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# Back Office Operations Success: 10 Steps You Have to Take As a Customer!

by Vantage Agora

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I have been a part of service teams or have managed service teams both as a supplier and as a customer since 1996. After all these years, in over 100+ engagements (Having partners ranging from fortune 50 companies to one person startups), I have come to the conclusion that as a â€œCustomerâ€• we hold more keys to making any service project successful than the service providers themselves! Most customer companies work really hard on the contract, beat up the supplier J, and once the contract is signed, just let the supplier and their internal teams â€˜WING ITâ€™, while just checking in on the project once in a way in hallway conversations. This is a sure recipe for disaster. Instead follow the 10 commandments listed below and we guarantee that you are going to get your partner to help bring value to you and organization by having them execute your strategies to success.

Customer 10 commandments for managing service

1. One point contact: Make sure that you assign one person whose success at work (Key Result Area or KRA) depends on the success of the service provided by the supplier. You need to have one person that is interested in your team to make the partner successful. If the partner is important enough to be your supplier, you have to make this commitment.

2. Training and Ramp up: Most operations and support projects require extensive and ongoing training. This is one of the main benefits of having a strategic operations partners. While the partners are required to re-train on a continual basis, it is critical that you have your team provide them initial training. This is a must!

3. Knowledgebase: If you have an internal knowledgebase, share it with the partner. This will help them ramp up and better structure their organization to service your needs. It is critical that you have your partner update the knowledgebase once every quarter. It is critical for you to review the knowledgebase if you want to ensure quality of work and improvements the performance of your partner and your project over time.

4. Backup: No, we are not talking about system back up. Make sure that you request your partner to have backup team members on the project. Make sure that you have additional access to systems. These backup team members are needed not just for vacation/attrition, they are needed to handle your demand spikes as well.

5. Any Surprise is Bad! Standard Operating Procedure (SOP): Have an established operating procedure. Have it all in black and white. Meaning, have it documented. This is a big change for companies that have an informal work culture. You as a customer has to make this adjustment. The supplier will not be able maintain an informal relationship with your team even if they want to.

6. Timely feedback and QA: We have seen companies have a tendency of cutting out all staff when they get a partner to help them with operations. This is a bad idea. Have people move into other customer facing roles, but spare at least 20% of their bandwidth to have them check the quality of the work done by your partner. Additionally provide your feedback within a week of completion of the work. This is good both for your operations and for the partnership.

7. Facing Challenges: Like any relationship, there will be times when you will be frustrated with your partner and your partner will be of you. The critical thing when things go wrong is to maintain your

calm. Have the team get into a habit of doing a â€˜Root Cause Analysis (RCA)â€™ on every error. You ca come out ahead every time if you ensure that you never make these mistakes again.

8. Structured Communication: People say over communication is good. But unstructured communication is bad and has been the cause of most project failures. Make sure that you have weekly calls with your partner team. Have people in-house at least once a month. Donâ€™t wait for a crisis to talk to your partner. Have a  monthly relationship call with your partner. Remember if this was an internal project you would have met this team at least 5 times more than your partner. The importance of the work does not reduce just because it is now done by a partner.

9. Access and IT support: Have additional access provided to your partners. This will help them train new people, buffer staff, catch up on work when required. You should even push them to have all their internal training happen on your systems. Think about it, it is the best way to make sure that your project is the one that they are most familiar with J! Provide access to your partner so they are able to access your support staff and log in tickets to your IT support teams to take care of their problems in an efficient manner. This will help meet their goals.

10. Service Level Agreements (SLA): Setup the same standards that you have established internally with your partners. Most customers try to set up higher standards with their suppliers than what they had internally. This is a BIG mistake. In the first six months after cut over from your internal operations to partner you should willing to have a slight dip in both quality and timeliness. But after that keep encouraging your partner to improve the standards by 5% every year. You might ask, how do you measure this. Well, that is simple too. Just have a dashboard that is customized to your KRA and measure it every meeting and every interaction.

If have questions about managing any of your partners or your operations please feel free to contact anyone of us at Vantage Agora.

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As a founder of Vantage Agora, Harsha has been instrumental in the growth of the company since its inception.Harsha has over 20+ years of experience in consulting, running and helping companies and their supply chains worldwide. His work with many companies, has made him a turnaround expert. Harsha has four worldwide patents in the area of supply chain management.

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