Using the Service Catalogue to get IT / Business Alignment

Ask your senior business managers whether they are:

- clear about what IT does for them and how that supports their business results?
- satisfied with the cost of the services they receive in relation to the value those services provide?
- confident that IT is doing the right things at the right levels of cost and warranty?

Chances are you will find that in many instances they are unhappy with the services they are receiving. This is where a Service Catalogue is a game-changer to help you improve the relationship between the IT Department and the 'Business' and move towards a service-orientated culture within the IT organisation.

This paper is based on iCore's proven methods and approaches to ensuring success when developing, implementing and maintaining a Service Catalogue.

What is a Service Catalogue?

The ITIL definition of a Service Catalogue is 'a database or structured document with information about all live services, including those available for deployment.' ITIL also states that 'The Service Catalogue is used to support the sale and delivery of IT Services.'

A Service Catalogue is distinct from a Service Request Catalogue which contains a list of requestable items relating to live services. As such, the Service Catalogue may incorporate or be linked to a Service Request Catalogue.

It is not immediately apparent that defining a Service Catalogue represents a substantial challenge for many organisations. However, a Service Catalogue is much more than a simple 'listing of services'; it needs to be a visible demonstration of both an IT organisation's commitment to service and the critical role that the organisation performs in delivering the outcomes required by the business.

Service Catalogue Uses and Benefits

You should use the Service Catalogue as a valuable marketing tool giving the Business (the customer) and consumers (users) a better understanding of what is available, and at the same time setting expectations around service quality. It will provide answers to the following questions that customers/users might ask of the IT organisation:

- What IT services are available and how do I get them?
- Where do I go for help to resolve IT service related issues?
- How much does the IT service cost?
- Are there options to reduce cost or to pay more for an enhanced service?
- Can I get answers to general IT service related queries without needing to call the Service Desk?

Additionally, a Service Catalogue provides a basis for planning and strategy development for IT, providing answers to the following questions that the IT organisation might ask of itself:

- Who are our customers and what are their business needs and expectations?
- How can we best position ourselves to differentiate our services from our competitors?
- What performance levels can we commit to, and how will we measure these?
- How can we correlate IT costs to the value IT generates?
- What are the key areas for investment and potentially new service requirements to be included as part of the service pipeline?

The Two Views of the Service Catalogue

Services included in a Service Catalogue are often categorised as one of two types:

- Business facing services; used directly by consumers and funded by customers as 'business systems'
- Supporting or technical services; required by IT to deliver those business facing services, but not directly accessed by consumers

However, this is somewhat misleading as services rarely fall entirely within one or other of these categories – there is overlap in the sense that business services invariably have technical aspects that members of the IT organisation need to know about for effective service delivery, and technical services often have some business-relevant aspects that are of interest to customers/users.

A more useful distinction might be made between Application Services and Infrastructure Services, where both types of services have business-relevant and technical aspects. Examples of each type of service might be:

- Application Service; ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning), underpinning the order-to-fulfilment business processes
- Infrastructure Service; Network Services (including WAN, LAN and WiFi), underpinning the majority of Application Services

In both cases, users need to know where to get first line support if they are experiencing difficulties (failure to access the ERP system, or unable to connect to WiFi for example), but only the IT organisation needs to know about the full Support Model, i.e. details of the internal and external support groups providing 2nd and 3rd line support.

This calls for the creation of differing views of the information held within the Service Catalogue, although it is important to understand that these are two different views of the same thing (i.e. two different views of the same set of application and infrastructure services):

- The 'business view', providing service details that are of relevance to customers/users, explained in an easily understandable, non-technical way;
- The 'technical view', encompassing the whole of the 'business view', but additionally providing the IT organisation with key technical details of services, where this information is hidden from customers/users

These views are illustrated in the diagram below, showing also the links to the underlying Configuration Management System (CMS).
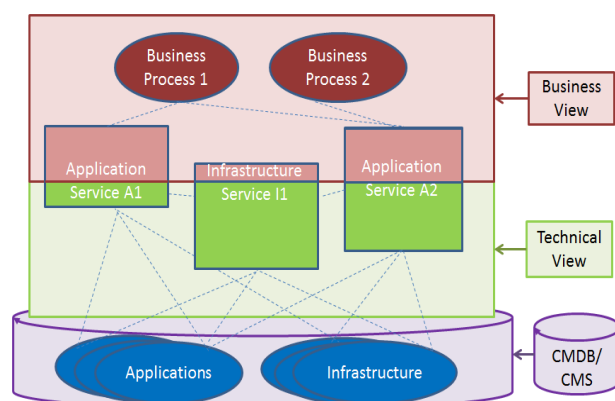
The CMS sits outside the Service Catalogue, but the services defined in the Service Catalogue should be included as Configuration Items (CIs) in the CMS.
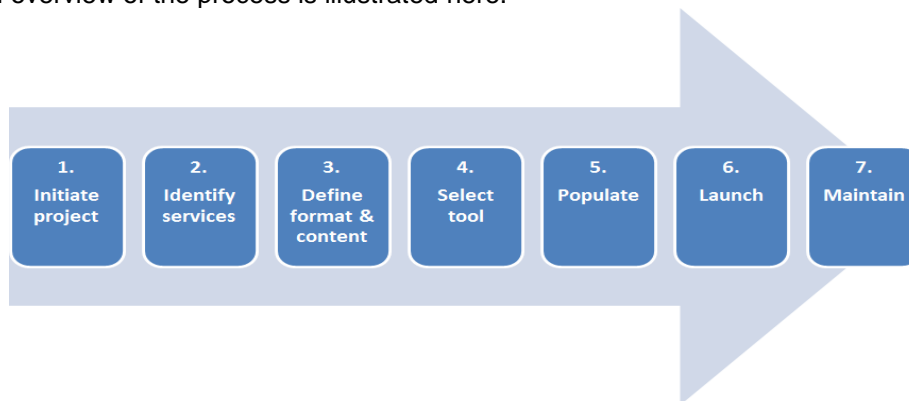
Linking service to the CMS in this way makes it possible to drill down into the CMS to identify the technical components of each service, essential for effective management of those services (e.g. availability management, root cause analysis of incidents, business impact assessment of changes).

Building a Service Catalogue

Initiatives to create a Service Catalogue usually focus on the Business View in the first instance, providing a 'shop window' of services offered by the IT organisation. This will deliver the key benefits of managing the expectations of customers/users and facilitating dialogue between IT and the Business. However, it is rare for Service Catalogue initiatives to continue beyond this stage towards development of the Technical View of those services. Only once both views are in place will the IT organisation be able to properly manage cost and risk, and to work in true partnership with the Business, developing roadmaps for future service enhancements and new services in line with business objectives.

iCore have defined a 7-step process for helping your organisation to create implement and maintain a Service Catalogue, identifying and addressing the obstacles you likely to face on the journey.

A high-level overview of the process is illustrated here.

1. Initiate project	2. Identify services	3. Define format & content	4. Select tool	5. Populate	6. Launch	7. Maintain

The Service Catalogue should ultimately become something that every IT employee knows inside out, especially senior IT leaders, relationship managers and anyone with a front-office customer engagement role. It provides a critical communication link between the IT organisation and the customers it serves, using a common language and fostering a better understanding between the two parties. So if you want to improve IT / business alignment within your organisation, you should focus on the planning, design, launch and on-going usage of a Service Catalogue.

If you want to know how iCore can help you to look at IT / Business Alignment or how to create, implement and maintain a full Service Catalogue then you should contact us on:

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