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Mark Chillingworth

Non-IT issues often trigger ITSM drive, says CERN manager

Group Leader of services Reinoud Martens also feels IT enablement concept is beyond doubt

By CIO Staff | 19 May 2014 | CIO UK



Adoption of IT service management platforms at the European Organisation of Nuclear Research or CERN was triggered by a need to streamline non-IT processes, according to its services manager.

Reinoud Martens, Group Leader of General Services Department at the home of the Large Hadron Collider – the world's largest particle accelerator – said there was a desire to use IT as an enabler for streamlining general management of the facility.

"In 2009, we decided a culture change was necessary and set about creating a foundation layer for IT enablement by working towards a 'single service point of contact' (web, voice and physical) that would make life easier for our scientific community when it came to day to day matters," he told *CIO UK* at a ServiceNow conference earlier this month.

However, Martens recalls that despite being surrounded by particle physicists and scientists, convincing people was not easy. "But we had to do it. The chaotic 'non-IT' processes world is now much more orderly thanks to IT! My team of four began with a blank slate armed with ITIL (Information Technology Infrastructure Library) principles, and in the absence of any other or better suggestions, forged ahead with it.

Being a non-profit organisation, choosing an ITSM vendor warranted caution. "We put a questionnaire out along with tender invitations quizzing prospective parties about how they could help us achieve our objectives. This narrowed it down to a few; we ultimately saw eye-to-eye with ServiceNow and commissioned them."

Five years later, even the sceptics within CERN have now recognised the enablement paradigm. "Instead of our colleagues calling or logging different requests for issues ranging from accommodation to finance, power grid to transport, car leases to library, there is now one helpdesk. That's simple ITIL best practice at play, not complicated particle physics."

Furthermore, a journey that began outside of IT has seen CERN increase its ITSM maturity manifold since 2009. "I was soon moved out of IT with my team to a new department – General Services – as we progressed from nascent stage to the operational phase," he said.

"The current concept in place was agreed with ServiceNow in Q2 2010 and went live in February 2011. Various non-IT complexities are handled more efficiently and it is worth noting that what's ultimately dealt with by the helpdesk is split 50-50 between IT and non-IT issues.

"For example, an order for leasing a bus maybe made electronically but there is a physical element to it. What's changed is that there are no multiple faxes going to and fro. All that's needed is a click of mouse. Once you streamline process there is a 'grey zone' between IT and non-IT; which most CIOs are at pains to make people understand."

The IT industry veteran says looking at all process minutiae is a good starting point. "Certainly makes the latter stages of implementation less complicated from an IT standpoint.

"Furthermore, I am no longer an IT manager. Have been there, done it. I am business process manager, sounds much more holistic!"

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