Process Demystified

ITAM Program - Ready or Not?

ITAK Columnist
Deima Elnatour
Founder and President of Elnatour Consulting Group LLC

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit" - Aristotle

We know by now that ITAM programs are large in size and complex in scope and implementation. Communication in these types of programs is a key success factor. Simply because it takes the organization an extended period of time to reach the end goal and it is critical to take the time to communicate and celebrate the small wins that ultimately lead to the finish line. Also the fact that organizations are dynamic in nature where players and people change, makes it important to constantly communicate and reiterate overall goals, past achievements and next steps. It takes organizations a period of 10 years to reach a level 4 or 5 maturity in ITAM programs. Some organizations say that 10 years is too long and simply not acceptable. Maybe so, but if this is the reality, we should not be wasting time arguing about timeframes and how long it should take to fully mature an ITAM program. Instead, we should focus our energy on the steps necessary to get there. Time is a factor that can be reduced by throwing more resources at the project. Only question is: will the people and the culture in your organization gracefully accept the change and foster it in a timely fashion? If not, then save the resources and take your time in releasing your ITAM program slowly and carefully to increase your chances of success. From my experience, the main obstacle usually in ITAM implementations is not the processes, the technology, or documentation – the real issues is the social readiness of your organization, is the people. The human element can make anything happen and if the people are ready for the change and accept it, you will succeed. Therefore, communication is a key success factor that will make or break your ITAM program as it keeps the people involved in what you're doing.

There are two main artifacts that we must worry about when communicating: 1) Content: what to communicate?, and 2) Channel: how to communicate?. Let's talk about each artifact to better understand what would work best for ITAM programs.

1) Content: communication memos can tell a story, state facts, assign tasks and action items to key players …etc. It is important to be sure that the content is appropriate to the targeted audience. For example, providing a long and highly technical memo about how the ITAM database works to our business owners will do more harm than good. You must always remember that the main purpose behind communication is to get the message across. Understanding is our ultimate goal. So using jargon words, and fuzzy language will be counter productive. Keep it simple and to the point. Also representation of the data is a key component that normally gets very little attention, if any at all. For example, you can use words to convey a message or you can use numbers or graphs or a combination of two or more items. It is ok to choose whatever you please, my only advice is to restrain from using complex graphs and metrics that are

hard to understand. In those cases the user will spend the time trying to figure out what it means and may just be confused. Remember the key is to channel the user's attention to the data itself so they understand where we stand with the program, what the next steps are and how they can help us get there.

2) Channel: email, one-on-one, webex, phone, presentations, face-to-face … etc… are communication channels. There is no magic answer to which one would work best because every organization is different. Some organizations are very sensitive to email and employees in such companies read and feel obligated to respond to all their emails. In other organizations, email is not the best way because employees get too many emails and it is not possible to keep up with all of it. So a face-to-face may work best for such an organization. Each one of us knows what works best for their organization. Sometimes a mixed approach also works well where you can use a combination of email, face-to-face presentations, webex, and one-on-one as you see fit. In most cases I find myself using a combination of all these channels within the organization with different groups. Just observe and see what works best for each group within your organization and build your communication plan accordingly.

Information Overload: Is It Possible to Over-Communicate?

I hear people often say: "you can never over-communicate! Did you ever hear anyone say: stop, you are over-communicating?" I personally never heard someone say that not because it is not possible for one to over-communicate but because when there are information overloads, people tend to just ignore it.

"Increasingly, America is the attention-deficit nation, moving to ever sharper sound bites and smaller quanta of meaning. Citizens live in a blizzard of information without wisdom, content without context, and are being pulled a million ways by tech toys and a zillion cable channels and the multitudinous blogs. A white noise of data is the ambient soundtrack to our lives" - John Swartz, New York Times, December 26, 2004

There you have it, you never want to drive your coworkers to block the noise and become desensitized to what you have to say. It takes serious effort to make someone pay attention in the first place and it takes much more effort to make people pay attention again after loosing interest.

To avoid such a dangerous outcome, be precise and create a good balance and schedule of when to communicate and what to communicate. Let's say that it is a good idea to send a communication out quarterly informing all interested parties of the progress you're making with your ITAM program. Let's also assume that one of the quarters you did not have anything important to say - then save your time and others. Filling in words on paper in this case is of no value to anyone.

Communication Is A Two Way Street – The Wisdom Of Crowds.

One of the main purposes of effective communication is to create a feedback channel from your audience. Bi-directional communication channels serve ITAM programs very well as they keep you in touch with what your users think and what needs to be improved. Such feedback needs to be gathered, clarified, negotiated then implemented. Users' confidence in the program increases and they become more interested in participating since they know their time will be well-invested as they can influence the future. Harnessing the wisdom of crowds, crowds in this case would be ITAM program users and customers, will help with organizational adoption and provide the necessary support for a successful implementation.

The simplest way to create feedback channels is to provide your users with a person's name for enhancements, problems, recommendations and questions. This person becomes your gate keeper for all user feedback. You can provide more details about how that person is to be contacted, but I like to keep it open to accommodate a variety of working styles. Some people prefer to drop an email while others want to discuss face-to-face ...etc. It does not matter how the feedback comes to the gate keeper. It is more critical to define the process of addressing such feedback and engaging the users in this process.

Let Us Hear From You

I am proud to announce the launch of the "Process Demystified" blog, which has been built to support the content of this column and allow you and all of our ITAMers to tell us what they think about this column. The intent is to make the blog a place for ITAM managers, ITSM leaders and ITIL professionals to discuss process related topics. The blog is located at: http://processdemystified.wordpress.com/. We hope you visit soon. Also let me know if you are interested in becoming a contributing author on the blog.