

eBCM Mindset: **KNOWLEDGE**

LEARNING OBJECT #11

ICT “SURVIVAL” KNOWLEDGE

HOW TO MANAGE OWN SYSTEMS

Outline

- Introduction
- A “normal” working day – an efficient operational flow
- The value for company of ICT "survival" knowledge
- ICT "survival" knowledge
- The “super-user” and his/her role
- Survival-knowledge management

Introduction

In an average workplace with normal ICT systems a certain level of knowledge is necessary for maintaining the basic functionality of the systems and applications. If something goes wrong, a server stops working properly, the network breaks down or the application is not working in accordance with expectations it should be possible to restart the systems and correct application misperceptions with minimal efforts.

In most companies there is need for documentation and understanding of simple procedures to resume work and system operability. This calls for a general description of ICT systems, the critical functional elements and actions recommended in case of an error (a check-list)

The task of this LO is to create an understanding of how to build ICT "survival" knowledge within a company, how to document that knowledge and in some cases how to identify or train a “super user” who takes on the role of maintaining continuity in systems operations.

A “normal” working day – an efficient operational flow

On a perfect working day everything works. The coffee machine gives the best coffee ever, the ventilation system gives a cool and comfortable working environment and all the ICT systems are functioning perfectly.

John, the employee turns on his computer, which starts up all its systems quickly, connects to the local area network, downloads the emails waiting and says: “Good Morning John”. After reading and quickly replying to his email, John turns to his daily routine which is online sales to business customers. This morning there were 10 orders waiting for John who browsed through them one by one. He initiated order responses to the buyers and flagged the sale into the sales system. All the orders were forwarded to the warehouse where an order pick list was printed out and to the financial department for invoice creation.

In the finance department, the order automatically created an entry into the “accounts receivables”, and then initiated a printout of a pro-forma invoice at the warehouse that became a part of the document package to be delivered to the customer. As soon as the products had been picked from the racks and sorted with other orders to be sent to the customer, they were scanned and loaded into the delivery van together with the pro-forma invoice and pick list. The van then left the premises and drove to the customer, constantly sending information about its location via GPRS telephone network to the service department.

When approaching the customer's location, the service department automatically initiated a SMS message to the customer's warehouse manager about the arriving delivery, who then was prepared for receiving the products when they arrived. When the products were scanned into the customer's warehouse the remote communication device in the van instantly communicated to the service department that the products had been delivered. The service department flagged to the finance department the fulfilment of the order, who then initiated an electronic invoice delivery directly to the buyer's financial system. There the invoice was automatically compared with the order and confirmation of order reception; the invoice amount was confirmed and became an entry into "account payables" ledger, finally leading to an automatic e-payment in the buyer's bank after the agreed credit time.

From the process description above, things are working perfectly with optimal effectiveness and speed. All information is available to all persons involved in a trading situation and there is no unnecessary delay caused. But what if the world was not perfect?

John arrives at work, gets the worst coffee ever, the office climate is hot and heavy, the computer refused to start correctly and when it did, there was no Internet connection which meant that there was no email arriving, the applications failed to start and John's day started overall disastrous; bad coffee and no sales.

The value for company of ICT "survival" knowledge

It is clear from John's example, that a company with all systems functioning is a much more efficient and prosperous than the one where there are constant system break-downs. The fact is that in the majority of instances the necessary response to a system failure is simple and easily learned. The idea here is to deal with the situation in a more organised manner, introducing the ICT "survival" knowledge.

ICT "survival knowledge"

ICT survival knowledge is here defined as the general knowledge required to tackle all the daily operational difficulties when running ICT systems, such as errors that can be corrected and do not call for repair service. This knowledge differs between companies. Hardware, systems, applications and network setup is obviously not the same from one company to another, making it impossible to provide a universal and detailed description of survival knowledge. What will be introduced here is a methodology to document, train and maintain the necessary knowledge.

In most companies there is a person, or two, who usually is called upon when things go wrong. This person often is someone that has interest in systems, knows very well how to use the systems and applications, is quick to learn and solution oriented. This is the "super-user"; co-workers tend to think of him or her as a smart and knowledgeable person that can and is willing to help with technical problems without being overtly technical and even intimidating to others by his knowledge. For the co-workers it is a plus that the super-user is not really a technical person, rather "a user" just as any other, making it easier to relate to the problems that arise in daily work. The super-user, however, is rarely systematically trained to maintain the systems. He or she attends to the problem when it arises, often leading to temporary operational standstill, with respective loss of productivity, while the error is corrected.

The importance of documenting acquired knowledge can never be overemphasised, especially when it has to do with maintaining the company's ICT infrastructure operational. When a company procures an ICT system, being hardware, software or network, it is a good practice to ask the installer to document the most likely faults that can occur and the appropriate actions to take, in a company ICT SURVIVAL MANUAL together with the relevant product instructions. During time errors will occur and if care is taken in documenting the error and the remedy the ICT SURVIVAL MANUAL will prove to be a valuable tool for companies ICT systems maintenance and operational assurance. The right persons to keep and maintain such a manual is an in-house person: The ICT administrator, if such a position exists within the company, and/or the super-use.

By taking the operational and maintenance recommendations given by the service provider (installer), studying the manuals that are provided with the ICT products and systems and learning from experience, a good checklist can be prepared and maintained. The checklist can also contain information such as telephone numbers of service companies, the names of persons that are familiar with the company ICT systems, references to websites where support can be sought and so on. The objective of preparing and maintaining a check list is to gather in compact form all the necessary knowledge needed for expedient response to any error that may occur. The super-user is the right person to manage such a list, but he or she may be absent for any reason and therefore others must have access to the knowledge in order to step in.

The "super-user" and his/her role

The super-user is often a person that has worked for several years for the company, has learned to use the ICT systems, is keen on learning and has the willingness to assist others. The super-user is not necessarily an IT person, more likely he or she is someone that is involved in many of the company's processes and is dependant on the efficiency of others. His status may be middle management in production, office operation or service department. For the super-user to meet the responsibilities mentioned he needs to be recognized as such and given the necessary time and resources. If his role is not respected, valuable information about the systems operations and maintenance may not be duly recognised or documented.

Most often the super-user is a self-made person, meaning that the interest in systems and willingness to assist others in their work either is in a person's nature or not. This naturally does not mean that a super-user cannot be trained; he just needs to be found within the company or recruited and then given the responsibility and resources to become the super-user.

Survival-knowledge management

For the purpose of maintaining effective business operations and up-to-date ICT survival knowledge the personnel of the company needs to be informed about the super-user's appointment, his role and the objective of having such a person in the company. This way, people will more easily be able to seek assistance instead of inactively waiting for solution or trying to solve problems on their own, possibly creating more problems to themselves and others in the company. People need to be trained in the general use of the ICT systems, company policy with regards to security, Internet browsing, email use and document backup routines. In addition to this general knowledge, individuals in key positions in the company would benefit from taking the eBCM-VET training course, making them well informed about the various aspects of eBusiness, its nature, opportunities and threats.