WHERE ARE ALL THE SERVICE MANAGERS?

Graham Oakes bemoans a lack of business-savvy IT people.

Graham Oakes: a real service manager would be measured against the profitability of the service

Some companies just build great products. Look at firms like Sony or Nokia, and you'll almost certainly find that behind every great product lies a product manager – someone who owns the vision for the product from inception through development and into sales and support.

Their end-to-end accountability for the success of the product is a key factor in its conceptual integrity.

Likewise, in customer-centric organisations, you will find relationship managers – people who are responsible for the end-to-end relationship with key customers or customer segments. They own the overall quality and business success of this relationship.

So in a service-centric organisation, one which has fully committed to using a service oriented architecture (SOA), you'd expect to find service managers. But where are all these people?

Often, I can find people with the title of 'service manager'. Such individuals are generally well-trained in IT service delivery frameworks like ITIL.

They work hard to define coherent service level agreements and to ensure that systems, software, helpdesks, etc, are operating in ways that meet these service levels. They play a vital and increasingly professional role in many organisations.

But they don't provide vision and ownership for services in the same way that product managers provide vision and ownership for products.

A real service manager, by this analogy, would be accountable for the business success of a service or logical bundle of services. They'd be measured against the revenue or profitability of the service, for example, not against technical measures like uptime or service availability.

They'd be responsible for understanding the needs of customers who use their service, for defining variants of the service relevant to different customer segments, and for driving the evolution of the service in response to (or even in anticipation of) changing customer needs.

Fundamentally, they'd be business people. They might sponsor technical teams to build and operate the service. They might even outsource aspects of development and operations to external organisations. They'd almost certainly work with SOA architects to integrate it with the other services within the organisation.

But their primary driver would be to deliver a business capability, on terms that other business people within the organisation could understand.

Maybe these people exist. Perhaps I just move in the wrong circles. I come across a lot of very good service-centric architects and developers and analysts. ITIL-style service managers are clearly on the increase, and filling a very important role.

Maybe I'm just working in the wrong places to come across these business-oriented service managers. Or maybe our transition to SOA still has a long way to go?

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