Governance in 1st level support: Good Practices from the IT-ServiceDesk at RWTH Aachen University

Florian Krämer

RWTH Aachen University IT Center, Seffenter Weg 23, 52074 Aachen, kraemer@itc.rwth-aachen.de

Keywords
IT support, 1st-level support, good practice, governance, quality management, knowledge management, user surveys, reporting

1. Summary

The IT-ServiceDesk supports all IT services offered by the university's IT Center to students and employees. Governance is understood as the management’s ability to analyze the current quality of work and implement changes in order to improve the resulting support quality and to adapt to fulfill new tasks. To that end Quality Management has been introduced. User Surveys and Reporting Techniques are used to gain the necessary information for effective governance.

2. THE IT-SERVICEDESK

The IT Center is a central organization of RWTH Aachen University that supports crucial processes of the university, provides basic as well as individual IT services for other organizational units of the university and supports Simulation Sciences. The IT-ServiceDesk is responsible for the 1st-level support. The variety and complexity of the services and the heterogeneity of users pose a significant challenge to the 1st level supporters, their knowledge and communication skills.

3. QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Quality Management (QM) has been introduced in 2014 to improve the support quality and to help employees of the IT-ServiceDesk in their daily work. In 2015 the IT-ServiceDesk will undergo the audit for the ISO 9001 certificate. For this task an additional person has been hired. We started with developing detailed descriptions of our work processes. Every process description has the same form and includes a brief schematic overview which summarizes the process. The processes cover support topics, but also processes regarding the handling of tools, most importantly the ITSM tool, training of new employees and organizational topics. Also the creation and maintenance of the documentation is treated within the QM processes. This will play an important role in future re-certifications since knowledge management will be part of the next version of the ISO 9001 norm.

The QM measures already proved very helpful in training, as a reference in everyday work and as a knowledgebase. Furthermore, they offer a very good anchor for critique, improvements and changes. However, there is still a lot of room for further improvements. We plan to target more knowledge related processes. To really “live” the documented ideal is an ongoing challenge.

4. REPORTING SERVICES

Using Microsoft Reporting Services, we regularly create reports out of the statistical information on the tickets in IT-ServiceDesk. At the moment these Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) reported include the number of tickets for a given timespan, the entry channels of tickets (e-mail, phone, personal contact), the topic and the first-solve-rate. It also shows the percentage of tickets which are analyzed within the first hour. However, employees’ rights must be observed at all times, meaning that no analyses that allow to assess the performance of individual employees can be performed.
For the future we plan to include additional indicators in the reports. The plans include information about the time that is needed to solve tickets, their topics as well as the number of different employees that work on a single ticket. Furthermore, we will also use data from the Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) system to report availability by phone and average duration of calls.

5. USER SURVEYS

User surveys are a very effective way to get representative feedback from users. Most user feedback we receive is from unsatisfied customers. Although this feedback often includes very helpful suggestions, it does not allow assessing the average satisfaction of our users. So far three different surveys were conducted.

The first one was a paper questionnaire, which customers who visited us personally could answer. This covered only users who used our personal support. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, but the sample was dominated by students.

The second survey was an online questionnaire that asked users to rate a specific support case. This survey reached students and employees as well as administrators equally. The results gave us a very good insight into the factors that influenced user satisfaction. These factors included the topic of the case, the number of contacts necessary to solve it, the time it took to solve the case and the communication channel. Although the information we gained was very helpful to us, many users perceived the questionnaire as too extensive and complicated.

Thus, we simplified the questions in the third survey. The online survey reached employees and students alike. However, again more students than employees participated. The results were helpful and gave us some hints concerning our weaknesses. However, we missed the opportunity to link the user’s satisfaction to specific properties of the support cases.

An additional problem of this kind of survey is that it only reflects user’s satisfaction in a limited timespan. In case of our third survey users’ comments showed that many bad ratings were due to a high frustration to temporary problems with the e-learning platform. As a consequence we plan to introduce a direct feedback that allows every user to rate their support case within a day after it has been solved. It will be saved together with the case ID so that it can be linked to other properties of the respective ticket. By this we hope to get a big dataset that allows to determine the correlates of user satisfaction.

6. CONCLUSION

Effective Governance in 1st-level support means the ability to adapt quickly to changes in the department’s responsibilities and tasks while ensuring a high quality in support. Examples for such new tasks are the management of in-house workstations and research data management.

Governance requires reliable information about Key Performance Indicators as well as users’ perceptions. Reports offer objective information on some of these KPIs. In IT-ServiceDesk we are currently working on implementing the reporting of additional indicators. User surveys allow some insight in user’s perceptions of the support quality. In our case the key challenge is to establish a link between user satisfaction and other properties of specific tickets without overwhelming users with the survey and still respect their anonymity.

A formal Quality Management not only helps employees in their daily work and provides a standard; it also offers an effective means to realize changes in the work processes. It proves to be especially helpful in handling knowledge and information as key assets in a service desk’s performance.

7. AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Florian Krämer studied Political Science, Economics and Linguistics and received his Master of Arts from RWTH Aachen University in 2010. After working as a research assistant in the Institute for Political Science he joined the IT Center of RWTH Aachen University in 2011. His tasks include support and training. He is responsible for the online documentation and works on different projects including knowledge management and research data management.