Case Study: Vitamix

Improving strategic business integration using IT service management practices and technology
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Summary

Catalyst

For Vitamix, a key driver in the adoption of a new IT service management (ITSM) solution was to source functionality that would provide the company with a quick return on investment and provide capabilities that would be of benefit to other functions within the organization. Another key objective was to communicate the value being delivered by such functions more effectively to the wider business. Vitamix is an organization that has experienced a good level of growth in recent years, and the company was keen to source and adopt a service management solution that could help it realize new value and efficiencies from IT.

Key findings

- Improving business transparency in the work being undertaken by IT and other business functions is a valuable requirement.
- ITSM technology must provide customers with functionality that will help them gain value quickly, but also be extensible in offering capability enhancements that will meet future needs as a customer matures and develops.
- When launching any new initiative, it is important for IT departments to understand and deliver on value from a customer perspective. Focus on deploying technology modules that will help achieve this ideal.
- Engaging with the business early in the adoption phase, and providing supporting documentation, can help create a wider interest in the organization in the service management solution being adopted, which will promote long-term usage of the solution.

Ovum view

As organizational budgets continue to be placed under scrutiny, ensuring IT is positioned as a business unit that adds strategic business value is a key objective. Prior to the mid-2000s, IT was often positioned as a cost center that enabled business operations through the provision, management, and maintenance of IT infrastructure. While this reactive focus certainly remains a valuable set of IT activities, IT departments now strive to offer more strategic business value by helping organizations innovate and realize new efficiencies from both information and enabling technology.

The experiences shared by Vitamix demonstrate the importance that it attached to building ongoing business engagement. It wanted to develop both the skills and expertise of staff. Sourcing technology that could help the organization further develop both its IT and business processes was expected to help the IT department become more strategically integrated with the business.

This case study represents well how traditional ITSM practices and technology can be used to deliver value beyond the IT department and into other business functions. This enterprise service management approach will become increasingly important as information and technology become more pivotal to organizations.
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ServiceNow – the ITSM solution implemented by Vitamix – was not only used by the company’s IT department but also by other business functions. Interfaces between IT and other business units have existed for a long time. The trend of ITSM functionality being used by business units beyond IT is accelerating. The value offered by such an approach can be wide-ranging. A system that enables the gathering and sharing of information that has benefit throughout the organization, coupled with automation functionality, will have a particular appeal.

Service management beyond IT is not just about a simple ticketing system; enterprise service management is about managing work more effectively, and employing a system and set of practices that can help organizations use IT for business strategic advantage.

Recommendations for enterprises

Key lessons learnt

Implementing any new technology on a wide scale, not just a new ITSM solution, is one of the greatest challenges for a company. A suitable solution could be selected and deployed, but, unless it is being used to the effect and scale expected, it will never deliver the value desired. The key to encouraging a change in behavior that will encourage the adoption of the new technology is communicating and demonstrating the value it can deliver. Once the employees responsible for using the new technology recognize its benefits and see how it can help them work more productively, adoption should improve. Written documentation, along with guidance videos, workshops, and direct communication (via in-house demonstrations and road shows, for example) from those leading the project can help in advertising the technology’s benefits.

The key point here is to ensure that the wider value provided by the tool for people in a variety of different roles is first identified and then effectively communicated. Simply implementing new technology without advertising the potential benefits will result in poor adoption, under-utilization, and an inadequate return on investment. To achieve a wide take-up, Vitamix involved the business functions that IT commonly interfaced with at an early stage of the implementation. The company’s aim was to generate support for the technology by empowering employees within the business to be product champions.

To generate an initial interest from other business functions, the Vitamix service desk manager consulted business unit leaders and advertised the value that could be gained, from the perspective of the business unit in question, by adopting the ServiceNow service management technology. Vitamix said that generating reports on the work undertaken by these departments helped to demonstrate the value delivered by these business units to the wider organization and was important in recruiting support from the wider organization. The value realized was very much in how the service management technology could capture information that would help a business function quantify its value and thus justify resources expended on the operations for which it was responsible.
Solution selection

Background

Vitamix develops and distributes blending equipment to consumer and commercial customers across the world. The company was founded in 1921. It has experienced strong growth in terms of both its product offerings and where its products are distributed. As Vitamix’s business has grown, so has the need for technology to support business operations and the services offered by the company. The company has a worldwide employee base which is supported by a centralized service desk based in the US.

The project for the adoption of new ITSM technology was initiated because Vitamix recognized that its existing ITSM solution was no longer supporting how the organization was developing, nor did it provide the capability that was needed. Vitamix wanted an ITSM solution that would not only provide it with value out-of-the-box, but one that was also extensible in being able to meet the company’s prospective future demands.

Adopting a solution that could be of value to other business units was also important. Interfaces between IT and other business units – such as HR and facilities management – are common. However, these interfaces are often not supported well by technology. Consider a typical new starter process, for example; provisioning and access management activities must be undertaken by both HR and the IT department in separate silos. Having access to the relevant information that supports this process in a single tool that enables collaboration between all the interested parties can be very valuable in ensuring the process is both efficient and effective.

The leaders of the project were committed to improving IT transparency. Specifically, they wanted technology that would provide functionality that helped communicate more effectively the value being delivered by IT and other business functions. Reporting and analytics functionality was identified by Vitamix as a key requirement to help achieve this ideal, and this is functionality that many ITSM vendors, including ServiceNow, have improved over the past 18 months in response to such needs.

Solutions from all the leading vendors in the space were considered by Vitamix. ServiceNow was eventually chosen as a solution that best satisfied the key criteria identified by the company. Specifically, Vitamix identified the strong out-of-the-box functionality offered by the platform as being key factor that led it to choose ServiceNow. Vitamix also recognized the ServiceNow platform as one that offered more advanced capability that could be used at a later date, as the company’s needs for service management technology developed.

Solution analysis

Solution deployment

Before any final decision was made on an ITSM solution, Vitamix took the initiative to speak with ServiceNow customers to gain an understanding the various experiences of other companies throughout the various stages of implementation. This is an important, but often overlooked, step of the deployment process. While no two implementations will be the same, it is important to learn from the experiences of other organizations where possible as this will help in overcoming adoption and usage challenges.

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Vitamix also arranged software demonstrations for the IT leadership team and other key stakeholders prior to making a final selection. Again, this is an important step, as it not only helps raise awareness of how an ITSM solution can be used by people in different parts of the organization, but it also helps gain early stakeholder buy-in that can subsequently benefit the long-term adoption of a solution. Vitamix recruited the ServiceNow professional services division to help with this process.

**Deployment process**

The team tasked with deployment of the solution included: a project champion, in this case the IT service desk manager; a business analyst; a tech writer; a technical engineer; a ServiceNow system administrator; and ServiceNow implementation partners.

As Vitamix would be using ServiceNow in the human resources and facilities management functions, as well as IT department, the managers and process fulfillers from these departments were also involved in deployment. It was important that the requirements of these departments were well understood, and how ServiceNow would support the interfaces between IT and these business functions in the future.

It was three months between the project being initiated to the ServiceNow platform going live, with the last two weeks dedicated to employee training and product testing. Vitamix employees interacting with ServiceNow were educated in ITIL, which was used as a framework, as developing a common language was important to the company. Vitamix said that ServiceNow’s strong alignment with ITIL processes helped improve how the solution was, and continues to be, used.

**Challenges**

One of the biggest challenges experienced by Vitamix did not occur during the initial implementation of the solution, but one that surfaced later. The IT team had developed a facilities management application on the ServiceNow platform based on requirements given by the manager of that department at the time. Post development and deployment, however, a new director came on board, and with this change in personnel also came a change in requirements for the application in question.

Overcoming this challenge required Vitamix to carefully recognize and analyze the new requirements. It was important that the business value of the request was recognized – and from a business perspective – so that IT was in a better position to more effectively understand and thus prioritize the request.

This example is interesting as it represents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to have constant business engagement to ensure such demands are recognized and acted upon. This is something that business relationship management and service level management activities can help with. The opportunity comes about because, when this sort of initiative is successful, support from IT beyond simple break/fix actions will then be sought by other business functions. The IT department, certainly in this example, is being viewed by the wider organization as a department of true business enablement.

**Outcomes**

Vitamix delivered a stable service management system that was effectively used by a wide variety of staff from many different roles both within and external to IT. Both IT and business processes were supported well by the technology and the implementation resulted in Vitamix realizing new efficiencies.
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Visibility into the work being undertaken, and of the services being provided to customers both within and beyond IT, was also achieved in a rapid timeframe that met the expectations set by Vitamix at the outset of the project. The importance of this visibility should not be an understated. Often work being carried out and the knowledge that aids the successful completion of tasks throughout an organization can be lost with no opportunity for repeat value. Service management solutions that offer a capability that will appeal to functions beyond IT can help organizations gather this type of information and use it strategically for wider business benefits.

Another key benefit identified by Vitamix was the way the solution provided the organization with the capability to quantify work and effort, providing visibility into employee activities and other resource commitments from an enterprise service management perspective, not just from the perspective of the IT department. Armed with this knowledge, Vitamix has been able to develop initiatives that have enabled the organization to improve interfaces between IT and other business units, which in turn has helped in further maturing important business processes.

As the interfaces between IT and other business functions were improving as a result of the use of a single service management platform, more requests were received by IT for new work to be undertaken within the solution. This has proven to be both an opportunity and a challenge for Vitamix, as the company now has new business demands, but only limited resources available to take action on those demands. Sensibly, Vitamix is managing such requests by taking steps to recognize and understand the potential business value that each could deliver and prioritize them accordingly.

Data sheet

Key facts about the solution

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Source: Ovum
Appendix

Methodology

This research was developed through interactions and interviews with both the vendor of the solution addressed, and with the candidate using this solution.

Further reading

*ServiceNow: Eureka Release, IT0022-000150 (August 2014)*

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Ovum Consulting

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