ISPM
TOTAL Control

The Four Steps to Service Management Excellence

White Paper

Table of Contents

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Executive Summary

The four stages

Achieving service management excellence is a journey that never ends. In a dynamic and fluid network environment, it is a discipline that is essential to the smooth operation of networks, services and operational systems. When implemented, a fully-fledged service management and assurance solution makes a significant contribution to the top and bottom line of any CSP's business.

In this paper, Service Assurance experts ISPM identify four clear steps that transform service assurance from an operational tool to a strategic asset.

These four stages, explained in detail, are:

1. Primary
2. Operational
3. Tactical
4. Strategic

"ISPM has many years of experience in helping CSPs make service management and assurance a strategic discipline."

Completing each stage delivers benefits, ensuring consistent ROI from the beginning of an implementation of the process. A key aspect of the ISPM approach is to leverage existing and legacy infrastructure and ensure that it is brought into the consolidated service management framework, alongside new solutions that may be deployed.

Service management and assurance requires the unification of different systems into a seamless network, ensuring consistency and that CSPs fully benefit from their deployed assets, leveraging the information they generate to ensure full optimization and quality. The eTOM standards provide a framework to achieve this; NetVision from ISPM delivers a fully eTOM compliant service assurance solution that enables the CSP to move from network maintenance to service excellence.

ISPM has many years of experience in helping CSPs make service management and assurance a strategic discipline. By leveraging that expertise and deploying the appropriate elements of the NetVision solution, CSPs can cost-effectively embrace the strategic service assurance approach and benefit at every step in the path.

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Introduction

International best practice

Achieving service management excellence is a journey that never ends.

In a dynamic and fluid network environment, it is a discipline that is essential to the smooth operation of networks, services and operational systems. When implemented, a fully-fledged service management and assurance solution makes a significant contribution to the top and bottom line of any CSP's business.

While there have historically been different approaches to service management, it is now recognized that International best practice is represented by the eTOM / ITIL standards, created by world-renowned bodies such as the TMF. The adoption and implementation of compliance to International standards approaches, such as eTOM delivers significant benefits. These include:

- Independent, third party certification of vendor equipment
- Adherence to international best practice, optimised for service providers
- Reduced risk in system purchases and evolution
- Inherent scalability for service growth and portfolio development
- Increased time to market
- Reduced integration effort and cost
- Clear and close co-ordination across business processes
- Reduced costs
- Increased efficiency and operational gains
- Internationally recognised

"Achieving service management excellence is an on-going process. Just as an organization can never have enough sales, so they can never stop paying attention to service assurance..."

Achieving service management excellence is an on-going process. Just as an organization can never have enough sales, so they can never stop paying attention to service assurance. With service management and assurance having such a critical role for CSPs, how can they both achieve optimal service assurance delivery and implement supporting processes to ensure that best practice continues to be observed?

This paper outlines the strategic importance of service assurance to CSPs and highlights a clear path towards achieving the right level of service assurance practice appropriate to the organization. It identifies four clear steps that transform service assurance from an operational tool to a strategic asset.

These four stages are:

1. Primary
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Completing each stage delivers benefits, ensuring consistent ROI from the beginning of an implementation of the process. However, the incremental effect of completing the journey increases these benefits considerably. There is value to be obtained in realizing stage 1 and additional value from stage 2. In this paper, each stage of the service assurance journey is discussed, together with the benefits that accrue to each.

Stages of Service Management

	Primary	Operational	Tactical	Strategic
Systems	Flow Manager Access Manager Network Manager Technical Manager	Event Service Desk SLM	Capacity	Availability
Benefits	Identification of Individual Alerts	Efficiency Organisation Productivity	Prioritisation Proactivity	Optimisation Quality

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Stage One

The Primary Role of Service Management

At the outset, the key factor is visibility. By obtaining visibility of alerts from network equipment, CSPs can create a picture of real-time and historical activity in their network. However, in multi-vendor networks, capturing and consolidating these alerts can be problematic. Typically, there will be many potential sources of alerts and information, each with its own monitoring system. The key activity behind this stage is to connect and integrate multiple solutions to provide a unified whole.

The output of different monitoring solutions should be integrated into a single, dedicated console, accessible to the relevant stakeholders. This reduces the operational complexity in managing networks with complex infrastructure and multiple solutions and presents all alerts via a single interface.

To achieve, CSPs must ensure that the appropriate monitoring capabilities and tools for each vendor solution are active. This ensures that relevant and, potentially, actionable information is collected from all applicable sources. However, while it's essential to be able to monitor individual systems and their behavior, treating each as a separate stream or flow means that CSPs can only see events in isolation. Significantly greater value is derived when this data is aggregated and consolidated and visible through a dedicated portal that captures all relevant information streams and alerts.

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Next, the data needs to be correlated. Service logic execution and deployment touches many systems. When services are decomposed into functional elements, it can be seen that they draw upon the capabilities of multiple platforms. In order to obtain a complete picture of the alerts generated by operational solutions, the alerts relating to a specific service flow must be correlated so that the CSP can observe what happens on an end-to-end basis, as service activity is triggered at different equipment in the network.

By correlating alerts with the originating solution and the stage in the service logic as flows, CSPs can benefit from a comprehensive view of individual services that are active in their network. The information presented allows them to track issues and determine the operational performance of each element involved in the service.

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Stage Two

The Operational Role of Service Management

The second stage is to make the data collected operational - that is, in terms of the measurement processes that generate the information. It is essential to both understand what is being measured and then to apply this knowledge to the specific processes and services in question.

There are several aspects to this. First, the availability of such information to key stakeholders – both internal and external – is an important consideration. The data accumulated should be visible to the internal teams, such as customer support, pre-sales, sales, operations, accounts and so on, who might benefit from understanding performance. In addition, external teams such as the customers consuming the services can also benefit from access to the data. Thus, sharing data and increasing its availability is a critical aspect in elevating service assurance to an operational tool.

Secondly, the data needs to be accessible – that is, how do the consumers of that information visualize it? Do they have access to clear, graphical displays that enable macro and micro views of the data, as well as flexibility to display data from the present and past? Accessibility is a clear requirement for making service assurance an operational tool; once data is accessible, it can form the basis of reports and can more readily be distributed when required and, crucially, delivered to the appropriate teams for action.

"The operational role of service assurance connects measured data into organizational processes and activities. It increases efficiency and, by automatically triggering other actions, it can increase productivity, removing the scope for manual error. "

Thirdly, it should be possible to convert measured data into automated processes. For example, if the data measured from a system exceeds the permitted threshold for a given parameter, this can be used to generate an automatic trouble ticket that can be routed directly to the responsible team, or a suitable remedial action. An alarm from the element in question is clearly necessary, but on its own it is insufficient. The data needs to be acted on and that means integrating the information generated from an event into a process that, in turn, drives further actions.

The operational role of service assurance connects measured data into organizational processes and activities. It increases efficiency and, by automatically triggering other actions, it can increase productivity, removing the scope for manual error.

Connecting measured data into automated processes and delivering it correctly can create considerable value. For example, monthly Service Level Agreement (SLA) reports are usually required so that internal teams can monitor performance and so that external customers can verify that they are receiving the agreed service level. Generating these automatically against agreed benchmarks and indicators can save considerable time (and costs), increasing operational effectiveness, freeing resources to focus on other activities.

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Stage Three

The Tactical Role of Service Management

The third stage is a crucial transition from building and managing a responsive service management and assurance solution to one that is proactive and can be used to create opportunities. Such a solution enables CSPs to spot gaps and to take tactical steps or actions to capitalize on them.

Traditionally, service assurance has been concerned primarily with the maintenance and operation of the network. Systems have been orientated towards detecting issues and issuing the appropriate alerts and, in those that have moved into a true operational role, implementing relevant actions. However, the information that is generated as part of an operational alignment can be used more creatively.

The data, reports and actions generated need to be associated with related data to yield further important actions. For example, an increased frequency of alerts and alarms from the delivery of a particular service may indicate that there problems, but it may also indicate that there is increased demand above established thresholds – creating an opportunity to deliver more capacity. Being able to recognize such opportunities and to capitalize on them is critical to elevating service assurance from an operational tool to a tactical advantage.

"The successful implementation of a tactical service assurance program can not only generate additional opportunities that contribute to revenues and save operational costs, it can also create significant intangible assets such as trust, which, in turn, translate into additional business. "

Similarly, if support and customer care teams can become aware of issues before service users, proactive actions can be taken, saving time and money. What's more, such proactivity can then be turned into a tool to enhance customer relationships – by alerting them to issues, identifying steps that will be taken and creating a sense of responsibility across both organizations. The perception that a CSP that embraces tactical service assurance can create can be a significant contributor to enhancing customer retention – as well as a selling tool to convert additional business.

A tactical orientation can also help prioritization and direct resources more effectively. Some issues are more important than others, and managing priorities can be a difficult – and often subjective - process. By implementing rules and configuring alerts and reports, a CSP can customize their service assurance platform to ensure that the correct priorities are attached to issues, enabling more effective resource utilization.

The successful implementation of a tactical service assurance program can not only generate additional opportunities that contribute to revenues and save operational costs, it can also create significant intangible assets such as trust, which, in turn, translate into additional business.

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Stage Four

The Strategic Role of Service Management

Service management and assurance can make a significant contribution to the achievement of strategic goals. This should be the ultimate ambition of any service assurance enhancement program – to deliver a solution that is completely aligned with the strategic objectives and goals of the CSP organization.

All CSPs have strategic goals that drive their business. Growth is typically a priority. By analysis of service consumption and network performance, opportunities for new services and can be identified: the strategic service assurance system can help identify growth opportunities, which can then be assessed for how these are compatible with strategic goals.

In addition, CSPs are often challenged to reduce their overheads and operational costs. Cost reduction initiatives can be difficult to manage and it is essential to target the right areas. Where can costs reasonably be reduced or margins improved without any service disruption or without affecting service levels? A strategic service assurance solution can help answer such questions, objectively and based on long-term analysis of key metrics.

"The right service management and assurance program can make significant and recurring contributions to CAPEX, OPEX and profit objectives, key elements of CSP strategy."

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are also a major element of assessing corporate performance and the achievement of identified KPIs will often be a strategic goal. Identifying, monitoring, measuring and maintaining such KPIs is essential to the effectiveness of the organization. Again, strategic service assurance tools can ensure the right focus and support appropriate improvement plans where required.

Investment into new infrastructure is another area in which a strategic service assurance program can make a major contribution. By analyzing service performance, uptake, consumption and demand, clear indications of trends can be obtained, enabling operational managers to target their investments in the right areas and to more accurately forecast the success of service launches.

Through the understanding service availability and predictions of service consumption levels a dynamic picture of the CSP network can be created, fully integrated and aligned with the relevant business processes. Effective service assurance solutions remove guesswork and assumptions from this process and deliver clear, objective data that can aid decision-making processes.

The right service management and assurance program can make significant and recurring contributions to CAPEX, OPEX and profit objectives, key elements of CSP strategy. It can be a key tool for ongoing optimization and quality assurance program that enhance competitive advantage and help achieve clear differentiation.

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Implementing Optimal Service Management

The implementation of an optimal service assurance solution for CSPs is of fundamental importance. It is a journey that that delivers increasing benefits until it is fully aligned with strategic goals and can make a vital contribution to the evolution of not only internal processes, customer service and sales, but also to
the future of the organization. It can help achieve operational excellence, competitive differentiation as well as enhanced profit.

But it starts with simple steps. By aggregating output from existing monitoring systems and ensuring that all data is available in a consolidated view, any CSP can embark on the first stage. Moving beyond this takes focus, but it is also a logical consequence of implementing the basics. In essence, moving along each step of the service management path is enabled by the foundation provided by the predecessor. It is an iterative process, not one that requires a sudden and dramatic network transformation. A key aspect of the ISPM approach is to leverage existing and legacy infrastructure and ensure that it is brought into the consolidated service management framework, alongside new solutions that may be deployed.

"NetVision from ISPM delivers a fully eTOM compliant service assurance solution that enables the CSP to move from network maintenance to service excellence."

ISPM has years of experience in helping CSPs make service management and assurance a strategic discipline. By leveraging that expertise and deploying the appropriate elements of the NetVision solution, CSPs can cost-effectively embrace the strategic service assurance approach and benefit at every step in the path.

Conclusion

Service management and assurance is a fundamental requirement for all CSPs. It supports good customer services and ensures the smooth operation of the network. With the right approach, it can become an integrated tool, delivering efficiencies and identifying opportunities for differentiation and evolution, aligned with the strategic objectives of the organization.

Service management and assurance requires the unification of different systems into a seamless network, ensuring consistency and that CSPs fully benefit from their deployed assets, leveraging the information they generate to ensure full optimization and quality. The eTOM standards provide a framework to achieve this; NetVision from ISPM delivers a fully eTOM compliant service assurance solution that enables the CSP to move from network maintenance to service excellence.

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