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Service Management at the speed of light



Published by Martin Thompson on Oct 20th, 2013 // [No Comment](#)

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ServiceNow recently held a three-city European forum. The event was a compact version of the larger ‘Knowledge’ event held in the US and a chance for customers to share experiences and hear from ServiceNow bigwigs.

I found the most fascinating session of the day was from [Reinoud Martens](#), Service Manager at [CERN](#), the home of particle accelerators and clever physicists searching for the [origins of the universe](#).

“At CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, physicists and engineers are probing the fundamental structure of the universe. They use the world’s largest and most complex scientific instruments to study the basic constituents of matter – the fundamental particles. The particles are made to collide together at close to the speed of light. The process gives the physicists clues about how the particles interact, and provides insights into the fundamental laws of nature.” [About CERN](#)

Reinoud’s session was entitled ‘*ITSM also works outside its comfort zone*’ and explored how CERN implemented IT Service Management best practice across IT and many other business functions. Reinoud kindly answered some follow up questions via email below.

Service Management beyond IT

Reinoud is Service Manager for a group called ‘General Services’ at CERN.

General Services serves IT services but also a myriad of other business services at CERN such as Civil Engineering, Facility Management, Medical and Fire Protection.

A user at CERN can log a password reset or seek help with a faulty laptop – but they can also rent a car, alert facilities to a blocked drain, book a hotel room, have an old filing cabinet towed away or log an expense claim – all from the same Service Management destination; the CERN Service Portal. In total CERN supports 282 active services across 494 operational functions.

Service Management Singularity

The goal at CERN, as Reinoud eloquently described is to:

1. Make life simple for users and supporters by providing:

- ONE point of contact (One #, One URL, ONE place)
- ONE behaviour; Unified processes for all services
- ONE tool shared by all service providers (sharing information and knowledge)

- ONE service description in a business service catalogue

2. Improve efficiency and effectiveness

- Alignment with good practice (ITILV3 and ISO20K)
- High level of automation
- Framework for continuous improvement

And do this for ALL SERVICES (not just IT).

Interview with Reinoud

Q. What drove the initiative for one Service Portal across all these disciplines? Could you describe what existed before?



Aerial View of the CERN taken in 2008

Before there were many numbers to call or people to know to get your needs fulfilled or to report a problem. There was an IT helpdesk, and a facilities management number to call, but their respective scopes were not 100% clear and there was a lot not covered by either of these numbers.

The most common way to find the right help was a Google search on the cern.ch domain that would return a lot of obsolete or wrong information (Every service published it's own pages which were not removed after reorganizations or updated after changes).

Many people published their own service catalogues with numbers to call. So there was a lot of confusion and chaos, although there might have been some islands of excellence hidden here and there.

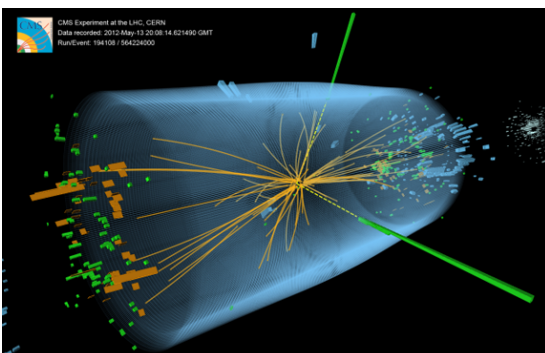
IT used a ticketing system with which they had difficulty upgrading; this system was also partly used outside IT for example Application Support. Even within IT some groups had their own systems. Outside IT there was no real ticketing system in place.

Some requests that have to follow strict authorization rules were and are supported in a custom workflow system developed at CERN where people fill out request forms by themselves (e.g. for taking leave, or for ordering equipment).

The initiative was driven by:

1. The realization that CERN needed to become more customer/user focused, also as we moved from a project phase ([building LHC](#)) to an operational phase (running LHC).
2. The need to support an exploding user population with less or at best constant resource levels.

Q. Did you face any political resistance when IT joined General Services (I'm thinking that certain departments might not want to relinquish control)?



“Approximately 600 million times per second, particles collide within the Large Hadron Collider(LHC). Each collision generates particles that often decay in complex ways into even more particles. Electronic circuits record the passage of each particle through a detector as a series of electronic signals, and send the data to the CERN Data Centre (DC) for digital reconstruction. The digitized summary is recorded as a “collision event”. Physicists must sift through the 15 petabytes

or so of data produced annually to determine if the collisions have thrown up any interesting physics.” [Computing at CERN](#)

It happened the other way around, as the ‘chaos’ was probably bigger outside the IT area. The initiative started in general services during first half of 2009. In 2010 IT joined forces to propose a potentially CERN wide (for infrastructure services) solution. HR and Finance were to join later.

Obviously we encountered a lot of resistance, scepticism and ‘other attitudes’. Many predicted this project would fail, so they adopted a very passive attitude, but after one year of ‘production’ these people also realized the benefits invested effort to make things work. It’s not something you can do overnight.

Q. From your presentation it was very clear that you have taken best practices from ITSM (ITIL and ISO20000) and applied them to other business disciplines. Can you cite any examples of where IT can learn from these other disciplines? Do such best practices exist in other areas?

There are no examples where the standard needs to be ‘extended’ for IT based on our experience for non IT. There are ‘small implementation detail examples’ where IT could ‘profit’ from the ‘culture’ in other areas. For example business services that are person facing will like to hide the fact that there is an automated process and tickets behind requests and incidents as much as possible; so they wish to make the system ‘more human’ with special notifications, or service dependent ‘signatures’.

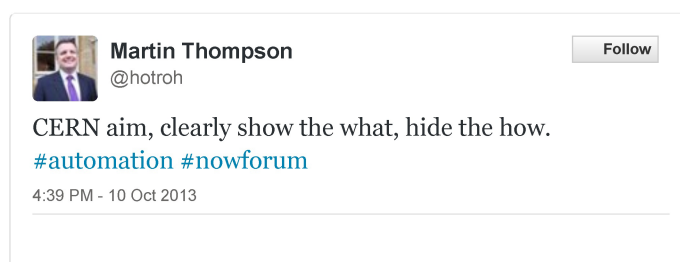
We have been looking at other standards but really found no alternative ... including external consultants. There may be standards for libraries for instance; but we can’t support a standard per service (with over 280 services), and in the end these alternative standards for very specific domains contain the same ‘common sense’ that can be found in ITIL and ISO20k.

Q. Can you elaborate on the section of your presentation regarding ‘Cultural Change’? In particular I recall how you used a combination of Knowledge Management (this is how things work around here) and Service Catalogue (and this is how things get done). What led to this approach?

The culture change has to do with technicians that are focused on solving technical problems (say fix a water tap) but really don’t caring about the ‘caller’ at all. They will close a ticket not when the work is done, but when they want to bill their work; this can be much later. As a result the caller gets out-dated feedback and thinks the system does not work.

It gets worse if they need a spare part; they will not inform the caller or update a ticket; they will maybe note in a piece of paper they have to get a spare part and the user thinks nothing is happening. It’s this customer/user awareness and what it means in the day-to-day life of workmen that are ‘supporters’ for the infrastructure services that is the problem. The sharing of knowledge between supporters and with users (FAQ’s) is something that came ‘automatically’. We had many local FAQ’s and wiki’s but now we provide a global infrastructure.

Service Catalogue is what is available to the users, not how things get done. The focus is on the what (scope, when available quality) then obviously there is a link to support teams. So it orchestrates how things get done as an additional benefit.



Note: Sample of CERN Service Portal users:

- Engineers
- Physicists
- Technicians
- Administrators
- Computer scientists
- Craftspeople
- Mechanics

But also:

- Computer illiterate support staff
- Candidates for job opportunities from around the world
- Suppliers

Q. What does ‘Coaching’ look like for non-IT supporters? I remember you mentioned taking supporters through the equivalent of ITIL foundation for business services, but not using ITIL foundation – can you elaborate on this point?

We organized awareness training for non-IT people, a sort of shortened ITIL foundation course not referring to IT situations. E.g. configuration management for a medical service is understanding who your ‘patients’ are, what their ‘status’ is in terms of health parameters etc. If a medical service has not a good register of this they are bad in configuration management.

Explaining the ITIL concepts, naming conventions, processes and ideas but staying away from IT examples... this is not always easy in areas as release and deployment management for a cleaning service or a materials management service...so you must be ‘creative’ and maybe skip some very specific areas in certain cases. Most areas however are relevant to most services (if you take a step back and ‘reinterpret’ the concepts).

This is not enough, you also need to explain again and again what the underlying ideas of the processes are, and how they should use the system (e.g. impact and urgency priority; not closing a ticket that is wrongly assigned, but assign it to the right function, or return to service desk, etc...). This is more laborious for non-IT people than for IT ‘supporters’.

Q. Why ServiceNow?

We looked at the market second half of 2010 once we knew what we wanted to deploy (Single point of contact, unified processes and single web based tool shared by all with in the heart this business service catalogue driving the automation and a service portal); we started with a long list of around 40 tools, quickly shortened down to 6 which we evaluated in more detail based on a long questionnaire; ended up with two for which we did a POC at CERN and some reference visits.

We took into account lots of criteria covering: functionality, configurability/flexibility, architecture, interface, future evolution, etc. The fact that ServiceNow was a SaaS solution played a role (this was an 'experiment' for CERN's IT department and they were ready to test it; it certainly helped dramatically reduce the time between the choice and being operational).

Obviously total cost of ownership also played a key role. Anyway things may have evolved in the last 3 years, so although we don't regret this choice a second, [the outcome could be different today](#). I have no idea of what is going on in this area on the market today (I am no IT guy anymore and have other things on my mind lately).

Q. Finally, your advice to organizations looking to embark on a similar journey?

Top Three Takeaways from Reinoud's presentation:

1. ITSM is RELEVANT beyond IT and it WORKS

2. Essential for success are:

- A comprehensive Business Service Catalogue
- To know what you are supposed to be doing
- To understand how these services are provided (by whom)
- To drive automation and smooth assignment & escalation
- A Service Portal to hide the complexity of all of this
- A good tool (that lets you be 'agile')
- Extra coaching for non IT supporters

3. You can do this in your own organization

CERN Service Portal

Images of the CERN 'Service Portal' below:

Service Portal Features:

- User access to all services
- Search function
- Browse the catalogue
- Report issues
- Follow-up issues
- Access knowledge base

The screenshot shows the CERN Service Portal interface. At the top right, there is a language selector for 'Français'. The main heading is 'CERN Service Portal' with the tagline 'easy access to services at CERN'. Below this is a navigation bar with links: Home, Service Information, Navigate Catalogue, Contacts, My Profile, and Site Guide. The central message reads 'Your one-stop access to CERN services.' Below this is a search box with the prompt 'Describe your issue or search for a service:' and a 'Report an Issue' button. The page is divided into three columns: 'My Incidents' (listing multiple problems with clones, passport big bang telescope, clone of odm copies service, and edms documentation problem), 'My Requests' (listing enhancement request CET, how to return results from JMT data access, support for business card p..., request for JMT data access, and request to use out of the b...), and 'Key contacts' (listing Service desk: 7777, Emergency services (24/7) including Fire/Feu/Accident: 74444, and Computer Security: 70500). The footer includes the CERN logo and the text 'CERN - European Laboratory for Particle Physics, CH-1211, Genève 23, Switzerland'.

Click to enlarge

The screenshot shows the CERN Service Portal interface. At the top, it says 'CERN Accelerating science' and 'Signed in as: Reinoud Martens | Sign out | Directory'. The main header features the 'CERN Service Portal' logo with the tagline 'easy access to services at CERN'. A search bar contains the text 'car'. Below the header are navigation tabs: Home, Service Information, Navigate Catalogue, Contacts, My Profile, and Site Guide.

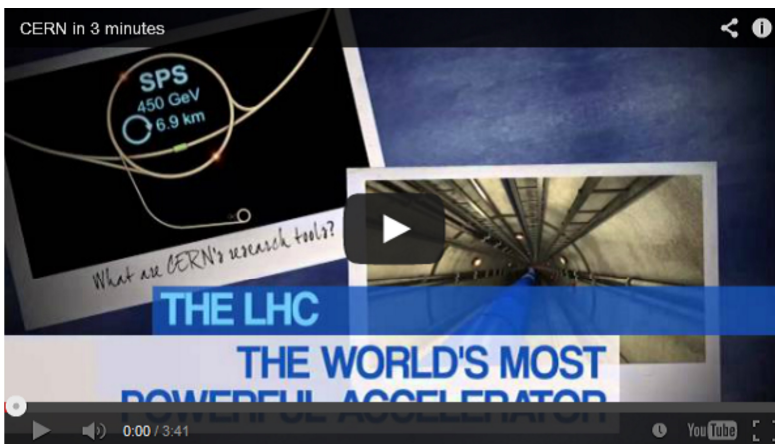
The main content area is titled 'Car Pool and Rental Service' with an 'Edit' link. It states: 'This service is responsible for all activities related to long and short term car rental.' Under the 'Actions' section, there is a list of tasks: Car sharing: online reservation system, Request for a CERN car, Report the failure of a CERN car, Request for a car rental, Cancel a car rental request, Report an incident, Submit a general request, EDH: Car Driving Authorisation, and EDH: Request for a mission order.

The 'Information' section includes 'Knowledge Base Articles' and 'This service offers:' which lists: Car Sharing provides to the authorised person with CERN cars on a self-service basis, Annual car rental to the Departments comprising the purchase of the vehicle, maintenance, fuel, insurance, writing off and the trade-in of the vehicle after 4 years, Short-period car rental to the Departments from one day up to 3 months, Cars or utility vehicles rental for official trip, and Coordinate troubleshooting in case of accident.

'Service limitations:' includes: Conditions governing the use of a vehicle are submitted to Operational Circular no 4, Further details at CERN Admin e-guide: Official vehicles (belonging to or rented by CERN), Only for official use, and Transport of passengers and/or goods in CERN vehicles is forbidden, except as part of CERN official activities. 'Additional information:' lists links for CERN Car Sharing - User Guide, Procedure: Car sharing - Conditions of use, Procedure: Transport and Mobility on the CERN site, and CERN admin e-guide: Official vehicles (belonging to or rented by CERN).

Click to enlarge

About CERN in 3 Minutes



Accelerator Event [Image Credit](#), Aerial View [Image Credit](#)

The profile card for Martin Thompson features a photo of a man in a suit. The text reads: 'Martin Thompson' (underlined), 'Martin is an independent software industry analyst, SAM consultant and founder of [The ITAM Review](#) and [The ITSM Review](#). Learn more about him [here](#) and connect with him on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#). [More Posts](#) Follow Me:

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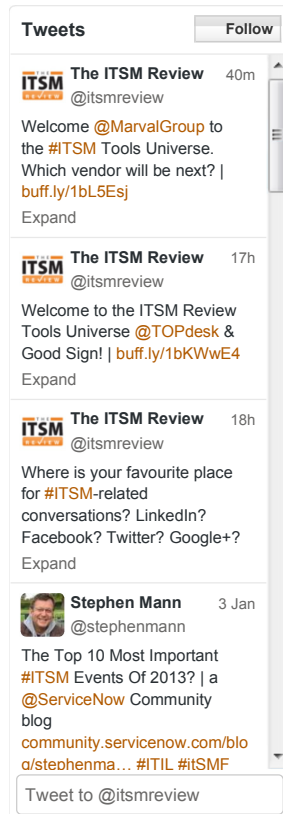
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Welcome to the ITSM Review Tools Universe @TOPdesk & Good Sign! | buff.ly/1bKWwE4
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Where is your favourite place for #ITSM-related conversations? LinkedIn? Facebook? Twitter? Google+?
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