A 5-Step Program to Optimize ITSM Training

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We've all watched action/adventure films where the "bad guys" jump out from behind cover and open fire with their automatic weapons pointed in the general direction of their opponent. In the vernacular, this is referred to as "spray and pray." This behavior is related to the Principle of Evil Marksmanship, which says that enemy soldiers in action films are often very bad shots and almost never harm the main characters. The major difference is that the later are highly trained, but just bad shots.

Okay, but what does this have to do with optimizing ITSM training? "Spray and pray" is also a commonly used term within companies to refer to a training approach where they "spray" training around and "pray" that it sticks. Tens of millions of ITSM training dollars are wasted annually as well intentioned IT organizations spray ITIL and other ITSM training around in the hope (and with a prayer) that it will stick. No matter if your organization employs the "spray & pray" method of training, or is managed by a bunch of well intentioned but "evil marksmen," the adoption of the following 5-Step program can optimize your ITSM training dollars."

Kotter Redux

Probably everyone, with the exception of liberal arts majors, has been exposed to the Kotter 8-Step Change Model in college or management seminars. In Kotter's 8-step model for organizational change, the first few steps help organizations overcome the status quo;

- Establish a sense of urgency
- Create a guiding coalition
- Develop a vision and strategy

The next steps focus on communication and the realization of the change vision;

- Introduce new practices
- Empower a broad base of people to take action
- Generate short term wins
- Consolidate gains and produce more change

The last step ensures that the change sticks;

- Institutionalize the new practices.

5-Steps to Optimized Training

The 5 steps to optimize training fits nicely into the Kotter 8-Step Change Model. It also ensures that an organization optimizes its training assets (time, money and people);

- Establish Awareness
- Establish Commitment
- Provide Context
- Empower People
- Institutionalize

Establish Awareness

Establishing awareness introduces the concepts and principles that help IT staff and managers orient themselves within the vision. Visions statements work by helping people visualize themselves in a future world where things are different (better) because of the change the organization wishes to achieve. Miss this step and resistance to change can significantly impede progress in making change. People have to understand where they fit in, and how they will benefit from the change. This is best achieved by introducing the subject matter (i.e. quality, project management, service management, etc.) at a high level in the context of the current situation. This helps reinforce the sense of urgency (Kotter Step 1).

Establish Commitment

The difference between commitment and involvement is like the difference between a pig and a chicken in a bacon and egg breakfast. The pig is committed; the chicken is involved. Any training program involved in the enablement of organizational change must have a core group of committed individuals that can socialize the concepts and principles of the subject in the context of solving today's problems. This also has to reinforce the individuals' perception of themselves in the context of the vision. The vision starts to become more real and achievable.

This step requires the training of this core group so that they are thoroughly versed in the subject matter and can speak authoritatively on the subject. This could mean a black belt in Six Sigma, PMP in project management or an Expert in ITIL. This core group becomes part of the guiding coalition (Kotter Step 2).

Provide Context

As organizational change happens, more and more IT staff and managers are impacted. It's important that just prior to that they receive more in depth exposure to the subject matter. For some, this will be all they need, but to others it will prepare them to take advanced, job specific training. Timing is critical for this step. Training and the use of that training must occur very close together in order to be effective. This means that for those that will be going on to advance training, the advance training should follow closely on its heels. For those that aren't, this kind of training should be done just before some event (rollout, implementation, etc.) that requires a deeper understanding of the subject (Kotter Steps 4 & 5).

Empower People

Empowering people is about providing the tools and training necessary for them to do a better job, and to design and create a better job for themselves. This step is where IT organizations will start to realize significant growth in both organizational maturity and capability. This step entails providing the IT staff and managers with detailed, job specific training. This is really the key to adult learning; making training relevant to the individual's specific circumstances (job and personal). Often IT organizations won't invest in this level of training because of expense and time, and the fear of making their employees "too valuable" in the open job market. The reality is that in a well run IT organization, well trained and well-managed staff tend to stick around and contribute significantly more to their organization than the costs (dollars and time) to train them (Kotter Step 5).

Institutionalize

All organizations must fight entropy. IT organizations that, for example, implement ITIL will fail over time because they invariably treat it as a project as opposed to a fundamental change to what they do and how they do it. Those organizations that approach IT Service Management as way of continually improving the services they provide the enterprise, will embed mechanisms that cause the new ways of working into the "DNA" of the individuals, thus the organization. It becomes part of the organizational fabric, as opposed to a sewn on patch. Most often, this can be readily accomplished through human resource policies that provide recognition, rewards, promotions based on individual career development and achievements. This takes careful consideration as to how organizations balance the attainment of a certification with demonstrable capability. Without consideration of demonstrated capability, training certificates are meaningless pieces of paper.

Summary

Unlike the movies, a spray and pray approach to ITSM training has real consequences; wasted money, wasted time and failed change initiatives. This 5-step program, in the context of an organizational change initiative will ensure that an IT organization's training resources are optimized.