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The Importance of Self Service

System Integrators use many metrics to determine whether a given project is a success but at MCTK, ours is very simple: 5 years after implementation, when the consultants have all gone, will the system still be running and adding value to the business processes it is associated with? Arguably, this is all that matters. The tricky part of this metric is making sure that all the things that go into making a system valuable over time are handled during the implementation process as many are easy to ignore.

One of the key ingredients to the long-term success of any system is whether its users take ownership and the more control users have, the more likely they are to take said ownership. To get this, working with the system must be easy and the level of frustration must be low. Having a high-quality set of self-service tools so that users can resolve issues quickly and easily without having to go through IT is a key component to this but is rarely given much attention.

Why does this matter so much? Imagine a simple scenario: Erroneous data is sourced into an integrated data environment (IDE). To fix that error, we need to delete the data from the IDE and resubmit it from the source system. In a typical scenario the user must go through some version of the following:

- Create a service ticket asking IT to delete the data from the IDE database
- The service ticket will eventually be picked up by a first level IT support resource unfamiliar with the specific environment who has questions.
- After going back and forth several times, the first level IT resource escalates the ticket to an SME who is more familiar with the environment.
- The SME will have their own questions so there will be more back and forth but likely at this point the deletion will probably get done.

- The service ticket is closed, and the user is notified that their blend has been deleted.

Even for this simple example, this process probably 2-3 days of time and a lot of back and forth just to delete an errant record. All of this represents wasted time and creates frustration on the part of the user which translates into a dislike of the environment.

At a recent refining client where we implemented an IDE to support Planning and Optimization, these are a few of the self-service tools we implemented for users:

- One button PROD system to DEV system data provisioning.
- Blend Deletion – If a user submits a blend that contains a mistake, they can delete it on their own from all the tables where it exists in at the push of a button.
- Automated reruns for data load jobs. This allows source to target data provisioning off cycle if needed.
- Subscribable monitoring tools for data loading, system utilization, report access, etc.
- Tools that allow for easy querying of source systems such as LIMS and PI to allow for review of untransformed data. This helps with data quality issue resolution.

By having simple, intuitive and impactful tools like these, users can manage the systems on their own with appropriate guardrails without having to go through the service ticket process. This both lowers support costs and raises user satisfaction. Win-Win.

In the blizzard of sprints, deliverables and deadlines, it's easy to let things like this slide but these kinds of tools are enormously important in the long run. Don't let your implementation team skip them.

Getting a project done is not enough. What you build must last and create value over time.