputs: *hard-copy reports*, which are most pertinent for periodic reports to IT management, and customers; *online delivery* to desktop dashboards or mobile devices, or to a subsection of your web portal, is best for real-time reports; finally, *PowerPoint summary presentations* are best for helping executive management understand how the support center is performing against strategic goals and objectives, as well as in tactical projects and operational KPIs.

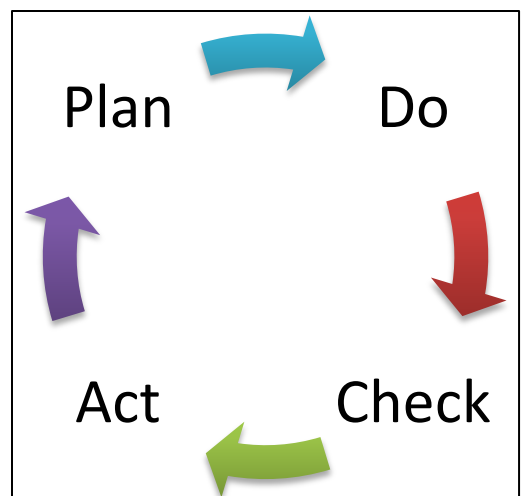
Output to multiple device types for optimized access – *Display boards* should be deployed in the IT support center, and in other areas of IT where visual monitoring of KPIs is crucial for IT management. *Desktop PCs* are the delivery platform for frontline support staff; real-time reporting on KPIs should be integrated into the desktop workstation of support analysts, so they can be apprised of their performance and shift priorities dynamically through the day as needed. *Mobile devices* such as smartphones and tablets should be positioned for supervisors to access real-time or periodic reports on the go.

An Action Plan for Designing and Deploying a Reporting Framework

Use the Deming Model to Plan and Deploy Your Reporting Framework

The Deming model, developed by Edward Deming, and now a part of the ITIL framework, provides a useful guideline for designing, developing, and deploying an effective reporting framework. It consists of four simple steps that are performed initially then repeated for continual improvement of the framework.

Plan your reporting framework. Document your overall policies and procedures, in accordance with the seven steps of continual improvement. First, start with your service strategy and design your measurements (what will you measure). Then proceed with planning your reporting framework to work with your measurements.



Do your reporting framework. Implement the steps to gather the data at key points, particularly in service operation – in IT Operations, through performance monitoring systems; at the service desk and in supporting functional areas, via call management, service management, and survey reporting systems.

Check on the success of your reporting framework. Get feedback. Are the stakeholders satisfied with the reporting? Is the formatting on target? Timely appropriate? Can the content be improved to be more effective?

Identify and act on any gaps in the performance of your reporting, or opportunities for improvement, and act on any adjustments. Consolidate these improvements into your supporting policies, procedures and systems, and continue the cycle.

Plan Your Reporting Framework

Document and communicate your reporting framework policies – These provide the overall guidelines to the IT organization for how reporting will be designed, developed, and delivered on an on-going basis. Developed as a part of your strategic planning, reporting policies should include:

- Defined target audiences, along with preferred formatting and business drivers;
- Approved balanced scorecard-type formatting;
- Agreed-upon terms and definitions to be used throughout along with definitions of commonly used metrics (basis used for calculations);
- How linkage is to be accomplished between visions and mission, and what is measured on a daily basis;
- The role of periodic and real-time reporting, with specific reporting frequency based on type of report and target audience;
- How reports will be delivered or accessed, as well as how and where reporting will be stored and maintained; and
- The types of meetings to be scheduled to review the results, discuss, and plan for any actions.

Determine data gathering requirements – As a part of your design for service provision, document the details that will support the execution of your reporting strategy. For example, what services and supporting components will require monitoring? What supporting processes for those services will also need to be monitored and assessed?

Define data collection requirements, who/how the data will be collected, and how frequently. Review existing tools, and determine tool and data gathering systems. Document these reporting requirements along with your metrics and KPIs as part of your overall service design.

Understand and plan to meet processing requirements for target audiences – During the design phase of your service reporting, consider carefully the target audiences, and their unique requirements in terms of content and format:

- **Customers** want periodic reporting on service level achievements (performance compared to targets in SLAs). The reporting format needs to be planned, reviewed, and agreed to by customers—and remember, charts and graphs play a key role! For example, service level achievement monitoring (SLAM) charts provide graphic reporting on SLA achievements, and

where opportunities for improvement are apparent. Color coding (e.g., red-amber-green) on charts shows when performance is on target, marginal, or off target.

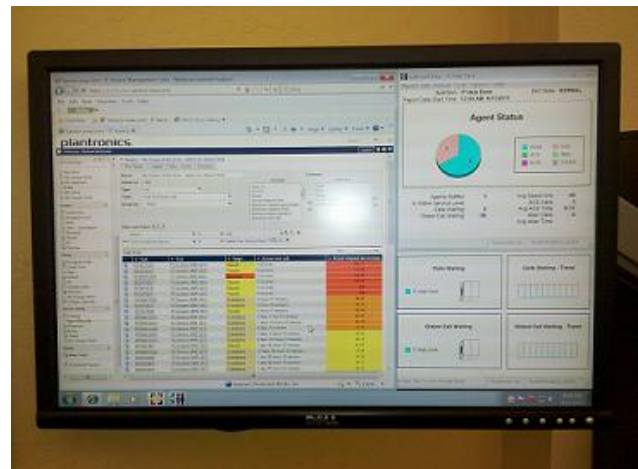
- **Executive management (the VP level)** is interested in performance against strategic goals and objectives. Reports need to be brief, to the point, and graphical. Monthly and quarterly summaries are preferred. Drivers should include cost savings, performance to organization level targets, compliance with industry regulations, risk avoidance, and service quality
- **IT managers and directors** are interested in performance reporting for services, components and processes relative to their respective areas. What does this mean? Tailor reporting to each department's need, and provide an overall picture of where their performance fits. Reports need to be periodic in nature (weekly, monthly), and provide the overall performance of IT, and where the department fits within this scorecard. For example, the IT network manager is interested in the performance of network services to target service levels, and any gaps in network performance to targets. Also, show how his/her department contributes to organizational goals, as well as any improvement opportunities in network-related process, procedures, or supporting technology.
- **IT operations managers, supervisors, and support staff** are interested in feedback on performance to core operational metrics and KPIs. Reporting must be delivered both real-time as well as in periodic scorecard format. Real-time dashboards should contain graphical reporting on KPIs, and be available to level 1 and 2 support staff, as well as to team leads and operations managers. Periodic scorecards—a daily morning report—on KPI performance and any outstanding escalations, a weekly recap summarizing weekly achievements, and a monthly KPI summary, need to be planned, agreed to, and put into practice.

Provide for standard and customizable reporting – A set of standard *real-time* and *periodic* reports need to be designed, put in place, and automated for push delivery to target audiences. Real-time dashboards should provide for screen delivery of performance information to a variety of devices in service operations, so that support staff can get immediate feedback on performance to target service levels.

Real-time displays should be available on support analyst workstations, so they can be apprised continuously of their individual performance to KPIs: response time targets, resolution time targets, user satisfaction levels, etc. Similarly, real-time displays of team performance to shared targets should also be available to team leads/supervisors, so they can keep their finger on the pulse of performance, and make any adjustments to staffing/schedule or priority handling

Standard periodic reports provide timely management updates and should include:

- **A daily morning report** for all key IT support staff and managers and executives, showing a one-page graphical report on KPIs and quickly summarizing the previous day's performance.
- **A weekly departmental scorecard**, showing the performance to target of each IT department (service desk,



desktop support, network team, etc.). The format should reflect a balanced scorecard approach, showing performance to targets in all four quadrants.

- **Monthly IT scorecard**, rolling up the various IT departmental scorecards into an overall IT summary scorecard.

Sample Weekly Balanced Scorecard for an IT Service Desk

(Note: KPIs and metrics featured may vary depending on your measurements framework.)

IT Central Service Desk Weekly Scorecard Week Ending: March 16, 2012	
<p>Customer Satisfaction Goals</p> <p>User satisfaction (service desk): 4.3/5.0 </p> <p>Customer survey (March): 89/100 </p> <p>No. of complaints per period: 3/<5 </p> <p>No. of compliments per period: 8/>5 </p> <p><i>Note: The number of complaints exceeded goal last week due to some unexpected failures related to the rollout of a new service package. Management is taking action to address.</i></p>	<p>Process and Performance Goals</p> <p>Average resolution time: 2.8 hrs/4.0 </p> <p>Resolved within SLA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidents: 95% • Service Requests: 89% <p>Percentage resolved at L1: 76%/80% </p> <p><i>Note: Resolved at L1 dropped below target due to rollout of new service package. KT training scheduled to boost L1 capability.</i></p>
<p>Financial Goals</p> <p>Average cost per contact: \$28.65/\$30.00 </p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidents: \$18.79/\$22.50 • Requests: \$38.50/\$40.00 <p>Percentage variance to budget: -12%</p> <p><i>Note: Cost per service request is dropping over previous weeks due to success of new web-based self-service portal!</i></p>	<p>Learning and Growth Goals</p> <p>Turnover rate to goal: 8%/5% </p> <p>Unplanned absences to goal: 0/<5%</p> <p>Sched. training completed to date: 98%/100% </p> <p>Staff HDI certified: 90%/100% </p> <p>Staff ITIL Foundation certified: 87%/100% </p> <p><i>Note: Some staff was unable to complete ITIL training due to outage last period. Training is being rescheduled.</i></p>

Draft reporting framework support documentation and SOPs – Document monitoring and reporting procedures for operational personnel. After sharing and gaining agreement with stakeholders, distribute policies and procedures to IT management and all support staff.

Do Your Reporting Framework

Begin the cycle of monitoring, data collection, and reporting – This happens initially during service transition, as you develop, test, and pilot your Reporting Framework. When reporting systems and output reports check out and are signed off by the various stakeholders, live operation of your Reporting Framework engages.

Make it automated and user-driven during live operation – Once planned, leverage automation tools to make it efficient. Reporting should be pushed out to target audiences on a scheduled basis, at the right time. With the right data gathering, processing, and integrated reporting tools and systems, manual labor can be minimized, and reporting can be very cost-effective.

Implement data gathering systems and tools – Modify, build, or purchase data gathering systems. Some examples include automated network and server monitoring systems for gathering data on network, application and server performance, and service management systems to gather data on process performance (incident, problem, change, etc.). Install and test the system to validate performance against requirements.

Translate IT terminology to business language when delivering to customers – For example, instead of a percentage, show unavailability in a commonly understood measurement, such as *impacted user minutes* (see caption to the right). Steps can then be discussed as to how this will be avoided in the future.

Employ an actionable approach to reporting that describes what is portrayed in the report/chart, why it happened, and steps that will be taken to avert the situation in the future (see below).

Communicate the business benefits of IT services on business processes.

Target real-time dashboards and timely periodic scorecard reporting – The frontline service desk staff needs real-time reporting to provide for continuous feedback on performance to core KPIs. A daily morning report can be helpful to put everyone in the support center on the same page, in terms of where to focus the day's efforts. In addition, weekly performance scorecards and monthly summary scorecards help support staff see how they are performing, and where they should target improvement efforts.

Periodic reporting is more appropriate for IT support managers, directors and executives. Everyone gets the daily morning report, to get a bird's eye view of how performance to key targets went the day before. Weekly departmental scorecards provide each department with departmental level performance, and a monthly IT scorecard rolls up departmental performance to an overall IT scorecard.

It's a good idea to provide for push reporting of scorecards to frontline staff, supervisors, and IT managers (rather than expecting them to retrieve the report). In terms of frequency, reports should be issued as a daily one-page morning report scorecard, a weekly summary scorecard, and a monthly roll up of departmental and overall IT performance.

Translating IT Speak to Business Speak

Most IT organizations report availability in terms of a percentage, such as "the service was 98.7 percent available this month, an increase in availability over last month's 98.1 percent."

Consider also translating what this means in terms of additional user productivity: "The increase in six percent service availability users resulted in an additional 179 minutes of uptime, enabling 358 additional orders to be processed during the month."

Deliver periodic reports in a balanced scorecard format – Plan to format and deploy your daily, weekly, and monthly IT scorecards in a balanced scorecard format. This approach, pioneered by the Balanced Scorecard Institute, organizes metrics into the four key areas that matter most to ensure balanced performance: financial metrics, customer satisfaction metrics, employee metrics (learning and growth), and process/performance metrics.

Set down guidelines as to the key metrics that fall into each quadrant, and provide an organization-wide balanced scorecard template as a common basis for reporting across departments within IT. This will make possible the roll-up of departmental metrics into an overall IT scorecard.

Implement an actionable approach when delivering your reporting – Provide commentary on the reports, whether they are written or electronic. Actionable reporting provides *invaluable* analysis: this is what happened and why, this is what we did or didn't do, and this is how we plan to correct or improve performance in the future. Actionable reporting recognizes past performance, but puts the focus on the *future* and proactive improvement.

Check the Effectiveness of Your Reporting Framework

Provide for a feedback process at the service, component, and process levels – Data collection, processing, and reporting to plan should be assessed by both services owners and process owners on a regular basis (e.g., monthly). Process owners, who should be focused on their process regardless of the services supported, should monitor the effectiveness of process measurements and reporting to ensure that data collection, processing, and reporting are working as designed for their process. For example, incident management should optimize process performance for all services supported by IM. Service owners, whose focus is their specific service, should also regularly assess data gathering, processing and reporting for their service, and all of the components that make up their service (e.g., email, and all the components that make up email).

Assess effectiveness of your reporting through regular customer and staff feedback processes – Assess customer satisfaction level with your reporting framework through periodic feedback processes; for example, leverage the periodic review meetings conducted by service level/business relationship managers to not only communicate service level achievements and identify any changing business requirements, but also to identify ways to improve your reporting. During IT support staff and IT management satisfaction staff surveys, check on your internal reporting effectiveness and look for ways to improve. Forward findings to the reporting framework program owner for consideration and action.

Act on Any Adjustments for Continual Improvement

An effective reporting framework should help identify gaps and opportunities for improvement in services, supporting components, and processes:

- At the service level, when a service is underperforming its target (for example, a target service availability level).
- At the component level – component monitoring and reporting should reveal gaps in performance for individual components (storage, processing, applications, etc.). Service owners

and infrastructure support managers should be attentive to any shortfalls, and address issues with recommended component changes/improvements (via change management).

- At a process level, when a process is not performing as designed. For example, incident management may be designed to resolve 80 percent of incidents within six hours, but it is taking an average of eight hours. This gap must also be examined to identify the root cause (which could be staffing, lack of support tools, knowledge/skills, etc), and an action plan must be put forward.

As gaps or opportunities for improvement are identified via feedback processes for your reporting framework itself, assess these via a business case approach. For example, there may be a new form of technology on the market which could further automate reporting, driving down costs and improving speed and efficiency. Is it worth implementing this new technology, or should you continue with your existing reporting systems and tools? A business case will help uncover the opportunity, and whether you should go forward with the improvement opportunity.

Avoiding Pitfalls in Your Reporting Framework

When designing and implementing your reporting framework, be sure to anticipate these common pitfalls and plan to avoid them:

Pitfall to Avoid	Actions to Address
Everyone gets the same report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify target audiences and classify stakeholders in their proper category
Reporting not in the optimal format for understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt the format for the target audience: customers, executives, IT management, support staff, or suppliers • Determine whether real-time or periodic delivery is best
Results not delivered in a timely fashion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule reporting using a push approach (most automated reporting systems offer this feature) • For real-time reporting, ensure dashboards are indeed real-time and are easily accessible
Reporting is not understandable to the target audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use words that communicate • When delivering reports to customers, translate IT-speak to business-speak • Employ charts and graphs to visually communicate results
Reporting is delivered without any targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without a clear target, how does one ascertain performance? • Always ensure your target/goals is plainly listed on the chart, along with an explanation • Example: "Average resolution time is to be within two hours 90 percent of the time."
Lack of actionable reporting: no comments provided, no analysis, no conclusions or recommendations provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide for visible comments on the report/display, which explains what the chart is depicting • Include an explanation, and a summary of actions to be taken to address the shortfall in performance

<p>Lack of an executive summary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always include an executive summary in formal printed reports going to management • Provide bottom-line results, what led to the results, and what actions are being taken to remedy any issues
<p>Reports are not in a balanced scorecard format</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the report is periodic in nature, and is intended to show overall departmental or IT performance, employ the balanced scorecard format • Ensure performance in all critical areas is shown: customer satisfaction, financial performance, service level performance, and employee learning and growth
<p>Reporting is reactive only (requires the target audience to retrieve the report)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that reports generated are stored for later retrieval, but push time-critical reporting out to the intended audience
<p>Frequency of reporting is too high (too many reports, too often)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pertains to periodic reporting • Understand proper delivery time for the report (use a just-in-time approach)
<p>Too much information in the report</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the target audience and provide tailored content • Senior management wants bottom line-information; reports should be brief and to the point, focusing on performance to strategic goals and objectives, operating costs, return on investment • Middle management wants more detail, with information on departmental performance to objectives, and any gaps that need to be addressed • Customers want performance against service level targets, user satisfaction levels, and how they can improve utilization of services
<p>Underestimating the resources required to plan, deploying and maintain an effective reporting framework</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a process approach, and plan your reporting policy and procedures first • Realize that the first step is the most critical – identifying the target audiences, and their respective reporting needs • Design both real-time and periodic reports using best practices • Once reporting content, timing, and delivery have been agreed upon, leverage automation tools to speed delivery and minimize labor and cost • Use the Plan-Do-Check-Act model as a guide to deploying and maintaining a successful reporting framework

Summary

In conclusion, an effective reporting framework is every bit as essential as a quality measurements framework. The first step for any successful organization is to create and communicate the strategy, and then to define what it will measure. After that comes the critical role of a reporting framework:

- Ensuring that performance data is gathered properly on all services, components, and processes;
- Processing this data into information that can reveal gaps and opportunities for improvement;
- Providing IT staff and customers with knowledge gained from the analysis provided by actionable reporting; and
- Enabling IT managers and staff to take action to close gaps in performance, or seize opportunities to improve.

About the Author

Paul M. Dooley is the president and principal consultant of Optimal Connections LLC. With over thirty years of experience in the high technology and software development industry, Paul has held numerous positions in customer service, support, and marketing. He has extensive experience in service desk infrastructure development, support center consolidation, deployment of web portals and knowledge management systems, as well as service marketing strategy and activities.

Paul has a BA in international relations from California State University in Fullerton, CA and an MBA from National University in San Diego. He is ITIL v2 Foundations and Practitioner certified and an ITIL v3 Expert. He is also an HDI Certified Instructor and auditor.

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