How ICT can Support the strategic priorities of Educational Establishments

Introduction

Through daily conversations with our clients we constantly pick up on issues and topics faced by IT Managers. One of the biggest frustrations we come across is the difficulty of aligning IT with the key priorities of the organisation. Many IT Managers experience a lack of joined-up thinking and a lack of a holistic, top-down approach from the boardroom to drive IT strategy. As a result you may find that in your organisation's budget for new initiatives priority often goes to other projects because of a perceived lack of alignment between IT and the businesses strategic and tactical priorities.

In our experience we have found that for IT priorities to be considered by the board they need to be closely connected to regulatory compliance as this can motivate the rest of the business to consider IT strategy in more detail. One key priority for any board is 'Risk Management', encompassing both compliance requirements as well as effective management of business risks. Ensuring compliance and adherence to business processes is key to any business, mistakes can and have, lead not only to the loss of revenue but to businesses failing totally.

A white paper entitled 'Counting the Cost of Employee Misunderstanding' published by IDC examined employee errors and their impact on the finances of 400 businesses in the UK and the US.[1] It found that more than 20% of employees do not understand at least one part of their job, often a business critical part. The costs to these businesses was estimated to be in the region of 19 Billion.

One way of ensuring compliance and effective risk management is through workflow automation ensuring that key business processes are carried through across the board. Historically 'Business Process Automation' was the preserve of large Enterprises that had big enough budgets to afford to pay for expensive consultants and software to deliver the automation across the Enterprise. That is no longer the case 'Business Process Automation' is now available within workgroups and smaller teams with many software packages claiming to support Business Process Automation within the Service Management space.

These days it is essential that effective ITSM (IT Service Management) software includes a flexible workflow automation capability where system

administrators can easily create and maintain processes that automate and maintain processes that automate and enforce the adoption of company policy. Service Management solutions that support workflow automation provide invaluable support to underpinning the rules of engagement between your internal and external customers and your service agents, thus ensuring that incidents are processed in full adherence to company policy thus minimizing business risks.

As an IT manager/director you have a responsibility to develop an IT strategy that supports the strategic objectives of your College. The strategy will include the development of IT policies which can be easily enforced by the adoption of workflow automation. In this briefing paper we will focus on the main elements that should be considered when reviewing workflow automation software helping you shape your strategy and research.

The Problem

Whilst Business Process Management Automation is considered best practice, the process of choosing and implementing a system is often time consuming and unsuccessful. Organisations can spend a lot of money and resources trying to get the chosen system to fit their requirements and all too often end up having to change their working processes to fit in with the functionality provided by the system. Moreover, systems are often difficult to use, bloated with unnecessary features and don't empower anyone outside the 'control room'.

When you are looking for a workflow automation tool you generally want a system to achieve three core elements:

- Allow managers to automate repetitive, but key, business processes
- Follow up automatically on uncompleted tasks in the process ensuring all are completed correctly.
- Provide an authorisation mechanism to ensure decisions are taken at the right level.

This in turn would mean that you can approach topics such as risk

management and compliance with the confidence that your Business Process Automation tools will enable you and your team to support the strategic goals of the business rather than hinder them. But with so many products entering the Business Process Automation space how do you chose the best tool for your team? This is particularly important when considering a tool that will provide an integrated service management solution rather than a standalone BPM tool.

Main elements to consider when reviewing workflow automation

When evaluating different software packages you need to consider the 3 main elements below, which will increase the chances of success and make the software work for your organisation. The ability to create working processes based on your organisation business processes rather than having to adapt your processes to the needs of the software is essential.

1. Authorisation and review steps to ensure decisions are taken by the right people who have the right information, supporting a RACI structure.
2. Notifications where and when you need them, to the right people at the right time.
3. A Business process design tool that allow you to map your processes onto the automation software.

Potential Solution

Modern ITSM Solutions such as Simplisys Service Desk are highly configurable and can be tailored to underpin business processes by the creation of workflow automation that both increases efficient compliance and improves adherence to business processes. Moreover Simplisys Service Desk is fast to deploy, configure, implement and adopt delivering market leading return on investment and total cost of ownership.

To further demonstrate the usability of Simplisys Service Desk we have listed how our particular solution addresses each of the elements we described above as key to the success of your workflow software implementation

1. Authorisation and review steps to ensure decisions are taken by the right people who have the right information, supporting a RACI structure.

   Identifying and assigning clear responsibilities within the workflow is the key to success.

   - Simplisys Service Desk Workflow allow you to Assign 'Responsibilities', ensure 'Accountability', 'Consult' with key Stakeholders and 'Inform' both within the process team and outside.
   - Key decisions can be assigned to a single person or a group, requiring a majority, single Signoff or unanimity.
   - Work Tasks are assigned to groups or individuals to be performed in parallel or sequentially allowing responsibilities to be clearly assigned and progress to me monitored.

2. Notifications where and when you need them, to the right people at the right time.

   - Simplisys Service Desk allows you to discriminate between communications to stakeholders and your team. Informational emails can be sent to ensure everybody is informed of progress with staff Notified automatically of key events and tasks.
   - Simplisys Service Desk allows your Team to 'subscribe' to only those notifications they need ensuring timely, targeted communication without flooding in-boxes.

3. A Business process design tool that allow you to map your processes onto the automation software.

   - Simplisys Service desk includes a fully integrated visual workflow design too allowing you to map your business processes onto the inbuilt business process management functionality.
   - Not only a design tool the system allows users and managers to see the current status of the workflow, where they are in the process and how individual parts of the workflow related to each other.
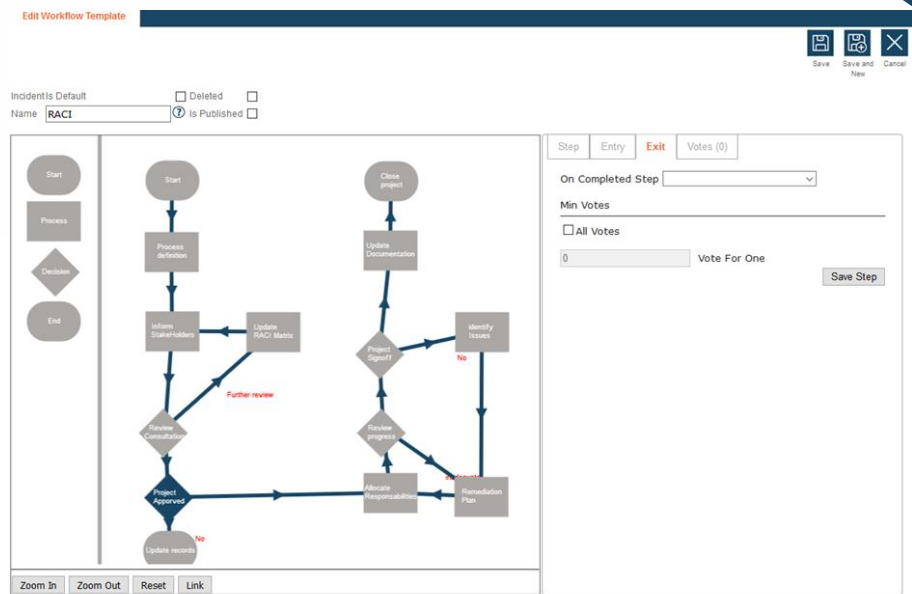
Above. Typical Workflow in Simplisys, created using drag and drop technology.

1. *Counting the cost of employee misunderstanding* (IDC, Framingham, MA, US, 2008).

About Simplisys

Simplisys Limited is the developer of Simplisys Service Desk (formally known as Citrus Service Desk). When we designed Simplisys Service Desk our objective was to quite simply create the ultimate service desk application for use in the real world – a rich feature list, configuration not customisation at its core, fast implementation out of the box, integration with your workflows and business rules, following ITIL best practice and a price point that makes it accessible to most organisations.

Simplisys Service Desk is designed developed, installed or hosted, and supported by our team at Simplisys Ltd. With our head office in Portishead, Bristol, Simplisys Ltd is an ISO 9001 registered company and delivers solutions to industry best practice quality standards. Our approach to implementation is to work closely with our customers, understanding requirements and reasons for change and ensuring that projects exceed expectations.

ISO 9001 Registered Firm
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International Accreditation Board
Registration No. 0044/1

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