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TIME FOR CALM AND RESTRAINT

One in 10 workers thinks he or she could be made redundant in the next year, recent research from the TUC has found. Meanwhile, the process of corporate retrenchment is already underway, as the economic slide gathers pace. And the dreaded word ‘recession’, which dared not pass most lips up until now, is starting to be openly bandied about.

One member of the Bank of England’s Monetary Policy Committee has warned that up to two million people could find themselves out of work by Christmas 2009, if economic trends continue. And continue they seem set to do.

Union leaders, gathering in Brighton for their recent annual Congress, were quick to point to what they described as the growing ‘jitters’ in the workplace and they have been urging ministers to take urgent action to boost confidence. And yet, for all the injections of cash into the financial institutions to date, it seems nothing can reverse the damage that has been done. Confidence, I fear, will not be that easily uplifted for the foreseeable future.

At the same time, the unions are worried that some firms may start to panic and reduce their workforces much more deeply than necessary. “There is a real danger that if everyone thinks that the downturn will be deeper than it needs to be, it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy,” warns TUC general secretary Brendan Barber. But how much is too much? What we are embroiled in is unprecedented for most of us now living through these worrying times.

Certainly, the need right now is for some measure of calm and restraint - where the inclination to make hasty, knee-jerk decisions is the more likely currency. Job cuts are spreading rapidly across all sectors. Unfortunately, it is not calm, but nervousness tinged with panic, that seems to be gaining the upper hand. In the shakeout, the IT service industry will no doubt suffer some fallout as the downturn deepens. And yet IT has become a ‘must have’ and may well prove more resilient than other sectors - and even benefit as businesses tighten their belts and look to technology to help them achieve maximum efficiency.

Another upside in these challenging times is that businesses tend to expand and contract more quickly now than they used to. They are mostly looking to shed staff in bad times and hire again when the economic cycle starts an upturn. However, the great unknown this time round is that we have no idea how far away an upturn might be - or how much farther down we’ve yet to go.

The fear is we could be in for a very long winter of discontent before the economic storm subsides and some semblance of those ‘green shoots’ of recovery that governments are so fond of referring to break through again. When they do, let’s hope the IT service and support sector emerges ready to continue in the role it has carved out for itself so successfully in recent years, at the forefront of British industry.

Brian Wall
Editor
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Supportworks sparks with electrical giant

Leading electrical specialist Comet Group has selected Hornbill’s Supportworks ITSM service management platform to support all Comet staff based at more than 250 locations nationwide. The company employs approximately 10,000 staff across the UK. Comet chose Supportworks ITSM to enable it to adopt ITIL processes and to support the IS systems used throughout the organisation.

Hornbill’s solution was selected for its ease of use and ergonomic design, following an evaluation of three competitive products by the IS team. Supportworks’ out-of-the-box functionality will also enable the team to deploy the system quickly and implement ITIL best practice for recording and tracking incidents, and managing change programmes.

Hornbill’s Supportworks ITSM was by far the most popular choice with end users,” said Rob Gwatkin, the service desk manager at Comet Group. “The Hornbill team understood what we wanted to achieve and made the process very straightforward and comfortable.”

OUTSTANDING SKILLS REWARDED WITH STAR RATING

Skills for Care has achieved Service Desk Institute’s 2 Star Service Desk Certification, it has been announced. The award was presented on 4 November to Rachel Clapham, head of IT, by SDI’s founding director Howard Kendall, in beautiful Victorian surroundings, which were provided courtesy of Three Albion Place Ltd in Leeds.

Service desk manager Sharon Slater-Cryans commented on winning the award: “The SDI Certification was achieved by the whole IT team enthusiastically pulling together to improve the IT service within Skills for Care.”

Winning ways: Skills for Care

“We are very proud to have achieved certification and will continue to work at this level, striving to improve, aiming towards the next level of SDI certification. As the service desk manager, I am very proud to be working with such as enthusiastic, motivated and professional team.”

Howard Kendall, SDI’s founding director, pictured handing over the certification award to Rachel Clapham on the day, praised in particular the way in which Skills for Care had performed as a unit: “The excellent approach of the whole team was the highlight of the audit - with clear and committed leadership together with good communication and customer orientation,” he commented. “We are delighted to be able to award Skills for Care a 2 Star Service Desk Certification.”

THE APPLICATION OF EXCELLENCE

Applicable, one of the UK’s largest independent email and collaboration solution providers, has launched ICCM’s service management solution e-Service Desk.

The overall goal is to continue to enhance customer service delivery. To that end, it has been deployed to help Applicable achieve ITIL best practice processes, as well as to obtain ISO20000 accreditation.

Mike Curtis, service delivery manager at Applicable, commented: “ICCM’s e-Service Desk is a strategic addition to Applicable. It enables us to launch out-of-the-box ITIL best practice with minimal effort and outlay. It’s also the solution that’s most likely to ensure we attain ISO20000 accreditation.”

Curtis continued: “With our company’s rapid expansion plans, we needed a solution that would reliably scale with the business. e-Service Desk integrates with our current and future systems, unlike other systems we considered which couldn’t.

Applicable understands that e-Service Desk is much more than just a service desk for the IT department. With its underlying Metastorm BPM platform, Applicable will be able to utilise our solution to define company-wide processes, which will benefit the whole organisation,” says James Gay, ICCM’s sales director. “We’re looking forward to working with Applicable to help them reach their goal of ISO20000.”

Pole position with PoleStar

G2G3 has announced the latest release of PoleStar ITSM, an updated version of its IT service management and IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) simulation. PoleStar ITSM is a high-impact simulation, which is said to accelerate the understanding, involvement and acceptance of IT service management best practice across an organisation.

The latest version provides an improved reflection of today’s enterprise environment, bringing the experience closer to the point of use of the participants. This, according to G2G3, not only increases the overall realism of the simulation scenarios, but also greatly improves the immersion experience and raises learning retention rates.
Avocent has added a key feature called LaunchPad to its LANDesk Management Suite 8.8. LaunchPad allows companies to distribute new applications more easily, or update existing applications for users across corporate networks. The offering addresses the needs of enterprise users who are seeking ways to improve their IT operations and their bottom line, while easing the pain of daily software administration.

"IT administrators are heavily burdened with daily software requests and related issues from network users," said Avocent CTO Ben Grimes.

With requests ranging from basic software installations and updates, to misplaced icons and system configuration missteps, help desks are overwhelmed and our goal with this release is to simplify and speed the overall software management process.

"We engineered LaunchPad to help IT administrators get in front of that workload by empowering them with centralised configuration and application control."

LANDesk Management Suite customers already have the ability to distribute numerous software packages to multiple users in a single operation without requiring dedicated hardware and to control software availability with policy-based distribution. With the new release, administrators gain greater ability to automate handling of software requests on the back-end, while enjoying a convenient centralised location for application installs and execution.

**LAUNCHPAD FOR BOOSTING THE BOTTOM LINE**

**Safe as houses with new solution**

Vivantio has helped Wiltshire-based Selwood Housing, a not-for-profit housing association with more than 5,000 properties, revolutionise its IT team by transferring its call reporting onto the Vivantio Service Desk solution.

Selwood Housing has a central IT team based in Trowbridge, which provides support to 120 internal employees. The team of five processes around 100 calls per week.

Prior to Vivantio’s Service Desk, the Selwood team was using Microsoft Access to log enquiries. Around a quarter of calls were either lost or had to be chased up by the end user, resulting in frustrated callers and disorganised workloads.

**INITIATIVE TO BOOST GROWTH**

Axios Systems has unveiled an aggressive new programme aimed at supporting an expanding number of channel partners, whom it sees as key to extending the growth of the company’s geographical footprint.

The programme will be headed up by new global head of channels and alliances Blair Kantolinna, pictured right, who brings significant industry experience in ITSM and business development to the role.

The strategic move comes as Axios records 20 years of consistent year-on-year growth, generated almost purely through direct sales. The company continues to enjoy double digit growth, but sees the expansion of its channel programme as a means of driving even greater geographical and vertical expansion. Kantolinna will be responsible for expanding Axios’ channel network to include complementary resellers and partners in North America, as well as emerging markets such as Eastern Europe and South America. "My priority will be to build on the current programme, secure relationships with the right partners and help enable them to successfully deliver outstanding business value," he commented.

**At the ready with readiness assessment**

EMC Infra has launched a ‘Readiness Assessment’, designed to help all types of organisations measure their readiness for an ITIL service catalogue and select the implementation strategy most appropriate to them.

The instant online assessment at www.infra.co.uk/Readiness provides ‘next steps’ advice for those considering a service catalogue as part of an initiative to bridge the communication gap between the business and IT.

According to EMC Infra managing director Nathan Brumby: “ITIL V.3 has underlined how fundamental effective communication between IT departments and the wider business is to IT service management best practice - as well as to business success in today’s tougher markets. It is also the only way to ensure recognition within the wider business of the vital role that IT plays,” he adds.

“EMC Infra is launching this simple and objective way for IT departments to kick-start their service catalogue, using an effective implementation approach that matches their organisation’s ITIL maturity and specific goals.”

The service catalogue establishes a shared view of priorities, focus, vision and goals.
Partners target boom region of African economy

Axios Systems and partner Seven Seas Technologies are helping Kenyan companies become more efficient through the implementation ITSM technology and best practice.

In September 2008, IDC projected increased economic growth in its first Kenya IT market report.

According to the report, overall market growth is expected to remain high, peaking in mid-2009 after Kenya has been connected to submarine fibre, which will ensure and extend connectivity.

The fibre-optic links will drive down communication costs for businesses which is expected to stimulate small and medium business where technology uptake has been hindered by high costs.

IDC projects that help desks, managed services, and application and hosting services will all be key areas to watch in the year ahead. Axios and Seven Seas Technologies feel that they are at just the right time for the expected growth.

Hornbill’s ITSM solution gets the thumbs up

International management and construction consultancy Gleeds has selected Hornbill’s Supportworks ITSM as the service management solution for its IT service desk.

Gleeds’ IT department has implemented the solution to support staff based in its 17 regional offices throughout the UK. Gleeds selected the system for its all-round functionality and to enable the IT team to adopt ITIL best practice. Since implementing the solution, the IT department claims improved visibility and resolution of calls resulting in a more efficient support service.

According to Simon Sheldon, IT service director at Gleeds: “Hornbill’s Supportworks ITSM was very flexible and met all of our requirements in one package – we didn’t need to think about having to source additional modules to extend functionality later.

“Supportworks has made us much more efficient as a team. Not only can we support users better, we are able to improve our processes with ITIL best practice.

“We have also started to operate a centralised purchasing system for IT, as we can efficiently log and track IT assets, which will generate considerable cost savings for the business.”

Gleeds operates a centralised service desk that logs and tracks calls from staff in any of the UK offices and some overseas locations.

Also, a team of desktop and network engineers operate as second and third line support throughout the country, solving problems and incidents. The IT team supports all of the company’s IT systems. Supportworks is used for problem, incident and change management and Gleeds is also starting to use it for release management.

Healthy move on help desk software

Animal Health has turned to House-on-the-Hill to provide the software for its new dedicated internal IT help desk. The help desk provides first line support for staff of Animal Health, an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Infrastructure queries are passed on to IBM, which provides IT support across Defra.

House-on-the-Hill’s SupportDesk solution will be used to log and manage queries received from 24 sites across the country.

Animal Health is primarily responsible for ensuring that farmed animals in Great Britain are healthy, disease-free and well looked after.

“House on the Hill was selected partly because the tool exactly suited the scale of our help desk and partly because of the competitive price,” commented Ann Nash of the agency’s information systems, applications and advice centre.
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According to the Service Desk Institute’s report, ‘A Guide to Service Catalogues’, a service catalogue (SC) can be a major plus for any organisation. Essentially, it is a list of live and approved business services provided to customers. It contains policies, guidelines and responsibilities, as well as prices, service level arrangements and delivery conditions.

Moreover, another authoritative source describes the SC as “an important tool for Service Strategy, because it is the virtual projection of the service provider’s actual and present capabilities.”*

The actual document is owned by a capability known as service level management (SLM) and someone representing SLM is responsible for its creation. An SC would typically contain information on:

- IT systems
- IT services
- Customer responsibilities
- Infrastructure
- Applications
- Resources
- Third parties
- Definitions of ownership
- Charges (where appropriate)

The SC would normally have two views: one for the business customer and one for the technical IT provider. The level of detail contained in each view will differ according to needs. The customer view contains WHAT the service is, while the technical view contains HOW the service is constructed. It is important to appreciate that the roles of ‘provider’ and ‘customer’ can apply to internal groups and departments within an organisation - any situation where one function provides a service to another - and not simply the relationship between an external paying customer and a company.

Essentially, the SC is the control.
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Compiling the information for a good SC is never easy, although, once done, it becomes a valuable tool for support staff, accounts, management, etc. It is essential for any sort of cost or charge-based approach - for which you need consistent information about your services, customers and costs in one place. Generally, it will be an internal document that is reflected in a number of other internal and external documents and systems - eg, ITSM tool, service brochure, SLAs, budgets, etc.

GETTING STARTED
In this article, the focus is particularly on the email service, as most IT departments deliver this. As you work through each step, you will see how an SC can be built up. The services provided are usually handled by a number of different teams within the IT directorate, so it will be necessary for each team to identify someone who will represent them during compilation of the SC. A role known as service level manager (SL manager) is responsible for creating the SC; this person should remain independent and impartial. It is important to highlight that the first line of support in all of the services documented will typically be the service desk, so it makes sense for the service desk to have a high level of involvement in the process and a direct link to the SL manager.

Step 1: First, the SL manager needs to initiate discussion about the SLM process. This can be done in a number of ways, including team meetings, email bulletin, memo, etc. The key stakeholders and their direct reports should be made aware of the service level manager’s role and his/her intentions in regards to the SC process. Each party should be fully briefed as to the stages and what the end result will be.

Step 2: The SL manager needs to establish the ‘highest level’ within the SC structure - ie, what IT services does the department provide?

- Infrastructure
- Networks
- Applications
- Service desk
- Procurement
- Projects

What are your resource levels? Are there third party contracts in place and what services are contained within them?

Step 3: Next, it is necessary to define what services sit under the highest levels. This should be based upon the types of support that are provided to the customer. Setting up a workshop with small groups of customers and asking what IT services are key will be useful in obtaining a realistic view of the types of support required.

Step 4: Within these services, identify the constituent parts and who provides these. Who is the service owner and who provides the 1st, 2nd and 3rd levels of support? Against the 1st, 2nd and 3rd levels, indicate which level delivers what service support, what the service times are, the cost and any subsequent charge for the service (if any). Outline how the service support moves through each level.

Step 5: Review these services: are they actually used by the customer? Are they technically feasible, financially viable and, most importantly, operationally realistic? If not, should they be decommissioned? Think about what levels of service you can actually provide.

Step 6: At this point, it is necessary to break the SC down into to customer view and technical view to enable the SL manager to market each document more effectively. The customer view shows what the service is and the technical view how this is delivered. The customer view should be the document that the internal customer sees and should cover off the top level of service provision. The technical view should be kept just for the IT team.

Step 7: Finally, agree with relevant parties a process whereby the SC (both customer and technical) is reviewed; what the change management process will be; who should be responsible for initiating this; and how often the review should happen.

In summary, the SC should contain the policies, guidelines and responsibilities of each of the IT services and support levels. Benefits of an SC are:

- Significant improvement in internal and external communications
- Better understanding of business requirements and challenges
- Ability to allocate and match costs to specific business departments/units
- Positively alter end-user expectations and behaviour
- Increase visibility of IT service provision
- Better understanding of IT service inefficiencies
- Reallocation of IT resources in response to inefficiencies.

For more information, please contact Sally Smith of SDI on: +44 (0)1689 889100. Alternatively, send an email to: research@SDI-europe.com

*ITIL Service Strategy (2007) Published for the Office of Government Commerce under licence from the Controller of Her Majesty’s Stationery Office.
12 | Cover story

A 2009 Survival Guide

Anyone not yet aware of the huge economic and business challenges that lie ahead must have been on a prolonged holiday into outer space. Here, some very astute observers offer their down-to-earth thoughts on the challenging 12 months that lie ahead. Brian Wall reports

What will be the big issues in 2009? How will the downturn affect the way that end users run their internal support desks? Perhaps it’s a time to throw caution to the wind and invest in new technology and tools to help the business streamline its operations, making them more efficient, productive and able to weather the economic challenges we now face - although Connectology MD Jonathan Wagstaffe takes issue with that.

“Utilise the technologies you have,” he argues. “The answer is not always new technology, but sometimes to simply utilise technologies that are already available. We are beginning to see procedural changes in large organisations, so technologies such as video conferencing and audio conferencing are becoming a much more frequent meeting method, rather than incurring travel costs.

“It is likely the IT support desk in particular will see increasing demand for support of these types of ‘cost saving’ technologies. Ironically, this may, in turn, place greater demands on the IT support desk’s own support technologies. Home-based or mobile users now spending less time in the office will require more flexible support for mobile devices, home-based PCs and a wider range of software platforms. As the business becomes more efficient by increasing its use of cost-reducing technologies, we could see the need for some investment in IT support function’s own support technologies.”

What about the global challenge and reduced staffing? “Already, we have seen some instances of international companies reducing their workforce by cutting support headcount in the UK and retaining their lower-cost resources in regions such as India and Asia-Pac.

As always, the differentiator will be the quality of service and skills levels required to provide the required support. To do this, the support desk has the opportunity to up its game and become a proactive internal consultancy that, in turn, increases its value to the business.”

Loyalty and Retention

Other key issues for all organisations in 2009 will be customer loyalty and customer retention, says Patrick Bolger, chief marketing officer, Hornbill Systems.

“Every aspect of every business will need to focus on this area, as winning new customers becomes more difficult due to budget cuts and delayed buying decisions. Internal support staff need backing from management and the rest of the organisation in providing the best possible service to the ultimate customer.”

Technology can be harnessed to create real efficiencies and provide a better environment for people to work in, he adds. “By setting up workflows within the service desk, it is easier to automate process and direct calls to the most appropriate people. This helps to resolve calls more quickly, boost morale and enables technical staff to concentrate on more complex issues.

“Encouraging self-help is a great way for service desks to extend their reach and improve customer satisfaction, without increasing headcount. By careful management of the knowledge base, information can be supplied to customers that enables them to solve their own problems and is particularly useful for out-of-hours support. If people can request help online, review the status of
their calls and even solve their own problems, this all helps to reduce telephone traffic to the service desk and frees up valuable resources,” adds Bolger.

The widespread adoption of ITIL means an increasing number of organisations are in control of their infrastructure, he continues, with processes like change management leading to more efficient and seamless upgrades and additions to systems, with less downtime for the end users. "Likewise, the adoption of problem management means that issues are identified much earlier in the cycle, so that IT departments can be far more proactive in their approach.”

On ‘global support desks’ while these can provide standard services, a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach needs to be modified with a local tailored service, he believes. "Businesses that are able to run a hybrid system with the capability for centralised reporting - giving an organisation-wide view of IT issues, while providing the localised services that people really want - will be the ones that benefit from economies of scale without sacrificing customer service quality.”

With 2009 all set to prove trying in the extreme for most organisations, Barclay Rae, head of global services at Axios, points to three key trends he feels are sure to be on the IT agenda - reassuringly, IT service management lies at the heart of managing these issues successfully.

Economic downturn means merger mania. "This will inevitably involve consolidation and integration of IT and other service operations, and ITIL provides a common approach and framework for implementing this with efficiency and quality in mind.

Managing your virtual assets to drive down costs. "Organisations will accelerate their virtualisation and cloud computing plans. Organisations will need to look to ITSM, ITIL and configuration management to ensure they maintain visibility of their IT assets and critical dependencies, in order to ensure business continuity. CMDB is a key element in virtualisation, and also to help to measure and demonstrate value.

Innovate to differentiate. "IT departments that innovate in 2009 will come out on top - innovation can reduce costs, increase compliance and improve service to the business. Innovation using technology will generally provide efficiency savings and fast ROI. However, technology doesn’t have a monopoly on innovation, and savings and quality improvements can also be made through process and organisational change.”

FEAR SPREADING
As we feel our way warily into 2009, few industries can now remain untouched by the economic crisis we face. In fact, says Linda King of G2G3, the fear is spreading and is having a detrimental impact on all our working lives. "Everywhere we look, we are witnessing the collateral damage. Many people are scared for their jobs, which is having a fundamental impact on the way they work.”

When under threat, people do one of two things. They fight or take flight. And the same is true in the world of business, she adds. "There will be a significant proportion of your workforce who, when feeling threatened, will take the ‘flight’ option. And you can be guaranteed that those who are feeling like this will be highly demotivated and actively disengaged. Rather than spending their time productively, they will be internet shopping or searching for alternative employment. In stark contrast, the ‘fighters’ will be determined to survive and thrive in the economic crisis. They will be engaged, motivated and ready to do whatever it takes - to save their jobs and organisation for which they work.”

So what makes a fighter? "Fighters see the bigger picture. They understand that what they do as an individual makes a difference to their individual success and the success of their business. They don’t speculate, they innovate. They experience a sense of belonging, and instead of focusing on themselves, they focus on the major forces that drive their business.”

Fashioning a high-level situational awareness is key to this mindset and this can be done in a many ways, she stresses. “Creating stimulating...
communications, which rise above corporate jargon, can often pull people into the drama of their business,” she insists. “Effective simulations can recreate the challenges faced by IT and help participants understand the true impact to the business of their actions. And innovative approaches to conveying complex information, such as infographics, can quite literally paint the bigger picture, engaging people and accelerating understanding.”

What companies running internal support desk operations can expect in any year, never mind 2009, is something that Don Page, CEO, Marval Group, constantly battles with. “This is a great question,” he says, “and guess what? I always seem to get it wrong. It would be easy to focus on doom and gloom; talk about the economic downturn, not forgetting to use the phrase ‘credit crunch’. I am not suggesting for one minute that some parts of the economy are not in the proverbial you know what. But I prefer to ‘always look on the bright side of life’.

“The one advantage I do have in this particular year is my 20 years’ experience of working in this industry sector. Experience has shown me that when ‘the going gets tough, the service desk needs to get going’. And when I refer to ‘get going’, that’s not literally going away or being outsourced; it’s a time when the service desk can really show what it’s made of - its value to the business and its contribution to the bottom line.

“We should not lose sight of the fact that, for many customers, our service desk is their only window on the quality of service and professionalism provided by our whole organisation.

“For me, the real challenge of 2009 will not be having the latest whiz bang technology or marketing hype, but to focus on raising our game and strengthening our position. As Sun-tzu [author of the ‘Art of War’ and legendary figure] pointed out: ‘We must train many more troops, not only to avoid a siege, but to avoid a defeat.’”

So what does Page recommend we can do to strengthen our own organisation’s positions? Here are some of his proposals:

- **Standardise** - focus on standardising and consolidating the IT infrastructure; adopt ISO20000; it’s easy and will improve service; save both time and money
- **Generate more business from new and current customers** - do what the service desk does best; continue to deliver a first-class service.
- **Improve your business processes** - be flexible, pragmatic.
- **Strengthen your team** - allocate MORE time for training, NOT less; they need to be fighting fit and ready for anything. That means everyone in IT. If individuals don’t want to contribute to strengthening the team, offer them a transfer to the catering department!
- **Review your tools** - if your ITSM or service desk tool is not delivering, or costs too much to develop or maintain, look for a better deal elsewhere
- **Outsource the service desk** - DO NOT even consider this as an option, unless you 100% know, with supporting evidence, you will definitely get a better service and ROI (remember it’s your ‘customers’ who pay the salaries).
- **Demonstrate value** - it’s crucial you focus on demonstrating to the business real value; report on how critical business services are performing; identify areas for improvement; pinpoint cost savings; communicate more - it’s not difficult.

In conclusion, Page offers these words of wisdom for 2009, although slightly altered from the original sentiment: “Do not ask what the business can do for you, but what you can do for your business.”

Finally Avocent’s CTO Ben Grimes reports what he believes will be the top three trends to dominate IT in 2009:

- **Centralised, automated asset management**. “Due to compliance needs and declining budgets, IT leaders will automate their company’s entire asset lifecycle across the enterprise. This means integrating physical and software related assets - including logical, contractual, and financial data in order to facilitate IT business planning and to manage technical standards, and acquire and deploy and retire assets.”

- **Power management**. “IT’s role toward social responsibility will take a back seat to saving an enterprise money. While it is green to conserve, it is just as important in cutting the power and cooling bill in the data centre. Power strips, or intelligent PDUs that monitor consumption at the outlet level, will help IT identify wasted capacity that can be used for future growth.”

- **Managing complexity**. “The adoption of virtualisation technology is growing, because it can offset increasing hardware and power costs. But it brings additional management challenges. In 2009, IT administrators will be looking for cost-effective tools to manage the most complex issues within their environment: power and virtualisation.

“Any virtual servers are easy to deploy, which can lead to inaccurate licence counts, as well as inaccurate asset information and wasted processing cycles for unused or ‘lost’ virtual machines,” points out Grimes.

“The companies with even mid-sized data centres will look to manage virtual and traditional physical servers in a more integrated way, using new software platforms that do this.

“Since single-vendor environments are rare, finding virtualisation and data centre management software that allows IT to manage heterogeneous hardware in a data centre is key.”

What is clear from the views offered by the commentators in this article is that 2009 is going to present the service and support industry with diverse new challenges. At the same time, our industry seems well equipped to meet those challenges and emerge from the downturn, ready to embrace a more positive future. We’ll keep your posted!
ConstructionSkills is the Sector Skills Council, working to deliver a safe, professional and fully qualified construction workforce - serving an industry employing around 2.6 million people. ‘Spotlight’ has been finding out exactly how it operates at the service desk level. We spoke to team leader Karen Brown and here is her take on what makes her organisation a force to be reckoned with.

Q: What types of customers do you support? What are their technical abilities and what common incidents do you receive (specific to your customer base)?

A: Our team supports ConstructionSkills’ 1,500 staff, 600 based at the head office in Bircham Newton, with 11 hub and satellite offices stretching from Inverness in the North, Bridgend in the West and Eastleigh in the South. We support four National Construction Colleges, the largest in Europe based at Bircham Newton in Norfolk. We support approximately 500 mobile staff, who work closely with the construction industry in particular, supporting our construction apprentices. Our customers have a very diverse range of technical ability. Some have never used a PC/laptop prior to working for the organisation, while others have been using them for a long time.

The types of incidents that we receive are also very varied, from support for mobile staff with connectivity issues at home, to ‘Tom Toms’, digital pens, desktop services, hardware and software (we support more than 50 services) and the most recent IP telephony.

Q: When you wake, what's the first thing that pops into your mind? I wonder what will happen today?

A: Every day is a new challenge with IT and you never know what a new day will bring. Various replies came when I asked the team this question, from ‘Have I overslept?’, to ‘How can I help my customer base more effectively today?’
What’s the greatest challenge your service desk faces?

A

Keeping up with the changes in technology - ensuring training is comprehensive for the whole team for each new release to enable us to support the business in a proficient and efficient way. Assisting customers using easy to follow, non technical language is a challenge we have to meet everyday. Sustaining and improving on the service we currently give to our customers.

If you could choose any celebrity, athlete, etc, to work on your service desk, who would you choose and why?

A

For me, it would be James Cracknell. He is so focused, determined and inspiring, I think he would be a great motivator for the team. I asked the team for their views on this and here’s what they said:

- Robert Kilroy-Silk (TV presenter and more recently a contestant in ‘I’m a Celebrity… Get Me Out of Here!’) - he would highlight what we’re doing right in terms of customer focus and care - and make the team feel good in comparison!
- Bill Gates - he has a lot to answer for!
- Gordon Ramsey - does not mess about, gets results and motivates the team
- Wentworth Miller - for his looks
- Chris Moyles - to provide entertainment
- A dragon from Dragons Den - for their drive and determination.

If money/resource was no issue, what one thing would improve your service in 2009?

A

Additional head count for the service desk would enable us to provide longer support hours and develop self-help resources for our customers.

What was the last thing you and your service desk team did together outside of work?

A

We had a member of staff from another office work shadowing on the service desk two weeks ago, he was staying on site so we all went out for a drink one evening whilst he was here. Some of us also went out last night for a Chinese meal as a send-off for Keith who used to work on the service desk and has now left the IS department to become a management trainee within ConstructionSkills.

What type of fruit or vegetable would best describe your service culture and why?

A

Nice ripe peach: lovely to look at and very pleasant on first contact. Satisfies both hunger and thirst (ie, represents technical and personable aspects of the service). Plenty of substance, with a hard inner core: ie, offers very strong customer-focused values, clear processes and defined methodology. Once eaten, the core remains and could be used to grow: self-help for the customer.

What one characteristic, present in a member of your team, stands out in the crowd?

A

Patience and a smile - this is a characteristic that’s present in all members of the team.

CONSTRUCTIONSKILLS AT A GLANCE...

Name: ConstructionSkills
Business type: Training
Head Office: Bircham Newton, Norfolk
Size of SD team: four analysts, (made up of three full-time and two part-time staff) and one team leader
Days/hours of operation: 8.45am - 5pm
Multi-lingual: No
Number of customers supported: 1,500
Calls received per day: 125
SD software supplier/product: Infra Enterprise
Longest serving SD team member: Karen Brown, 22 years with the organisation, the last seven of those with the service desk. Nick Hutson, meanwhile, is not far behind, having been part of the IS department for 20 years.
An old adage has it that: "We are what we habitually do". But how exactly do you define that? Guy Fraser reveals why the answer is far more complex than it might at first seem.

If anyone asked you, "What do you do?", you'd probably talk about your job both in terms of its title and its responsibilities. Yet the first time my boss asked me what was on my 'to do' list, it turned out to be a much more difficult than I'd expected.

Having produced that list, I duly took it to him. He read it, smiled and said: "This is your 'outstanding' list. What I want to know is what you do during a normal day." This took a good deal longer to prepare. Why?

Norman Schwarzkopf, the general of Gulf War fame, is reputed to have joked that 'most battle plans collapse on contact with the enemy'. Another famous leader, Harold MacMilan, when asked what the most important defining issue in politics was, replied: "Events, dear boy, events!". However, despite what both of these great men said, they had managed their arrangements sufficiently well so they could focus on the unexpected events, because they had most other bases already covered.

In other words, although it varies from job to job, what we do is significantly affected by what happens around us that is either unexpected or may turn up at an unexpected time. Managing such situations well depends on anticipation, which, in turn, depends on preparation. Our goal in managing the support desk is to make sure we move from a purely reactive stance to a position where we are prepared and actively managing the reasonably likely eventualities.
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PREVENTABLE SURPRISES
The credit crunch was a surprise, but not to a certain number who saw the rising parallels with the situation prior to the 1929 crash. The Falkland invasion by Argentina in 1982 was a surprise, but not to those who lived there and had watched the rising number of Argentine ‘visits’, naval incursions and other tell-tale signs. How often do we look back with the 20:20 vision of hindsight and see the tell-tale hints that led to an apparent ‘surprise’.

Surprises usually arise from lack of attention. Only the hindsight situation tells a more visible tale. So we should start with the premise that we must try to anticipate how our environment may change in the next week, month or year. In my first middle management post, I allowed myself to be more or less dragooned into the IS9000 preparation team. Part of this involved auditing various departments to check that they were following procedures and keeping records that they were following them. The other part involved setting up appropriate procedures for the department that I was running.

At first, I had a great time dreaming up all sorts of processes for us to include. I then had to go and audit some other departments. As soon as I’d done this, I promptly went back to my own department and eliminated as much from my own procedure list as I could. I had grasped the fact that every time another step was added to the process, it had to be followed, documented and auditors had a right to check it. In other words, to be user-friendly, processes need to be as simple as possible.

THINGS MATTER OR DON’T
The forces have many procedures that are strictly monitored and insisted on. However, one man I knew who went out to take charge of a unit, which had just finished fighting, told me that when he arrived the whole regiment had only two views of various procedures: either they were a complete waste of time or they were absolutely essential.

In this highlighted situation, where what they did or didn’t do could affect whether they survived or not, this is quite understandable. Fortunately, the support desk is not under so much pressure, but the point is nonetheless worth remembering. In other words, if a process step is to be added, it needs to stand up to the scrutiny of logic and necessity.

CREATURES OF HABIT
From a domestic point of view, most of us may have had the experience of leaving the house and wondering if we turned the tap or the lights off. We go back to check and usually we have. The reason for this apparently is that regular everyday actions like turning off taps don’t involve much conscious thinking, so we can forget that we’ve done them. Human beings, like most animals, are creatures of habit and we are naturally resistant to change.

By the same token, good process habits are what keep your IT and service desk operations performing consistently and enable them to continue doing so without excessive stress. So, when embarking on the processes inside the organisation, do not treat this lightly: you are interfering with what, in some cases, are deeply ingrained behaviour patterns. Indeed, some companies outsource process drafting to consulting companies. This is fine, as long as the companies to whom this is delegated understand the following three critical factors. If they don’t, or the internal management team who are doing them don’t, chaos is likely to follow.

BULL BY THE HORMS
So the first step is to make sure that the existing processes are documented. This is probably more important than anything else. A number of them may be superfluous, while a number of others that may appear to be superfluous prove to be, on closer scrutiny, essential. To go back to the analogy of leaving the light or the tap on, many of us are unaware of the processes we follow. So it is these that are the most important to document, but also the ones that a cursory audit is most likely to miss.

The other factor when doing a process audit is suspicion, particularly if it relates to a restructuring, to a downsizing or a possible one. In earlier articles, I’ve often mentioned the importance of being upfront with staff, if unpleasant changes have to be made. In order for processes to be streamlined, this is essential, otherwise finding out what actually happens will prove difficult.

Once the processes have been documented, the next step is to find out which ones are necessary, which are not and which, if any, need to be added. Having read this article, hopefully you are now in a conservative frame of mind about adding too many, but have a clear idea as to what changes may need to be responded to.

WHAT CHANGES ARE NEEDED?
To work this out, first of all identify what changes are needed. These will fall into three main categories: traditional processes that are redundant and serve no purpose; processes that are missing from the current service offering and need to be included; and those which need to be changed in response to imminent or possible changes in the support desk environment. A sensitive audit of current procedures with the support desk team will bring to light many of the first two.

The third should be put together by ensuring that whoever is installing new systems is keeping the support desk not only informed, but actively involved. The other is to make sure that there is good
liaison with personnel, so that new staff are being properly trained. It’s worth getting involved in the induction process; it saves a lot of time later.

THE RIGHT TO INVOLVEMENT
The support desk has to respond to questions about new systems and software changes, as well as new staff who may not know how the system works. So the support desk manager’s signature and formal involvement must be included in any new IT project that may affect users across the company, so that PRINCE 2 procedures are breached if his/her signature isn’t on the project preparation and handover documents.

The project document needs to include training of users and support desk staff, as well as advertised, user-friendly procedure-updates online, so the support desk does not get bothered with a multitude of calls on launch day.

Once these procedures are in place, this leaves the manager free to focus on the more speculative areas of risk management and maintain a close watching brief on the impact of other less predictable issues, such as major viruses, spyware and hackers that may threaten the company. This takes us into the area of security, which is a specialist area in its own right and should also be incorporated into the company’s standard procedures.

During this middle stage, securing the trust and participation of the team being asked to carry out the processes is critical. The more they participate, the more successful the outcome is likely to be. The other major factor is using a single common process to deal with as many different products, services or issues as possible - because processes only become ingrained as good practice, if they’re regularly used. Processes that we only have to follow occasionally have to be almost learned again next time we use them; think about this when completing the next tax form. Common procedures also help new staff to learn more quickly, and so reduce delays, mistakes and problems.

LAUNCH AND COMMUNICATE
Once the new process plan has been completed, it needs to be launched and communicated effectively. Again, you should involve the team that will have to use them. If this selling process is not done well, the team will ignore them, if they can.

Finally, it is essential that all of the processes are attractively set out in a manual and on a website that is easy to find and navigate. The Inland Revenue has worked hard at this one, and having a user-friendly set of instructions is not window dressing; one thing that encourages people to abide by processes is when they are easy to follow.

It is also important to have hard copies of the full process manual available. If the system crashes, it looks bad when you can’t access your own recovery procedures!

Afterwards, take regular feedback to ensure the processes are bedding in well. Be flexible and open, if some of them are not so easy to use; some changes and tweaks will probably be needed.

At the end of the day, it’s worth remembering the following: good process is about persuading people to adopt good habits that make their lives and the lives of their clients, internal or external, easier. Stay focused on that and the rest will surely follow.

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What the acquisition of Infra - a provider of IT Service Management (ITSM) software - set out to achieve was the further solidification of what EMC refers to as its ‘end-to-end strategy’. This was a marriage very much established with one clear purpose: to automate data centre operations, and return visibility and control to IT management.

Significantly, Infra provides a Web-based ITIL (IT Infrastructure Library) verified solution that automates IT service management processes in enterprise organisations. Moreover, with its ability to manage the full lifecycle of IT services, its service desk complements EMC’s automated discovery, rich analytics, native dependency mapping and model-based approach. This better enables customers to manage service delivery end-to-end. It was a synergy that EMC was quick to point out at the time of the acquisition itself. “With the introduction of virtualisation and web-based technologies, our customers are looking for a dynamic IT service environment that can keep pace with this rapid rate of change and growing complexity,” says Chris Gahagan, EMC’s senior vice president, resource management software.

“The combination of Infra’s service management and EMC’s existing infrastructure management capabilities delivers practical and innovative solutions for today’s IT service delivery challenges.” That’s a theme readily taken up by Nathan Brumby, MD of the newly established EMC Infra. For him, this is a continuing story of EMC’s dedication to the core ITSM market. “What the acquisition has at its core are the commitment and drive EMC brings to what was, in relative terms, a small (albeit highly successful) privately held business and the unlimited upside they can realise with the investment of EMC - and why this is good for customers and staff. "Strategically, the timing for the
acquisition was perfect. Although Infra was very effective -in its market, at the same time it faced the issue of how to fund continual growth. What EMC has been able to deliver is the opportunity to enable Infra to continue to grow and prosper, building on its brand awareness and ensuring its long-term continuity with customers. Also, it’s enabled Infra to engage with enterprise-level companies in an expanded marketplace, taking it to the next level through a whole new business approach and level of investment.

Brumby also has a clear vision of how ITSM will contribute to the success and IT development of businesses going forward. “ITSM is now being properly integrated and attached to the bigger IT management picture,” he says.

CLEAR REFLECTION
This, he feels, is now being clearly reflected in the way that the EMC Infra Service Desk fits into the wider EMC Resource Management software portfolio (see box). Specifically, one of the four major business units within EMC is its Resource Management Software Group (RMSG), which serves as the underlying discovery, mapping and management capabilities at an application and network level that feed up into the EMC Infra CMDB (configuration management database).

The new levels of integration recently announced between Infra and the Smarts Application Discovery Manager (ADM) are testimony to what is happening. Leveraging heightened integration between EMC Smarts ADM and EMC Infra, Customers can now apply the power of automated application discovery to support dependency-driven change management, impact analysis, and CMDB population.

This forms a key piece of EMC’s management software portfolio, adds Brumby, which is aimed at helping customers to automate end-to-end IT service management in the most effective and business efficient way possible.

What Smarts ADM provides is continuous automated discovery and dependency mapping of the frequently changing relationships that exist between IT applications, databases, their hosts and configurations, and the underlying information infrastructure - as well as the network protocols on which these systems rely. Infra is a 100% Web-based solution for automating IT service management throughout the enterprise that enables and enhances incident, problem, change, configuration, knowledge, release, service level and availability management processes. Moreover, Infra has been verified to an enhanced level of ITIL compatibility by Pink Elephant.

“EMC now has a story that starts at the network and application discovery level, moves through compliance and change, and ultimately ends up being reflected in business optimisation and value for the enterprise,” states Brumby. “But it can equally address the network engineer and the CXO.”

Moreover, a key point he emphasises is how the process (ie, ITIL) driving a best practice will continue to be recognised. “If the economic markets continue to slow, this will only be to the ITSM vendors’ advantage, revealing a way of maximising the efficient delivery of IT services.”

SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT
He acknowledges that there are difficult times ahead in the marketplace, as the economy comes under increasing pressure. But he also sees this as a driver for businesses to leverage and make the most of that they already have within their working environments. “They have all made significant investment in their networks, storage and applications, and are at the point where they now want to manage that as one, consistent activity. That is where we come in. Our role is to help them to do exactly that, as efficiently and effectively as possible, with ITIL very much wrapped around the whole process.”

Brumby is aware that most businesses still have the last economic downturn still fresh in heir minds - and how they emerged from that.

“The best organisations will get through the present uncertainty and come out stronger. It means being that much more focused on how you run your business - and smarter in how you compete. ITSM, with all of the tools and techniques it offers, can play an important part in making that happen.”

EMC INFRA IN ACTION
- EMC Infra, Smarts and Voyence product families support and enhance IT service automation, operations and delivery in enterprise organisations
- Developed on the foundations of ITIL best practice, EMC’s IT Service Automation & Operations solutions deliver end-to-end IT Service Management, visibility and control by enabling and improving the Service Desk function, service-centric CMDB population and federation, as well as key processes related to Workflow, Incident, Problem, Event, Change, Configuration Management and ensuring IT compliance
- Application dependencies and relationships can be populated automatically, quickly and continuously into the CMDB and associated with an organisation’s IT service catalogue
- Network topology information and relationships from EMC Smarts can be leveraged within the CMDB
- Infra Service Desk workflow automation and incident and problem management capabilities enhance IT productivity.
THE LONG - AND SHORT - OF STAFF RETENTION

Does it really matter that much whether you hang on to your staff long term or not? Editor Brian Wall opens the debate by arguing in favour, while Rob Addy points to the plentiful supply of other fish ready to leap out of the employment pond.

Today, more than ever before, companies have at their disposal valuable resources to gauge employee lifetime value (ELTV) and calculate how much they are contributing to the business. For those with the foresight and acumen to pursue this route, it is altering fundamentally the way in which employees are perceived, with many businesses seeing the benefits that accrue from long-term people retention.

“Historically, employees have been treated as cost creators, rather than as value creators,” states the Forum for People Performance Management and Measurement. “While it has been relatively easy to associate value with sales performers who generate revenue, the value non-sales performers contribute to an organisation has been much harder to quantify.”

However, new technology enables managers to accumulate extensive information about organisational performance at an individual employee level. Furthermore, any organisation, regardless of industry, size, revenue or number of employees, can take the first step to estimating the value contributed by their people.

In the forum’s white paper, ‘Exploring The Building Blocks Of Employee Lifetime Value (ELTV)’ - the second in a series developed by the Forum for People Performance Management and Measurement and the Performance Improvement Council of the Incentive Marketing Association - it defines ELTV and presents a tactical approach to begin strategising this.

First, though, what exactly is ELTV? “Employee lifetime value is a quantitative measure of the long-term financial contribution an employee makes to an organisation,” states the forum. “Before exploring how to estimate ELTV, it is helpful to ascertain what precisely qualifies a person as an employee, what determines a ‘lifetime’ and what is meant by value.

In addition, it is helpful - and eye opening - to expand our understanding of an employee’s ‘financial contribution’ to go beyond mere revenue-generation activities.”

In the past, employees often stayed with the same employer, sometimes performing the same job, over the course of an entire career. Today’s workforce comprises, among other arrangements, independent contractors, leased employees and temporary employees. For the purposes of this article, the term ‘employee’ refers to anyone working for an organisation, on either a full or part-time basis, who is enrolled in a formal compensation system.

Because the term ‘lifetime’ connotes a permanent employment relationship that does not correlate exactly to today’s workplace, there are two general ways to define the term for today’s marketplace, according to the forum: 1) delineating a specific period of time or 2) the length of time an employee has been employed by an organisation. The ELTV model presented below considers ‘lifetime’ to extend to the lifetime of the employment relationship.

The study also suggests ways in which employees create value that are much harder to measure, but which have a clear qualitative impact on the organisation:

- Employee enthusiasm helping to make a company look attractive to potential customers or employees
- Creative and innovative employees helping organisations deliver superior and competitive processes, products and services
- Employees generating goodwill through interpersonal relationships, inside and outside the workplace
- Cultural effects, such as more efficient processes or positive contribution to a company’s defined values.

TORRID TIMES

Certainly, the emerging financial crisis has sparked a need for medium-sized businesses around the globe to monitor employee engagement, productivity and effectiveness more closely. “With the market downturn, business must act quickly to determine the real cost of disengaged employees,” says Adrian Finlayson, chief executive officer of Accumulate, one of the biggest suppliers of reward, recognition and incentive solutions. “They should implement strategies to realign employees’ focus on behaviours and work practices that deliver efficiency gains, cost reductions, retain customers and secure sales.”

Having fully motivated and focused staff is crucial, in financial terms alone. Gallup research has estimated that, in the United States, the cost of one disengaged employee is around $13,000 each year in lost productivity. The study, which also surveyed 1,500 Australian workers, revealed that 20% of employees are ‘actively disengaged’ at work, with an estimated cost to business of $31.5 billion.

Moreover, the number of disengaged employees within an organisation and the level of detachment often has a multiplier effect. Finlayson says that, while it is not
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Naturally, any organisation that adopts the above approach has to believe that such an investment of time and resources will pay substantial dividends and retain employees long term. In the second part of this article, Rob Addy debates whether this is even the right strategy in the first place.

**IS THE WAR OF ATTRITION WORTH FIGHTING?**

Skills shortages within the IT support space in mainland Europe are increasing, with an ever reducing pool of suitably skilled resources being sought by an increasing number of internal and vendor support organisations. Offshoring initiatives of recent years have reduced the number of people entering the IT support arena at the lower levels and consequently a knock-on shortage of experienced and skilled resources is becoming apparent. It is anticipated that this skills shortage will intensify in the short term and that, over time, natural market forces will remedy the situation by pushing pay rates up to attract more local candidates into the marketplace.

It should be noted that the incestuous nature of the IT support industry, and the cross-vendor applicability of core technology skills and experiences, means that many of the skills an individual acquires at organisation X will be immediately applicable to organisation Y. The almost universal adoption of Wintel platforms, MS Exchange for email and the rise in popularity of back office technologies such as J2EE and .NET platforms for enterprise application stacks, as well as the continuing drive towards web-based delivery mechanisms, means that support agents are able to leverage their knowledge and skills in these areas across multiple vendors and multiple organisations. For these reasons, it is reasonable to expect an increase in the level of labour movement within the IT support sector.

Commonly accepted wisdom states that any staff turnover is a bad thing. Attrition should be avoided wherever possible. Or should it? Given that the potential for an extended IT skills shortage is real, does this mean that an attrition time bomb is ticking at the hearts of the IT function? Perhaps a new employment model for the support function is required.

**COMMONLY ACCEPTED WISDOM CAN BE WRONG!**

Attrition is often cited as a terrible phenomenon that support executives must constantly strive to fight and eliminate. The rationale behind such assertions is questionable in the...
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extreme. Below are some of the most commonly repeated arguments against attrition and the reasons why they are flawed.

Attrition-related costs are inflated, as new starters require significant training to get up to speed - skills are readily transferable between similar organisations, far the reasons outlined above. Also, specialist disciplines within the IT function, such as networks, security and database administration, are typically common between organisations, irrespective of the market sector involved.

End users prefer long-term relationships with their support personnel - they rarely call the service desk for a chat. They have a problem and they want their issues to be resolved in a timely and courteous manner; they don't want a friend.

Long-time employees hold invaluable business experience that benefits the organisation. Given the common lack of communication between IT and the business, and the fact that IT-to-business alignment has been a primary driver for the IT function for the best part of a decade, it's bizarre that this is still claimed by some as a reason to avoid staff attrition.

If we were to suspend disbelief for just a moment, and accept that the business experience of some support personnel is valuable, one must still take into account the fact that X years of experience is often little more than one year of experience repeated X times.

Employees with extended tenures have useful technical experience: technology refresh rates and advances in IT capabilities make much of the knowledge acquired from 3-4 years ago redundant.

Attrition is no bad thing

The realities of the labour market cannot be ignored and forward. Thinking organisations recognise that they must work within the boundaries of their local employment environment, rather than trying to continually fight against the tide. Attrition can bring as many benefits as problems, some of which are described below:

- New starters bring external influences and ideas into the organisation - organisations can learn from the experiences of others and potentially avoid costly mistakes
- Team dynamics constantly change as newbies become old hands, etc, invigorating the wider team and making it more flexible and open to change
- Regular recruitment allows an organisation to take advantage of the skills investments of others - avoiding training costs by using the opportunity provided by regular staff turnover to recruit candidates with the skills needed to plug internal gaps and extend team capabilities
- Provides an opportunity to reduce the cost base of the support team - more experienced employees are significantly more expensive than inexperienced newcomers; by adjusting the proportion of experienced staff and trainees within the team, support executives can alter their cost structures.

Stop fighting attrition and embrace it as a necessary and good thing. Staff attrition has been a major concern within the IT support industry since its inception. Support executives need to determine whether complete staff retention is either achievable or desirable. Indeed, it can be argued that a certain level of planned staff turnover is beneficial to an organisation, as it revitalises and brings new ideas and approaches to the table. Rather than fight attrition, support managers should begin to embrace it and perhaps even depend upon it. In the accounting and legal professions, for example, a large influx of raw recruits is required every year to feed the on-going staffing needs of the corporate sausage machine. This provides low-cost, but highly motivated, cannon fodder to perform the repetitive and menial tasks that are necessary to deliver even the most prestigious and value added of services.

Where a level of staff turnover is predicted and planned for, it can be satisfied by a variety of methods and employment models. Support functions will begin to utilise alternative sources of personnel, such as students, stay-at-home parents and the ever increasing retired population. These demographics represent a rich and diverse opportunity for IT recruiters, as this largely untapped resource pool will be increasingly accessible, due to distributed telephony technologies and cloud-based service desks.

Such workers will be able to work as and when it suits them, fitting in shifts (although the term 'shift' may become somewhat meaningless, as the work performed will begin to be measured in terms of the value added, rather than the duration for which one is available to perform) around their home life commitments.

Rob Addy is a research director with Gartner covering IT Infrastructure Support Services across EMEA where he advises organisations on a variety of support and outsourcing related areas. He is also the author of ‘Effective IT Service Management: To ITIL and beyond!’, published in September 2007 by Springer and reviewed on Page 34 of this issue. See www.gartner.com and www.effectiveitsm.com for details
Ringing. “Good morning, service desk. How may I help you?” Everyone except an alien living on Planet Zog knows that an interaction between business user and service provider is now taking place. Humans exchanging telephone conversations have been the cornerstone of handling user-supplier contacts since it all began and, in my personal opinion, long may that last. However, there is more than one way to skin a cat (apologies to all you cat lovers) and perhaps the ‘old school’ guys (like me) should now have a look at the new ‘gadgets and gismos’ ... so enter self-service web tools.

For many years, I have been preaching the concept of ‘stick-to-what-you-are-good-at’, combined with a philosophy of ‘enjoy your job’. Many service desks struggle to get these two principles implemented as a culture. Well, how about this for a proposition ... good service desk staff are great at talking to users and interpreting answers to questions, allowing them to identify solutions to different circumstances: combine this with a constant challenge of new situations and you have happy staff. Technology is extremely adept at repeatedly and consistently performing basic functions, and never seems to moan, if it has to do the same simple and basic task a hundred times a day. Surely, then, the perfect solution is to use people for some activities and technology for others. But what about the user’s point of view? Let’s not forget that there are more than enough people out there who don’t like using technology and much prefer to chat with a real person. These customer needs must be understood; we cannot afford to ‘railroad’ over them and enforce solutions that conflict with their demands and indeed their perception of quality service provision. The key issue is to provide the users with choice.

As us old ITIL advocates will tell you, there are many factors that affect the success of self-service strategy. The first of these is that all related existing processes are not compromised. The second, but equally as important, is that the user experience is not compromised: self-service must not involve them in more work than the normal single phone call would have. Let’s think about self-service as a

SELF-SERVICE WEB TOOLS?

Definitely, yes - but be careful!

There are many factors that affect the success of self-service strategy: the first of these is that all related existing processes are not compromised. Ken Goff explains all...
business strategy: the deployment of tools that negate the need for direct intervention by support personnel can have many benefits to the organisation, such as reduced operating costs, greater control over individual transactions and access to support activities outside normal support hours, all of which should lead to improved customer satisfaction. However, it is vital to get three things right in order to achieve these benefits: select the correct activities for self-service; select the right tools for performing the functionality; and implement them in an effective and efficient manner that totally satisfies the customer’s needs.

It is imperative that any adoption of self-service tools is handled in a formal and structured, project-managed manner; like any strategic initiative, there can be disastrous consequences when getting it wrong. In my opinion, the first stage is crucial to the latter success of this initiative, this being the opening engagement with stakeholders to establish clear requirements for self-service activities. As stated several times in this article, the self-service solution must only handle the ‘right’ options for the ‘right’ reason. It must not force a fait accompli upon the users, just because it suits IT to do it that way.

Stakeholders must include business (management and users), IT provider (service desk, support teams, technical and application management) and of course, third party support groups.

The other critical activity within this initiative has got to be the selection of the self-service tool. The mistake I’ve seen so many times is for the organisation to choose the tool too early in the project; they are then forced to deliver a solution driven by the tool’s capability, rather than the original requirements.

So please, let’s stick to the golden rule of tool selection: solution requirements, followed by tool selection criteria, followed by tool evaluation, resulting in a final step of tool selection. I really believe that this is one area that demands extreme diligence. I strongly recommend site visits and detailed discussions with organisations that have implemented solutions. Please do not assume that your position is unique and that other organisations don’t face the same situations that you do.

But this just leaves one question… what are the right activities for technology to handle directly with the users? Gartner has stated that 30% of all calls to the service desk are for a password reset. I’ve heard it said that there are 20 million calls a day being made to service desks around the world and, if that’s true, that means support staff get involved in 6 million calls every 24 hours. Let’s say that’s 3 minutes per call (queue waiting, discussion, proof of identity, reset routine, confirmation of success), so 300,000 business hours are lost every day and 37,500 desk staff absorbed in performing the most simple and basic activity, and providing little or no value-add.

DANGER AREAS
Surely, then all repetitive tasks that have standard input information, and also already have pre-defined execution steps, must be crying out for self-service. These include, access to standard information (FAQs or published data), procurement of standard items, access to updates and progress of previously logged tasks, etc.

However, the danger areas for self-service are those contacts that are not standard. Incidents are the obvious interaction here: these usually involve the gathering of different data and information from users on each occasion and are therefore, notoriously difficult to pre-judge in the form of a screen template. Service desk should be experts in questioning skills and, as such, are able to extract relevant data and information from the caller, based upon previous answers. They also have the ability to drive the conversations in a manner that allows ALL the vital information needed to resolve the incident to be gathered during this one contact.

Once the incident log has been read by the service desk, any missing or confusing information will require contact back to the user and introduce a time delay that the self-service option was introduced to eradicate! There is a similar argument for activities such as requests for change that may well require unique supporting and background context.

Another issue that I have come across with self-logging incidents is an expectation that users will understand the nature of the form’s question and know exactly what kind of response the IT group are expecting to see. This demands a certain literacy by the users that will not always be present.

I am not saying that self-service tools cannot address these two concerns and vendors will argue, of course, that the tools can be set up to drive the users through the recording of relevant and important information.

I simply offer the cautionary word that it is a difficult thing to get right and so the complexity of the solution invariably has to go up, which will have a direct impact on the user’s perception, and ultimate use, of the facility.

One of the key considerations in this debate must be that of ‘culture’. Many organisations are used to working one way (the telephone call, and personal interaction between user and service desk staff). Change is good, but only when there is a demand for it and it is implemented in a considerate manner. The involvement, from day one, with everyone concerned is essential. All requirements and concerns must be addressed. Ongoing and continual awareness, including education and training, is vital, if the journey is to be successful. ‘Cultural sponsorship’ is a concept that is far too often overlooked when major changes are introduced. This requires the focus and attention of both business and IT management to ensure that the people-related issues are gathered, understood, analysed, resolved, and integrated into the new methodologies going forward.
Do the users want it? Is it implemented in such a way that they get advantages from using it? Will it cause them not to use the service desk when they should? Do the IT staff want it? Does it allow IT support to be delivered in a better way? Does it actually deliver a quality solution? Getting positive answers to these questions is the only basis on which to move forward with the self-service initiative. If the staff agree with it, they will make it work!

SEEING THE BENEFITS
So where does the real swear word - money - fit into this debate? Well, obviously, it has a major part to play. It is far too easy to get caught up in the mindset of “this is going to be expensive to deploy”, due to the nature of the development and implementation costs (project, processes, tools, associated hardware/software, training, etc) and you’d be right. It is. However, the benefits must be viewed from two angles: tangible (financial) and non-tangible (perception).

Getting it totally right will deliver cost savings and increase the business’s satisfaction with IT. But not getting it right will only deliver one of those benefits at best, or neither of them at worst. Good businesses are based on getting these sort of decisions right, so be sure to perform detailed and accurate costing exercises upfront, as well as sensible and realistic benefit realisation scenarios that WILL be delivered.

Well, you’ve read the thoughts of this old fool and, while the article was never meant to supply you with the answers to the question of “should we go self-service?”, I hope it’s given some food for thought.

Ken Goff is a highly sought after trainer/lecturer and consultant, working right across the service management spectrum (specialising in ITIL). His clients include high-profile organisations worldwide. He can be contacted at: ken@kengoff.co.uk or: 07914 402870.
This is a self-development book by Adrian Webster, who has spoken at SDI conferences before and been really well received. This revised edition is billed as a ‘grown-up’s book for kids at work’, which gives you an idea of the thrust. It’s 100 pages of easy - and good fun - reading that will give you both ideas to develop how you succeed at work, and lots of ammunition to look at changing how you and your colleagues behave.

Webster uses several fun names to bring your journey to ‘Fat City’ (where your success dreams lie) to life. For example, ‘don’t feed the Neg Ferrets - they’re dedicated to seeking out everything negative in life and machete their way through everything positive’. And then there is ‘molasses man’, one to avoid, as they are ‘sweet but slow people stuck in the inside lane of life’. However, to help you escape to the ‘fast lane of life’, you may want to find a PUP (potential unattached player) who is new to the organisation or work and brimful of enthusiasm. If you can stop them being gobbled up by the ‘Neg Ferret fraternity’ and help them avoid ‘PUP-napping’, then they can help you reach your Fat City goals!

So you get the idea. The trip through life and work to your Utopian ‘Fat City’ goals is a road where the author guides you in a pragmatic and fun way, helping you make the most of ‘pit stops’ and using ‘TNTs’ positively to help you succeed as much as you really want to, avoiding being dragged off by ‘Neg Ferrets’ and pulled down by ‘Sinkers’!

Webster has put together a short, amusing read that will really lift your spirits, much in the vein of ‘Who moved my cheese?’ and will inspire you to look at work with a fresh mind - what’s to lose, other than a couple of hours’ reading time? And there’s even a Polar Bear Pirate helpdesk - see www.polarbearpirates.com for more guidance. I recommend this as an excellent read.

Howard Kendall, founder and chairman, SDI
Pixie Dust - A tale of recruitment problems in Ten Tree Wood

Pixie Dust is an easy read, disguised as a fairy tale, which gently explores the complexities of modern recruitment processes.

Howard Awbery’s story tells the tale of Floot, a woodland leader, and his search to find a new second in command; cleverly highlighting those familiar mistakes we all make when trying to choose the right people for our team; and providing an insight into a more selective and considered approach.

The book contains some interesting ideas and conveys them in an unusual way, which kept this reader engaged and entertained. However the unusual form of narrative often made the practical point of the story difficult to pick out and the explanation of the recruitment model was slightly obscured.

Awbery’s message is a simple, but powerful, one and the model discussed, applied in the correct way, could revolutionise how we approach senior management recruitment. At times, I did feel that the ‘story’ constrained what could have been a more detailed explanation of how to use the model. However, what the book lacks in practical detail, it makes up for with a fantastically innovative approach to storytelling and overall it succeeds in simplifying an extremely complex management process.

All in all, this is well worth the hour it will take to read and a good choice, if you are looking to sprinkle a little ‘pixie dust’ on your recruitment strategy.

Full details can be found at: www.pixiedustmanagement.com and www.athenapress.com/book.php?ID=2590

Alison Lomax, publisher, SupportWorld

Effective IT Service Management: To ITIL and Beyond!

Exactly what does Rob Addy cover in this book? Far better to ask what he doesn’t cover - although he probably covers that as well! Addy clearly eats and drinks his subject and equally serves up something of a feast for his readers. Watchers of the TV show, ‘Come Dine With Me’, might well choose the author as the perfect host for the sharing of knowledgeable conversation across a dinner table on this often heatedly debated topic. And no doubt they would enjoy the choice cuts of wisdom he serves up in this substantial tome.

He sets out his stall from Page 1, pointing out that “IT is the single most pervasive discipline within the business world today”, immediately adding: “…it is amazing to see many IT shops still floundering in the dark ages, with little or no focus upon proactive IT Service Management.”

From that point on, there is no holding back. He is determined to see that deficiency remedied and, in a hard-hitting, but always witty, style, offers a wealth of insights and guidelines to encourage businesses towards a more enlightened approach. Moving from ITIL as ‘Holy Grail or Poisoned Chalice’, to self service, interaction management, change management, problem management, et al, he covers just about every base - even offering a glimpse into the future of ITSM in what are uncertain times. It’s a rollercoaster ride and you disembark a little unsteady on your pins - albeit with the thrill of the occasion firmly ingrained on your psyche. Verdict? A ‘must have’ for any service organisation.

Full details at: www.effectiveitsm.com and www.springer.com/978-3-540-73197-9

Brian Wall, editor, SupportWorld
IT SUPPORT WILL OPEN UP A BRIGHTER ‘GREENER’ FUTURE

By Howard Kendall

I’ve noticed that more organisations than ever before are increasing remote working initiatives across their workforces in a bid to shrink their carbon footprints significantly.

BT’s Directory Enquiries, which has directory staff located in offices and their own homes across the UK, is a good example of how remote working initiatives can work well.

Remote working certainly reduces staff commuting, but, if managed effectively, it can also greatly improve office workspace efficiencies and asset rationalisation by enabling initiatives such as ‘two staff to one desk’ programmes.

According to a recent survey carried out by analyst house Quocirca, around 70% of enterprises polled said a quarter of their staff work remotely at some point during the working week. As there is a very real likelihood that the government will introduce carbon taxes on businesses in the near future, there is no doubt that remote working is here to stay.

Businesses are increasingly looking to Green IT as a means of cutting expenses and energy consumption across their IT departments and a number of businesses have already started with this agenda. Server consolidation, automated power management and virtualisation are certainly popular deployments to realise significant cost and power efficiencies, as well as helping to start a viable social responsibility agenda.

IBM is a particularly good example of a company that has a strong green agenda and the company has several strands to its ‘carbon management initiative’, which are applied to its own business, as well as being offered to clients.

IBM has introduced a ‘travel footprinting’ strategy in its consulting business to reduce client impact through influencing the choice of mode of travel. IBM also employs remote infrastructure management service for its server configurations and assesses that, if this were taken up by IT infrastructures globally, we would see a 20% reduction of electricity consumption - about 0.4% of annual greenhouse gas emissions. However, without a robust IT infrastructure and effective IT support in place, businesses will find it difficult to provide a reliable, safe and secure IT environment outside the main office walls. Businesses will increasingly rely on electronic technology to keep employees in communication with each other, and reduce the distance that both employees and customers have to travel. The pressure to provide a consistently good IT service to support this mobile workforce will, therefore, certainly become more intense.

Employee confidence in IT, and the delivery of quick and effective IT support, is vital in carrying businesses through the next generation of flexible working practices. Staff need to know they can rely on good support when working out of the office, and businesses will need reassurance that their corporate data is safe and secure in the hands of remote workers.

Organisations should therefore ensure they have a robust best practice ITSM programme in place to take them into the future.

Implementing best practice processes will consistently deliver a measurable set of IT services levels. Only by doing this will the business ensure that its IT support programme is in the best possible condition to meet the challenges of an increasingly mobile workforce.

For more information, go to: http://www.realbusiness.co.uk/news/carbon-footprint/5486426/it-support-will-take-firms-into-a-greener-future.html

Howard Kendall, founder and chairman of the Service Desk Institute

JOB LOSSES SEEN AS UNLIKELY, DESPITE THE DOWNTURN

The recent SDI IT Salary and Staffing Survey of 250-plus ITSM professionals has found that 65% of those surveyed are confident the current economic climate will not result in a reduction of staffing levels and subsequent redundancies.

In order to defend themselves and their staff against the economic downturn, it is anticipated budget holders will reduce their recruitment budgets in preparation for the next financial year. Growth seems unlikely, with 45% of those surveyed anticipating a significant slow down in investment. Preparing for the future and protecting current staff are the main motivators in these uncertain economic times.
A recent survey conducted by Axios and Globe One maintained that an ITIL qualification could boost IT professionals’ salaries by 40%. In response to this claim, SDI ran its own survey to find out if this really was the case.

Asked: ‘Do you agree that obtaining the ITIL qualification (Manager or Foundation) can increase an IT professional’s earning potential by up to 40%?’, respondents were split 50/50. Half stated the ITIL qualification could boost an individual’s earning potential, with the remainder believing it couldn’t. Respondents were also asked: ‘Do you agree that for those individuals without an ITIL qualification, employers want at least 10 to 15 years’ experience for the same pay packet?’

The results show the majority thought that the ITIL qualification did not equate to 10 to 15 years’ experience - in fact, a massive 72%.

**KEY TO SUCCESS**

Sally Smith, head of research at SDI, comments: “There is no doubt that all qualifications from reputable training providers are of benefit to the individual. However, it is unrealistic and sensationalist to think that a qualification will be the sole reason someone succeeds.” Smith adds: “It is an individual’s ability to apply the training skills learnt that is key to their success, not whether they possess a particular certificate or not.”

What are your thoughts on this subject? Do you think that an ITIL qualification can really help to boost an individual’s salary? Please email: research@sdi-europe.com

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**SALARIES ON THE UP AND UP, CLAIMS NEW SURVEY**

A new SDI survey reveals that starting salaries in the ITSM industry have improved dramatically since 2005, and the majority of IT service desk managers and IT service desk team leaders are satisfied with their current salaries.

According to ‘The IT Service Desk Salary Survey 2008’, the majority of respondents perceive themselves to be valued by senior management. This is a good indication that the ITSM industry is not only rewarding its staff financially, but also recognising individual’s contribution as a whole.

Interestingly, the majority of respondents do not have their annual pay increase linked with their performance. One suggestion would be that ITSM managers address this by linking performance in with reward. This will give staff greater control when influencing their salary reward and greater autonomy when it comes to their own performance.

One of the areas highlighted as a concern is the general level of dissatisfaction with salaries amongst IT service desk analysts. “If your staff are dissatisfied with their salaries and there is no possibility of a pay rise, then it might be worth considering other incentives, which are not solely linked to financial gain,” says the report. “Giving the individual the opportunity to develop their skills through training can be an invaluable incentive and the qualification they receive will stay with that person throughout their career.”

Contact Sally Smith on +44 (0)1689 889100 for further information or to obtain a copy of the full report. Alternatively, email: research@sdi-europe.com
A year is a long time in service desks - and that is never more likely to be true than this year. There’s a perceived level of gloom descending on the whole economy. And while I think that, as an industry, we are well equipped to weather the downturn, it’s inevitable that many service desks will see their organisations cutting budgets and being cautious in 2009. So how do we get through 2009 as both organisations and individuals? While inevitably there will be some factors outside your control, there is much you can do to make the best of 2009. For example:

For organisations - there are some that will emerge more or less unscathed, in my view. If you’re in managed services, then you should see an increase in interest from businesses looking to control costs, so be ready to offer them great service and a sensible sales model to really clean up - but then be aware enough to ensure you deliver good service levels, so they stay with you after the initial contract period!

If you’re in software or associated services, some areas will escape damage - security is potentially one - but all should focus on how much extra value you can offer to customers to help them over a tough 2009. Customers will remember the help they get now and remain loyal way beyond 2009. And that’s a great mantra for the rest of us: however much we may be hit by a downturn, there is always someone in a worse position - like the estate agents or the car dealers!

For individuals - first read the above! You need to act as though you are a business in your own right, delivering services to the business you work for in return for your salary, benefits and bonuses. That’s the reality of your position and you’ll do better if you think about that constantly. The last people to get cut from any business are the most useful and valuable. If you’re the one putting in the bit extra, then it helps when the harsh climate hits - employers are forced NOT to overlook people that are only ‘doing enough’ and to react accordingly.

Also, employers are more willing to help you find a new position, if you’re valuable - with them or others - and this can really help in a tough market. Also, make sure you keep your skills and qualifications up to date or even add new ones. This will make you more employable for any number of reasons - not least that you’ve taken the initiative to do that and that the range of options will be wider.

So there’s some of the basic steps that should help you get through the coming year. But also keep in touch with us at SDI. We’ll be helping everyone do things more efficiently throughout 2009 - and also helping to keep spirits up, too!

Have a great 2009 and make sure you’re still there fighting in December!
Picking a customer relationship management application that meets the precise needs of your business is one of the biggest technology decisions you are likely to make. When you consider the money involved in buying it (and businesses will be looking at their budgets very warily in 2009, I suspect!), plus the time to train your employees, along with the on-going manpower to keep the data it contains up to date, such a solution adds up to a major investment. Of course, you may well be aware of all of these caveats already, so on to the systems themselves.

You’ll be pleased to hear there’s any number of solutions to choose from out there, but it can also be mind-boggling - from traditional on-premise software you load on each employee’s PC, to ‘hosted’ solutions that reside at the premises of an application service provider (ASP) and which your employees access via the Web. If you have little or no computer expertise in-house, a hosted solution might make more sense.

Moreover, if CRM is still new to you, then a hosted service is probably, at least initially (see below), the least expensive, most painless way for you to give it a try, since you won’t be shelling out on expensive applications, and then be tasked with getting it up and running across the business.

At the same time, a hosted solution has its downsides. For starters, there’s the monthly cost. With on-premise software, you buy it outright and use it until a new version comes along that makes you want to upgrade. With a hosted solution, you’re paying on a per-user, per-month basis. Over the course of a year - or two or three - your out-of-pocket expense for the service is likely to be several times what a comparable on-premise CRM app might have cost.

Also, committing to a hosted service provider means your valuable business data resides with them, usually in a proprietary format. If you decide to end your relationship with your ASP, they will certainly hand over your data to you - but it might be in a database format you can’t work with without their application.

And then there are the questions of uptime and security. Unexpected outages could mean no access to the system, while some business owners aren’t comfortable with having their customer information stored off-site on someone else’s servers in the first instance. A lot to consider in this response, Doug, I know - but it’s worth spending the time and effort to pinpoint the solution that will be the best fit for your business.

Brian Wall, editor, SupportWorld
DEAR SUPPORTWORLD

Q I have worked as a service desk analyst for four years and I would like a change of job role. While I enjoy dealing with call incidents and understand all the call metric requirements and service levels, etc., it is the topic of the enquiries that bores me: Information Technology. Is there any other industry or sector that I could work in that would make use of my current skills (I am fully ITIL and SDI trained), but won't mean that I am dealing with desktop software enquiries all day? I have heard that facilities management might be an option?

Yours sincerely
Jane, Bangor

A Dear Simon. Sounds as though you like the people and service bits of the job, but are a bit bored with the technology stuff? FM might work for you, but that's really not that different in terms of the role. You'll potentially be supporting other 'things', like copiers, lorries, building fittings, etc. Maybe what you need is a move into a customer service role? The qualifications you have equip you well to move into a customer contact job and you'll be able to choose the type of business you work for - in finance, health, sport, whatever. The downside is that, unless you bag a senior or supervisory role, often salaries are a little lower than in IT. Like most choices, if you want the pleasure, it costs you!

Thanks
Simon, Harrogate

Guy Fraser, Eumartec
www.eumartec.com

DEAR SUPPORTWORLD

Q What is the UK service desk average cost per call? When can I get this sort of info from in future?

Anon

A As far as formulae go, it is difficult to offer any without knowing more about the operation you are running. This should include factors such as the range of platforms that you are supporting, the service level agreements you need to meet, levels of qualification and training required for your staff, and the profile of incoming cases during a 24-hour period.

As an opener, it would be worth following the points I made in my article in the Sept-Oct 2008 issue, which provides several arithmetic formulae relating to hours in a 24/7 shift pattern.

To recap in round terms, there are 168 hours in a week, and the average working week for an employee is around 37.5, so if you're moving from a normal office week to 24/7 you're staffing multiplies by 5 and the cost by more than that because nightshift workers have to be paid significantly more.

Before you start you need to consider carefully whether you need 24/7 at all. It is a major undertaking if you're not doing it at present and the bottom line is not whether it would be convenient but whether the basic profitability and health of the business demand it.

Once that exercise has been completed, if you decide that it is necessary you then need to look carefully at the profile of cases the out of hours team can expect and what skills are required.

Howard Kendall, chairman, SDI

Sally Smith, head of research, SDI

www.supportworld.co.uk

January/February 2009
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### 2009

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