IBM Rational Builds Client Satisfaction and Reduces Backlog With Better Problem Solving

Information Technology

CLIENT

IBM Rational Client Support (RCS) supports the IBM Rational Software Delivery Platform, an open, modular solution that spans the entire software and systems delivery lifecycle. RCS operates globally to help organizations automate, integrate, and govern the core business process of software and systems delivery.

CHALLENGE:

IBM RCS uses client satisfaction, measured by transactional-based surveys, as the key indicator of its success. The surveys indicated that clients were generally happy but there was room for improvement in the speed and accuracy of issue resolution. While the client handling and technical skills of the staff were high, RCS asked Kepner-Tregoe (KT) to help improve troubleshooting performance. The challenge was to control the cost of support and increase client satisfaction at the same time by improving problem solving and reducing escalations as well as time-to-close. Because of its highly complex technical environment, RCS wanted "an efficient, simple, and scalable problem-solving approach" that would optimize interactions with clients by helping RCS quickly gather and use the right information.

SOLUTION:

RCS and KT developed a KT Resolve^{SM} pilot program to improve problem-solving capabilities through capability development, coaching, process improvement, and human performance support. Piloted successfully in Asia-Pacific, the KT Resolve solution was implemented globally. Within 18 months, over 500 people, including all service engineers, received training in the KT processes for issue resolution. This was supported by a customized coaching model and tool for measuring and managing the effectiveness of coaching provided. To sustain performance, RCS sets goals to drive continuous adoption of the logical KT approach or "KT behaviors," rewards their notable use, and links competency in KT methods to performance bonuses and promotions.

The logical KT processes have been integrated into business tools including the development defect tracking and escalation databases. A central repository for all Problem Analysis specifications with links to escalation records and change requests is accessible globally. Custom applications for KT Problem Analysis and Situation Appraisal are continuing to be developed; and Decision Analysis has become a key management tool within RCS.

SCORECARD

- Improved customer satisfaction 5%
- Reduced backlog 25%
- Improved escalations and handovers
- Optimized client interactions
- Building consultative rather than transactional client relationships
- Reduced employee attrition

RESULTS:

RCS credits KT Resolve for making "a shift change in client service: from a zone of indifference to a zone of affection." (Harvard Business Review March/April 1994, "Putting the Service-Profit Chain to Work") The program quickly met the primary objective of improving client satisfaction reported in transactional-based surveys. Overall scores improved 4% globally including 5% in Europe and a 3.5% increase in North America that pushed satisfaction above 90%. In addition, incident backlog decreased over 25% globally. Commitment to KT Resolve at all management levels has been strong as the speed of problem solving increased and better interactions with clients occurred. As the number of unsatisfied clients fell, the few that remained showed a lesser degree of dissatisfaction with the timeliness and effectiveness of responses to problems. Handovers of issues, especially escalations, have improved. RCS also credits the KT Resolve approach and KT processes for a dramatic drop in the employee attrition rate and for clarifying daily priorities.

Today RCS reports increased confidence in working on client problems. In many cases, the ability to explain the need for certain data or for discounting possible causes can be just as important in building client relationships as finding root cause. RCS now offers a more consultative, less transactional approach to technical support that is building strong, long-term relationships. Opportunities to extend the KT Resolve program at IBM, beyond IBM Rational, are underway with expectations for expanding improvements to customer support.

Troubleshooting Training

Increase Customer Satisfaction

Reduce Issue-Resolution Cycle Time

Reduce Service Cost

Process Integration

Performance System Integration

Coaching On-the-Job