

## *The IT Help-Desk: A Key Player in the Healthcare Service Culture*

### **Is your help-desk perceived as helpful or...helpless?**

Your investment in technology and in the professional staff that supports that technology are both critical to the success of your organization. The methodologies and procedures necessary to support technology can be defined objectively; however, the methodology to support technology as an extension of a person's ability to function can be summarized in one subjective concept – *expectation*.

The notion of an interface between a person and technology is simple to define but relatively difficult to achieve. Technology will continually evolve; constant improvement in service and support is required for an organization to just maintain its present position. An IT department must have team members with the appropriate experience and technical skill-sets necessary to provide both depth and expertise in the design, development, and support of the installed applications and infrastructure across the enterprise. However, the face of the IT department to most end-users is the help-desk.

A help-desk should be more than just a place to receive calls and send help; it is really the principal operational interface between IT and their users. Infohealth consultants have worked with clients to transition help-desk coverage to meet enterprise-wide needs. The impact and effectiveness of a hospital-based IT help-desk starts with IT management. The help-desk is usually considered an entry level area where newly hired staff develop on-the-job skills and then move to more substantial positions once they have gained seniority and seasoning. Most users develop an impression of the overall functionality of the entire IT department from their experience with the help-desk; IT leadership should consider elevating the level of staff that deals directly with its users.

Improving customer service and defining *expectation* should begin internally with the hospital's primary customer base – hospital employees and physicians. The hospital staff has a right to expect the same level of customer service from the internal help-desk support that they expect from their retail experiences. Communication and consistency are the two of the major keys to developing an *expectation* across an enterprise. Help-desk staff members must become chameleons to a degree; they must understand the business environment and culture and they must also have an excellent grasp of the underlying technology used by their customer base.

There are no guarantees to a problem-free IT environment; problems are inevitable. It's not the problem that is important, it's how the IT department responds to the problem that matters. Customers (end-users) want to know what to expect...each and every time they use the system. The IT department, especially the help-desk, must concentrate the same effort on managing relationships that they devote to managing technology. Everyone in IT should be involved in the help-desk function at some point. The help-desk staff is responsible for the initial support. If an incident cannot be resolved at the first call level, incident escalation to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> level IT support is required quickly.

The IT infrastructure consists of hardware, software, networks, documentation, and people. The traditional approach to IT support has always focused more on technology and less on people. At Infohealth Management Corp. we believe that people are at the center of all processes and that technology should be an extension of the person. For technology to be an effective

extension of a person's ability to do work, it must be functional, flexible, seamless, and transparent.

*You can't fix it if you can't measure it!* Historically, the healthcare IT industry has done a poor job of measuring effectiveness; most measurement systems fail to consider:

- Complexity of the installed applications;
- Workflow process and redesign;
- Quality and value of the services provided;
- ROI on "soft" benefits as well as dollars;
- Security, disaster recovery, and business continuity;
- Technology life cycles; and
- Other key performance indicators.

Infohealth Management Corp.'s *INFOMAP Assessment Survey* is scored against best practices and provides a proprietary methodology for developing an IT departmental profile and analyzing five IT management competencies: Assess, Plan, Manage, Support, and Measure.

INFOMAP was originally developed as an internal tool to assist Infohealth consultants measure IT functionality and capture the information necessary to track improvements over time.

- The INFOMAP 250-question survey covers:
  - Governance and Management processes
  - IT planning and budget practices
  - IT Readiness and Operations effectiveness
  - Workflow and internal standards
  - End-user expectation and support
- The overall Employee Skills Assessment captures:
  - Education, certifications, and professional IT training
  - On-the-job training or cross-training
  - Work experience and history (healthcare/non-healthcare)
  - Vendor and product knowledge
  - Work team structures and dynamics
  - Language skills (verbal and written)
- The IT Department Profile captures
  - Installed applications by vendor and hardware
  - FTE complement that supports the applications (by application) and
  - Overall network infrastructure

The final INFOMAP report will identify service gaps and enhancement opportunities. The *Assessment Process* increases the value of your investments in IT support resources by appropriately identifying and analyzing the skills and ability levels of your current IT staff.

There continues to be much discussion in the healthcare industry about aligning information technology (IT) with the business and showing the value that IT produces. That alignment is important, maybe even critical. We have all come to understand that today's healthcare environment is driven by the need to exchange information and it is fair assumption that separating Information Technology from Medical (device) Technology is impossible.

Technology will continually evolve; constant improvement is required to maintain your current position. Your investment in technology and in the professional staff that supports that technology are *both* critical to the success of your organization. An IT department must have team members with the appropriate experience and technical skill-sets necessary to provide both depth and expertise in the design, development, and support of the installed applications and infrastructure across all facets of the enterprise.