WORKBOOK

CompTIA

CompTIA Channel Standard: Managed IT Solution Providers

This Standard is designed to pair with the CompTIA Channel Standard for IT Solution Providers and details intelligent business practices fundamental to operate a Managed IT Solutions business; additionally to provide quality services as well as value to their clients. For your convenience, this Workbook combines both the IT Solution and Managed IT Solution Provider Standards. This Standard represents the input of numerous experts with countless hours of experience, in addition to meeting with IT businesses to learn about them. The outcome will be dependent on execution as well as a number of market-specific and economic factors beyond the scope of this Standard.

Only with honest self-reflection can a business effectively evaluate itself against this checklist. Throughout that process, the company and its management team can embrace incremental improvements, focus on establishing and meeting the ever-increasing expectations of their clients, in addition to creating a highly professional environment for employees.

The CompTIA Channel Standard for Managed IT Solution Providers provides intelligent business practices for the core operational, management, and delivery functions of a managed IT services firm. By pairing this Channel Standard with the CompTIA Channel Standard for IT Solution Providers, a full picture of functional best practices for your business is created. Those functions have been categorized as follows:

- Business Generation
- Delivery & Operations
- Customer Relations
- Business Management
- Business Direction

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK:

This Workbook has been created to provide a guide through a self-evaluation of a Managed IT Solution Provider organization. It combines all of the content from the CompTIA Channel Standard for IT Solution Providers and the Standard for Managed IT Solution Providers. It contains these elements to assist:

- Intelligent business practices – the behavior, activity, process, or expectation to be met. These are phrased as positive statements and can be used to describe your business to clients, partners or other interested parties.

- Explanation and clarification – additional information that expands the business practice and identifies the intent of the practice.

- Questions to consider – a representative list of questions that should be posed to a management team about the practice. These may inspire other questions specifically related to the business as well. Use these questions to guide management conversation related to the self-evaluation.

- Recommended practices – a description of what a 3rd party might be looking for if they were to examine the business. These can be used to help identify where improvement opportunities may lie or where a unique differentiator of the business may be hidden.

Category 1

Business Generation

This category focuses on the way in which you generate business. The process from defining a market focus to closing a contract and handing it over to the business to implement (Delivery & Operations).

PROPOSAL – Provide the client with a clear understanding of the proposal.

Producing a proposal detailing exactly what the business intends to install for the client. This is done by using the results from the plan and by taking into account budget, timing, milestones as well as client expectations. Proposals should explicitly state the solution being offered, how much it will cost, how long it will take to install, the resources planned, the Supplier's milestones, the client's milestones, and the sign-off process.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you draw the outcomes of the site visit and the design into the proposal?

How do you build costs (e.g. your estimating process) into the proposal?

What do you do within the proposal to reflect your understanding of the client's requirements?

How do you spell out your proposed solution?

What do you include on such issues as resilience, availability, and future-proofing?

What do you include on such issues as access (to the property or systems), work hours, timescales, and warranties?

What do you say about responsibilities, handover, and acceptance?

Recommendations:

Minimally, proposals should state: cost, products, outcome or installation, timing.

Ideally, proposals take into account budget; timing; milestones; expectations of the client; and details exactly what the business plans to install for the client. A proposal should explicitly state the solution being offered, how much it will cost; how long it will take to install; the resources planned; the supplier's milestones; the client's milestones and the sign-off process. Additional information could include: background information on technology being proposed; clearly stated cost and timescales; terms and conditions; and proposed payment schedules.

Don't forget to take notes!

CONTRACT – Ensure there is an agreed scope of work to meet the client's objectives specified within the contract.

Formulate contracts that can be clearly understood by the client from the proposal and subsequent discussions. Contracts should state: objectives, material supplies broken down by type of material, labor costs, timescales, test and acceptance procedures, and warranties to be provided. The contract should also state terms and conditions of business.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you link the proposal and contract?

What do you cover in terms of timescales, consequential loss, and payment?

How have you positioned handover and acceptance?

Recommendations:

Contracts should minimally consist of the Proposal and signature. Ideally, contracts reflect the ideal Proposal while including terms and conditions as well as handover acceptance. It is also highly recommended that all contracts be reviewed by legal counsel.

Don't forget to take notes!

MARKETING – Accurate business targeting so current and/or potential clients are aware of how the business can meet their needs.

Be aware of market risks and ensure the business has the capacity to deliver to target markets. Maintain legal, decent and honest marketing materials, which show an understanding of client requirements as well as how they are addressed.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you target the different segments in which you operate?

What marketing activities do you undertake?

What do you do to develop leads among your prospect base?

How do you monitor lead generation?

What do you do to get prospects to come to you?

Recommendations:

Identify target markets and potential clients in addition to keeping a database of clients as well as potential clients which can be maintained and shared. Comprehensive understanding of the requirements of market segmentation and lead generation.

Don't forget to take notes!

SALES – Close business with specific clients to achieve the goals of the business plan.

Maintain ordering mechanisms so clients who come through the sales pipeline can deal effectively with the business to have their needs satisfied.

Questions to consider internally:

What is your repeat business to new business ratio (In your plan vs reality)?

How much of your sales comes from non-sales staff?

How do you recruit your sales people?

Do you use telephone/face-to-face selling?

How accurate is your forecasting?

Do you segment your revenue plan into different streams?

Do you analyze why you lose business?

Do you produce a Loss Analysis Report?

Recommendations:

You must have a paper trail showing order acceptance through to processing. Allocate a specific job number that can be used as a project reference to keep all project details in one central place. Effective sales forecasting and sales cycle in place that's integrated into CRM. Maintain defined procedures for closing business through receipt of order to processing. Carry out credit checks where appropriate for new business. Have a form to complete to gather: bank references, turnover, trade references, etc.

Don't forget to take notes!

REQUIREMENTS GATHERING AND SPECIFICATION – Internal and external quality requirements are accurately defined and met.

Functional and non-functional requirements are specified and any safety-critical requirements receive appropriate attention. Fewer emergent requirements and 'Scope creep' is avoided. Requirements are reviewed for Under-specification; Over-specification; Completeness and validity; Sensitivity to the client's business model.

Questions to consider internally:

Who does your requirements gathering?

How do you know they are doing a comprehensive analysis?

What happens when you propose one solution but the client insists on another?

How do you plan for future developments?

How is the requirements gathering validated by the client?

Recommendations:

Build well-structured proposals with evidence of client satisfaction. Evidence that client needs are challenged. Talk to clients on a regular basis. Look at system requirements and be proactive about giving advice. Identify business frustrations that can be fixed by technology. Look at granular detail in order to identify what a client needs.

Don't forget to take notes!

CLIENT ANALYSIS –Develop a clear understanding of the immediate and strategic business needs of the client as well as any budgetary constraints. Align support levels to the client needs.

Specifically discuss with the client their current and intended use of the required application software in conjunction with their business plans. This helps build a clear understanding of the immediate and strategic business needs of the client as well as any budgetary constraints. Do this in conjunction with their business plans; needs for IM (data recording, reporting, process automation); overall use of software; and budget constraints.

Questions to consider internally:

What process do you have in place for analyzing client requirements?

How do you engage with potential or new clients regarding their business and information strategy?

What consideration is given to their return on investment?

How do you document proposals and recommendations?

How do you prepare for demonstrations?

Recommendations:

A structured client analysis process that's carried out by an experienced technician and is consistently applied for all projects. Pair the discussions described above with tours of the client's premises as well as meetings with employees and users to help embed change management from the start. Provide a report to the client on their business process in addition to information management objectives and outcomes. Together with guidance on how to evaluate options to achieve them via application software and systems integration. Store the reports in a document management or CRM system. Base all demonstrations on the fact-finding from these discussions.

Based on the analysis the client is offered a flexible range of services from "break/fix" to proactive, managed services, aligned to the client's budget. Issue asset tags for all assets. Have the client show the technician all items to be supported and any other items that depend on the support.

Don't forget to take notes!

TECHNICAL SKILLS, EXPERIENCE AND CERTIFICATIONS – The client trusts that you and your staff have the necessary skills and experience required to deploy, as well as support the technologies and solutions provided.

Be able to demonstrate experience and skills in the technologies deployed as well as supported through documentation of certification and job history. Combining both vendor-neutral as well as vendor-specific training and certification with targeted recruitment of qualified technical staff can create a robust work force able to support the solutions. Ensure you have minimum expected competencies for industry-standard infrastructure vendors and any specific solutions you support. Aim to recruit engineering staff with analytical and trouble-shooting capabilities. Maintain good working contacts/relationships with third party vendors and receive training on new products.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you document the experience and skills of your staff?

How do you communicate this to prospects and clients?

How do you work with third party vendors to both understand their product ranges and attain the appropriate qualifications or training to work with them?

What process do you have in place to understand new releases from industry leading vendors?

How do your recruitment and staff development processes ensure that you have suitably skilled and qualified staff?

Recommendations:

Winning the confidence of your client that you can advise on as well as support the hardware and software systems they have in place means demonstrating that you have the necessary skills in addition to experience of the technologies supplied or supported. You should be able to prove your capabilities and show how you maintain them. Minimally, you should have resumes or curriculum vitae for each employee.

Maintain "dummy" equipment to test new fixes and products. As part of recruitment processes, aim to recruit engineering staff with analytical and trouble-shooting capabilities. Implement a policy to have all technicians suitably qualified to CompTIA A+ before working on client projects and include industry certification as part of staff development. Encourage and participate in membership of appropriate professional institutions. Keep training history up-to-date on regular basis via standard templates.

Don't forget to take notes!

SITE ANALYSIS – Undertake technical and security surveys of the existing IT environment to gain a thorough understanding prior to recommending a solution.

Utilize assessment tools to conduct an audit, or "health check", of the infrastructure and security in place prior to drafting a Service Level Agreement. This allows an accurate inventory and SLA to be created, with improvements for technical as well as risk management identified, and recommended at the outset.

A detailed understanding of the client's current IT security environment and disaster recovery arrangements allows an accurate SLA to be drawn up for these aspects and any risks identified. The client is provided with assurance that they will not be impacted in the event of a disaster.

Questions to consider internally:

At what stage do you undertake an audit of your client's infrastructure?

What is the scope of this audit?

How is this audit performed?

What steps do you take to perform a health-check of the infrastructure?

What tools or templates are used to support this survey?

How do you record the findings of the survey?

How do you report issues and recommendations to your clients?

(FOR SECURITY SITE ANALYSIS)

At what stage do you undertake a security and risk survey of your client's infrastructure?

What is the scope of this survey?

What tools or templates are used in support of this survey?

Do you base your review on any recognized standards for security or business continuity?

How do you record your findings from the survey?

How do you report issues and recommendations to your clients?

What steps do you take to enable you to respond quickly to client equipment failure?

Recommendations:

If not required by the client, recommend a specific security risk review. Record the findings within an IT asset inventory. Specifically check the antivirus and patching. Identify any upgrade, replacement and installation projects. Use existing security standards available from ISO, NIST, BS, or CompTIA to assess the client's Information Security Management. Disaster recovery requirements are reviewed with the client, including potential data loss scenarios, and service level requirements. Data backup is recommended to the client if not in place. Any maximum downtime requirements are recorded within the SLA and help desk staff are made aware.

Identify and report consequences of any devices or components showing signs of age or wear, at higher risk or failure or unreliability. Specifically review firewall, encryption, and password security as well as any legal or regulatory standards affecting the client.

Detailed penetration testing should be carried out for all network systems, hardware, and infrastructure; with a detailed report issued to the client.

Don't forget to take notes!

STANDARDIZATION – Standardize equipment to deliver benefits of economy of scale and consistency.

Work with the client over time to promote standardization of their infrastructure. Benefits of standardization include: cost, consistent performance, improved recovery time, reduced training, maintenance, and repair cost.

Questions to consider internally:

What steps do you take to promote standardization?

How do you engage with your clients in the discussions around standardization?

How do you accommodate reliability and performance into your recommendations?

Recommendations:

Provide the client with baseline performance and lifespan information to set expectations of standardized systems. All equipment supplied is configured/built and imaged to in-house standards at the business premises before deployment to the client. Any recommended products have been fully tested in-house first or third party testimonials/reviews taken.

Additionally, promote standardization for software systems such as: operating system, office software, and security software. Maintain a set of common/standard configuration options that are supplied to clients based on suitability.

You can also agree with the client and document a set of standard specifications upon which procurement is based.

Don't forget to take notes!

Category 2

Delivery & Operations

This category is most critical to meeting your clients' expectations and is therefore the largest. Its focus is on how you plan, delivery, and check the projects you undertake. Only by delivering what the client asked for, and what you promised, can you have a truly satisfied client.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT – Work is not undertaken that would exceed the capacity of the business to deliver the client's needs.

Skilled and competent staff are deployed and equipped to deliver the IT solutions that clients expect. These may be people employed directly, business partners, temporary or contract staff.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you record the capabilities of your staff?

How do you ensure those records are kept up-to-date?

When you take on a new contract, how do you assess your capability to deliver?

What do you do when you realize that you do not have the capability to deliver?

Recommendations:

Track capacities and skills to help assign resources in the future. Be able to demonstrate an understanding of staff skills and availability for particular projects. If requested, be able to show evidence of a clearly defined resource management and allocation strategy that is being followed up effectively.

Don't forget to take notes!

RISK MONITORING – Acceptable levels of risk are defined and kept within agreed limits.

Descriptions in the business plan or records that rank risks categorically, numerically, or in some form of prioritization. Risks are not only recognized, but something is being done about them.

Questions to consider internally:

Who is responsible for risk management?

What skills do they have to do the job?

How do they go about this task?

How do you assess risk?

What do you do to review the risks you have assessed?

Recommendations:

Adopt a "common sense" scale (1-3, 1-5, Low-Med-High, Green-Yellow/Amber-Red, etc.) to help categorize identified risks. Be able to provide evidence if requested that risk analysis is being done and client satisfaction is being achieved. Risks identified in project specification should clearly define limit and scope of the mitigation.

Risk Monitoring is an opportunity for continual improvement. A demonstrable recording of all key risks in addition to suitable mitigation plans regularly reviewed by appropriate staff and executive management. Progressive risk reduction will be shown over time.

Don't forget to take notes!

QUALITY – Internal quality requirements are defined and met.

Countering any lack of IT understanding on the part of the client with the expertise in questioning on the part of the Supplier. The fewer emergent requirements, the better.

Questions to consider internally:

What is your approach to quality management?

Who is responsible for it?

How do they exercise that responsibility?

What level of accountability and governance is there within the system?

Recommendations:

Project supervision to ensure that quality standards are defined and met. In other words, assign a responsibility for quality assurance. Identify then communicate standards that you expect your staff to adhere to including technical expectations as well as personal expectations of behavior and culture. Those involved understand what is required of them in terms of quality and installation.

A quality management system that is defined and audited is the ultimate goal.
This system is repeatable, consistent, managed, and audited.

Don't forget to take notes!

SITE DOCUMENTATION – There is enough clear and understandable documentation to use and maintain the IT solution.

Using any combination of traceable paper or electronic documentation.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you develop and maintain your site documentation for a project?

How does it vary between large and small projects?

Do you have evidence to show clients are satisfied with the site documentation you provide?

Recommendations:

Hold documentation of products sold, their configuration and implementation, as well as passwords. Retain that information. Basic documentation should align with original the solution proposal. Maintenance manual with all aspects of the installation detail should be available.

Other site documentation recommendations include detailed plans, drawings, specifications, etc., that are available when required, then stored in a manner that is safe, secure, and retrievable. Document retention is an integral part of workflow in an ideal image of this best practice.

Don't forget to take notes!

CONTROL NON-CONFORMING IT SOLUTIONS TO ENSURE FAULTY ITEMS ARE CONTROLLED – Solutions and components that do not work as they should are not deployed.

Ensure IT solutions that do not meet the client's requirements are not released to the client without documented, mutual agreement to allow this. Remember to re-test whatever is repaired and deal with the knock-on impacts that the solutions may have had elsewhere.

Questions to consider internally:

What happens when you have identified a faulty item?

What do you do to ensure that those responsible for the fault are aware of the issue?

What do you do to ensure it does not happen again?

Recommendations:

Carry out product testing at the point of installation. Test for DOA on receipt of goods. Recommend clients take on extended warranties. Work with suppliers on a partnership basis to preempt the need for measuring non-conformance. Be able to produce evidence with metrics that service conforms to SLA. Produce reports for clients when required. 24/7 monitoring of systems in operation. Template the SLA used. Only buy tools and products from quality suppliers. Have regular meetings with suppliers to keep up to date on technology.

Don't forget to take notes!

AUDITABILITY –There is evidence of the correct work being carried out, on time and within budget.

Create useful records as a by-product of work done, not just formulated for audits.

Questions to consider internally:

What information do you keep to demonstrate timely execution of work?

What information do you keep to demonstrate cost control within your review process?

Recommendations:

Minimally, record the basic details of work completed and some measurement of Time and Costs. If requested, evidence that achievements against plans have been analyzed & reviewed. Maintain a history of order processing, job management, client sign-off, and evidence of client satisfaction. Confidence in work force to understand work parameters and report any deviations.

For continual improvement, utilize well-structured proposals and evidence of client satisfaction. Implement an internal audit process for review and improvement opportunities. Evidence of active measurement, review of order processing, and order management system. Completed job sheets can be reviewed against job requirements to evaluate success.

Don't forget to take notes!

ACCEPTANCE PROCEDURE –To validate the client's acceptance of the solution.

Plan acceptance well in advance, based on an agreement with the client as to what constitutes acceptance to make it clear when a job (or part of a job) is finished satisfactorily.

Questions to consider internally:

What is your standard acceptance procedure?

How do you ensure that the client understands that responsibility for the installation has been handed over?

What happens if the client delays acceptance?

How does acceptance link to invoice production?

How does acceptance link to other parts of the business (Support to Maintenance or Sales to Relationship Management)?

Recommendations:

Maintain evidence that the client has signed-off that the solution meets the original (or amended) requirements. Signed documentary evidence of client acceptance of installation. By including the acceptance procedure from the Proposal stage forward, fewer surprises or pushback on acceptance will occur. Creating mechanisms to pass notice of acceptance to other parts of the business is a good way to communicate internally.

Don't forget to take notes!

BUSINESS CASE – Document and, if asked, demonstrate the steps you would take to develop a business case for the solution you are proposing.

A successful project must be planned around the intended outcomes as documented in the client's business case. This means engaging with your client to understand their business drivers, aims, and objectives.

Questions to consider internally:

What process do you have for drawing up a business case?

What is the scope of the business case?

How is this documented?

How are options provided to the client?

Recommendations:

Work with their prospects and clients to draw up a structured business case for the solution. Benefits, options, and costs should be provided. Start with a high level plan for achieving the desired outcomes, with key milestones, major dependencies, and risks. Following such a process will demonstrate you understand your client's business drivers and agree with the client on how the application software can support them.

Don't forget to take notes!

MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE – Show how you assist the client in making sure that the new software and processes are successfully adopted within their business.

A solutions project is likely to involve change in terms of both process and culture. Change needs to be properly managed to ensure that your solution is adopted and successful. Support the client to ensure the adoption of the solution and supporting business processes.

Questions to consider internally:

What is your approach/methodology for the management of change?

What governance and reporting arrangements do you seek to have in place for a project?

What training needs analysis takes place?

What communication processes are put in place?

How are project issues and risks logged and tracked?

Recommendations:

Have an approach for managing change. Ensure that leadership is part of the project process. There should be a reporting process and client champion/sponsor or similar identified. Provide a training needs assessment related to the new technology solution. Support and maintain services in place from outset. For further improvement, identify, and support a communications strategy that addresses the deployment and adoption of the solution.

Don't forget to take notes!

SYSTEM AND DATA MIGRATION – Be able to demonstrate how you manage the process of migrating existing systems and data.

Often within the deployment of a new software solution there is the need to migrate existing data. Ensuring this happens with minimal impact and risk means thorough planning and having a robust methodology. You want the client to have confidence that any existing system and data can be migrated without loss of service or data/information.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you assess the requirement and case for data migration?

What track record do you have?

What methodology do you have in place?

How far can conversion/migration be automated?

How do you work with key third party vendors regarding data migration?

How is business continuity accommodated?

How is old data handled?

Recommendations:

Assess the requirement and case for data migration. Have a robust methodology, a defined process for system and data conversion; without loss of productivity as well as with security considerations applied. Where possible, provide/leverage automated routines for migration. Offer to archive old data. Be able to demonstrate a track record. Maintain record keeping by implementing a highly structured process that embeds backup, testing, requirements traceability, and user acceptance.

Don't forget to take notes!

SYSTEMS INTEGRATION –Demonstrate how you manage a systems integration process.

Clients will often have needs to share/consolidate their data, requiring systems integration. If delivering this service and solution, you will need to demonstrate that you have suitable experience and skills. This demonstration will assure the client that you can deliver the integration of the application software with other systems in place.

Questions to consider internally:

What track record do you have?

How do you assess the case, requirement, and method for systems integration?

What methodology do you have in place?

What toolsets do you utilize?

How do you work with key third party vendors regarding systems integration?

How do you use research to remain up-to-date with latest methods and technologies for systems integration?

Recommendations:

Validate the reasons integration is required to ensure that clients are actually implementing the correct product/version/module. You should be skilled in the use of any API or other toolset of the application software you deploy, sell or support. Be familiar with modern methods and industry-standard enabling technologies for systems integration. Have an approach and process for systems integration. Be able to demonstrate a track record. A highly defined process for the complete lifecycle of a systems integration project will help to establish this track record. Make the consideration and execution of data import, export, and sharing a regular occurrence, embedded in every project process.

Don't forget to take notes!

DOCUMENTATION – The Client has the correct documentation for their software solution.

Your clients should have clear and comprehensive documentation to enable them to understand their use of the software systems supplied. They should also have full documentation relating to their contractual relationship with you and the projects you undertake; this supports engagement as well as accountability.

Questions to consider internally:

What documentation is typically provided to your clients?

How is documentation provided to your clients?

What documentation do you maintain on your clients' behalf?

To what extent is single source information shared by your engineers and your clients?

How do you store and keep documentation?

What revision controls do you have for documentation?

Recommendations:

Provide the client with a copy of the SLA/contract and specifications. User guides are provided and supplied to the client, for different types of user and systems administrator as required, including all documentation provided by any 3rd party software author. Software installation media and license keys are retained by the business or client. Similarly copies of all warranties. Backups are documented. Policy and procedural documentation for the IT processes that the client needs to implement and follow is provided. Any training is documented. The business ensures that single source information is used by both its staff and the client. This documentation must be kept securely in a shared system that is backed up. Utilize a document management system to maintain version control.

Don't forget to take notes!

PROJECT MANAGEMENT – Ensure that the project is delivered accurately and within agreed budget and timescales.

Assign a Project Manager (PM) to oversee the success of the project and hand the project documentation to that person. This person can then act as a conduit for any decisions that need to be made as the installation progresses.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you plan and deliver your projects?

Who is responsible for planning and execution?

How do you start a project after the contract is signed?

What are the typical stage reviews that you carry out?

What happens when a critical project starts missing its deadlines?

How effective are you at contingency planning?

Can you show examples of situations in which contingency planning has been of benefit?

Recommendations:

The PM appointed should be empowered to make key decisions with respect to the project to avoid delay. This person should also keep track of progress and report this along with any changes to the original accepted proposal to the client's project sponsors. Remember that the PM role is ongoing throughout the project and the role includes monitoring all changes to the plan. Make use of accepted project methodologies such as PMI, PRINCE2 or using tools such as Microsoft Project. Be able to provide evidence that projects are effectively managed and translated into job sheets that reflect the plan.

Don't forget to take notes!

UNDERSTAND COMPETENCIES – Records are kept of staff development needs.

Records including details of: on the job experience; mentoring/apprenticeship; formal training/qualification; permanent/temporary recruitment.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you plan your requirements for technical skills?

Does the business have a culture in which skills development is prioritized?

Are technical sills graded in terms of competencies?

Recommendations:

Define competencies for all staff. Review key competencies against current business requirements to ensure that projects are completed effectively. Review competencies within the business against current and future business requirements and have systems in place to bridge any knowledge or capability gaps.

Don't forget to take notes!

INTEGRITY - Sufficient means are in place to assure that IT solutions are delivered without interference.

Have security safeguards to ensure that only those with the appropriate authority and skills deliver the component parts of the IT solutions.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you minimize complications?

What happens when complications occur?

How do you communicate integrity issues to the client?

Recommendations:

Be able to demonstrate a good level of integrity within your business. Culture and mission statement are to meet client expectations. A well documented and implemented system that clearly identifies, measures, and monitors achievements against requirements is one way to demonstrate that integrity. Have means to identify, analyze, and report all compliant and non-compliant areas. For further improvement, maintain evidence of a strong and well-illustrated ethos across the business of 'delivering' on promises, paired with evidence of pride in the achievements of that delivery.

Don't forget to take notes!

DELIVERY ACROSS THE BUSINESS –Ensure that the client gets what they expect.

Have a supply process appropriate for the type of IT solution being delivered and for the client's approach to acquisition/purchase.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you assess the overall business contribution to client satisfaction?

What do you do to ensure that the client relationship is not simply a one-off project experience?

Recommendations:

Order equipment in line with the agreed proposal and key staff are scheduled accordingly. The project plan should ensure that all aspects of the proposal are addressed with any requirement for ordering or scheduling is placed and met. Acquire client endorsement of both the supplier in general and that the solution met or exceeded the proposal. Repeat orders for incremental functionality/capacity are one indicator of effective delivery across the business. Another is no (or few) complaints relating to inability to meet client's stated requirements or the original proposal and additional orders are truly incremental.

Don't forget to take notes!

TIMELY PAYMENTS – To manage cash flow and Suppliers' expectations.

Agree to payment terms and arrangements with, and signed-off by, the client. Match cash flow with funds available to purchase the IT solutions needed to deliver the business objectives.

Questions to consider internally:

What is your payment record to your Suppliers?

How do you handle disputed invoices?

What approach do you take on payments to Suppliers when their performance impacts on your ability to satisfy your client?

Recommendations:

Maintain the agreed upon contract Terms & Conditions. Be able to provide evidence that supplier payment details are known and made regularly. Maintain evidence that the supplier is satisfied with the business relationship. Have clearly set out T&Cs that form part of any proposal and contract. Have a trigger for overdue invoices and follow up.

Don't forget to take notes!

SUB-CONTRACTOR SLAS – SLAs show that internal quality requirements are defined and met.

SLAs with partners and sub-contractors should be adequate to guarantee the longevity of supply. Ensure that sub-contractors are providing the right skills for the business when needed and that partners are providing the right support, training, and technical equipment to enable work to be carried out effectively.

Questions to consider internally:

Do you follow a single- or multiple-sub-contractor policy?

How do you assess the performance of your sub-contractors?

What do you do when your sub-contractor fails to meet your expectations?

How do you keep the prices of your sub-contractors up-to-date?

What evidence can you show that your sub-contractors are satisfied with the relationship?

Recommendations:

Where SLAs are in place, assess actual Service Levels against these. Be able to answer if they are defined, documented and achieved. Implement a vendor approval system to carry out checks to ensure quality. Use reference sites. Ensure all personnel understand the service levels for sub-contractors and partners and make sure these are met with key personnel taking corrective action where necessary. Build up a level of trust working with a few contractors so that standard of work is understood. Measure contractor in terms of quality of supply, staff, and communication – the whole client experience. Understand their strengths in project management and ability to liaison with business project managers.

Don't forget to take notes!

MANUFACTURER RELATIONSHIPS – Good use is made of the relationship opportunities with Manufacturers and Suppliers.

Working with a small number of regular Suppliers helps ensure a business keeps abreast of technological advances and how they may impact on pricing and the ability to provide a good service to clients.

Questions to consider internally:

How have you benefitted from your Supplier relationship?

What do they give you?

What do you give them?

Recommendations:

Maintain a consistent preferred-Suppliers program in which performance is being followed up effectively. Be able to provide evidence that Suppliers proactively supply new product information and are kept up to date with current project progress where necessary. Develop close working relationships with a small number of Manufacturers. Conduct regular meetings with them and make good use of their training facilities.

Don't forget to take notes!

TRAINING –Be able to show what training solutions you offer to your client to ensure that they can use the application software effectively.

Undertake a proper Training Needs Analysis with the client. You want the client to operate and manage the application software without unnecessary recourse to the Supplier.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you undertake a training needs analysis?

How is training delivered?

Who undertakes your training and what qualifications do they have?

How is training managed and developed?

What documentation is provided?

What follow-up services are provided after training?

Recommendations:

Document the Training Needs Analysis with the client. Offer full training services, either directly or via third parties, including user and systems administration training, via methods that suit client needs. Training should be supported by FAQs and documentation such as work instructions and processes. Review training effectiveness and client readiness prior to final sign-off. Provide clients a named contact then designate a technician to monitor emails and have supports calls redirected. For further improvement, utilize specific help desk/CRM software, to which clients have access. Consider a third party or the software author covering out-of-hours support.

Don't forget to take notes!

BENCHMARKING – have a methodology for optimization and improvement of client infrastructure.

The client should be made aware of how well their infrastructure is performing, the level of support offered, and any risks. By benchmarking areas such as those below, you can place clients in a structured program of optimization and improvement.

- Identity and Access management
- Desktop performance
- Device and server management
- Security and networking
- Data protection and recovery
- IT and security processes

Questions to consider internally:

What approach do you take to auditing and benchmarking your client's infrastructure?

How do you identify and use Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)?

How do you structure improvements and action plans?

How do you report findings and recommendations?

Which industry-standard optimization models do you follow?

What tools do you use to help monitor infrastructure performance?

Recommendations:

Undertake benchmarks and produce reports on a regular basis (quarterly). Aim to understand and, if appropriate, utilize then follow the optimization models provided by industry-standard infrastructure vendors (e.g. Microsoft Core Infrastructure Optimization Model).

Audit and benchmark the client's infrastructure in areas such as: identity and access management; desktop, device and server management; security and networking; data protection and recovery; as well as IT and security processes. Consider both relevant business as well as technical aspects. KPIs are identified.

Include performance improvement measures within reports and actions. Use monitoring software to provide reports and alerts on an automated basis.

Don't forget to take notes!

INCIDENT MANAGEMENT – Have a protocol in place to manage support incidents effectively.

The client should be able to contact a named manager directly, in the method of their choosing (phone, email, web chat, portal, etc.) Processes and staff resources need to be in place to ensure the incident is recorded, and when possible, resolved at the first contact. Systematically record and track all incidents then allow for client access/view of the system.

When your client has a problem they will want to be able to contact you then have their problems resolved quickly and effectively. This means having a systematic approach to incident reporting and management.

Questions to consider internally:

When is your support service available?

What methods can clients use to contact you?

Do you clients know who to contact for support?

What process and systems do you have in place for recording and tracking incidents?

What SLA processes do you have in place for managing incident severity and response times?

How is the client kept up-to-date regarding incident progress and resolution?

What tools do you provide to support staff and clients in diagnosing then resolving problems?

Who is responsible for managing support?

Are your policies and procedures in this area documented?

Recommendations:

Have processes and staff resources in place to ensure that the incident report is registered, then resolved, the first time and at point of contact (within agreed business hours). Provide a knowledge base for support staff. All reported incidents must be systematically recorded and tracked, with the client ideally having access. An incident severity level is assigned, based upon the SLA.

Designate a technician (or NOC) out-of-hours to monitor emails and have supports calls redirected. Use specific help desk/CRM software, to which clients have access. The policy and procedures are documented then made available to staff. The client is updated regularly on the progress of the incident.

Ensure someone is responsible, such as senior engineer or help desk manager, for routinely monitoring incidents and their status.

Don't forget to take notes!

PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE – Demonstrate proactive activities to ensure the client's infrastructure is consistently reliable.

Ensure your standard SLA includes proactive and preventative monitoring maintenance options at regular intervals that suit client needs. Utilize remote and automated fault diagnosis and correction where appropriate. Ask clients about issues that have occurred. Identify trends and take mitigating action. Plan necessary outages to minimize impact.

Preventative monitoring as well as maintenance is essential to ensuring that your clients' IT infrastructure remains reliable and high-performing. Proactive and preventative maintenance measures should be included within your SLA.

Questions to consider internally:

What preventative monitoring and maintenance in included within your standard SLA?

What remote/automated fault diagnosis and correction is in place?

Who is responsible for preventative maintenance?

How are your staff alerted to problems?

What process is in place to track trends?

How are processes documented?

How is the client engaged with regard to identifying issues?

What process is in place to take remedial action?

What is your approach to IT outages and client sites?

Recommendations:

The use of an incident management system enables trend tracking. Staff should regularly check for then apply new patches and service packs for software. Guidelines must be documented and made available to staff. Also the business should regularly ask clients about issues that have arisen and identify trends then take mitigating action. All outages should be planned and any impact forecast.

Have a named contact for clients. Designate a technician (or NOC) out-of-hours to monitor emails and have supports calls redirected. Use specific help desk/CRM software, to which clients have access. The policy and procedures are documented then made available to staff.

Don't forget to take notes!

REPORTING – Provide the client with useful management information.

Within a good support service, the client will be provided with management information relating to the performance of their IT infrastructure. This should be included as part of the SLA and cover aspects such as: availability, performance, capacity, and upgrade or replacement recommendations.

Questions to consider internally:

What management reporting is included within your standard service and SLA?

What is the scope of the information provided?

How is the underlying data recorded?

How do you communicate issues and recommendations to your clients?

Recommendations:

Include management reporting as a service within the SLA. The management report should: summarize proactive, reactive, and on-request tasks undertaken; any issues detected; and any remedial tasks performed. Availability, performance, capacity, and upgrade/replacement planning information should also be provided. Any future risks should be identified as best able and improvements recommended.

Include within the reports the efforts and costs that were required to rectify issues. Provide the reports systematically to clients following any regular audit or health-check. Any recommended improvements should include priorities and costs.

Additional reporting may include an SLA reconciliation report (perhaps annually or bi-annually) provided to the client, including a financial statement, issue handling, and project work. Be sure to understand the client's escalation procedures as well as internal reporting processes to allow for the smoothest communication and resulting actions from the reports.

Don't forget to take notes!

TECHNOLOGY OBSOLESCENCE – Protect clients from technology obsolescence.

Continually research and test new products that relate to the infrastructures you support. Work closely with your technology partners while keeping ahead of the game by attending relevant exhibitions and trade shows.

As part of the support service they receive, the client would benefit from your insight and advice on new products, upgrades or replacements they should make. This will ensure that their infrastructure is future-proofed and that they are protected from technology obsolescence.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you research and learn of new products that related to the IT infrastructure?

What steps do you take to test new products before introduction to your clients?

How do you keep your clients informed?

How do you align your research and recommendations to the lifecycles of the assets within your client's IT infrastructure, identifying the need for upgrade or replacement?

Who is responsible for managing research and testing?

Recommendations:

Monitor client hardware and software asset lifecycles so that upgrades/replacement can be planned in conjunction with performance assessments. Assign specific responsibility for this and disseminating new market news as well as information to colleagues. Implement a system for asset inventory to facilitate this activity. Conduct further audits to update inventory periodically (e.g. annually).

Actively inform clients of emerging trends and technologies that might impact or benefit them. Consider including this type of reporting with regular management reports. If that is the case, be sure to provide: options, process, and costs for recommended upgrades/replacements.

Don't forget to take notes!

PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTALLY AWARE IT – Support your and your client's environmental policies.

Being environmentally aware is an ethical and beneficial (e.g. in terms of cost savings) attribute. This applies both to your own practices and the advice you give to clients.

Utilize remote monitoring and management of client networks. Recommend power saving measures to clients. Older, less-efficient hardware should be retired as part of a proactive lifecycle management process.

Questions to consider internally:

What do you do to reduce your own carbon footprint?

What is the scope of "environmentally aware" advice, actions, and monitoring you provide to your clients?

What account do you take of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) as well as Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) Directives for selling electronic goods in the European Union?

Recommendations:

Promoting Green IT can be embodied in the ethos of the company in terms of both its operations and recommendations to clients. Utilize remote management and monitoring of client networks to reduce travel. Recommend power saving and heat output reduction measures to your clients. Older, less power-efficient, hardware should be retired as part of a proactive lifecycle management process. In procuring equipment, hardware does not need to be excessively powerful for business requirements.

Be aware of international and local environmental regulations such as WEEE regulations in the EU.

For more information on WEEE and RoHS, please visit **http://www.export.gov/index.asp** or **https://www.gov.uk/guidance/waste-electrical-and-electronic-equipment-weee-exporting**

As with obsolescence, consider including environmental recommendations as part of the regular reporting provided to clients, identifying the options, process, costs, and savings.

Don't forget to take notes!

SUPPORT 3RD PARTY ARRANGEMENTS – Assure clients that 3rd party hardware and software receive the same level of support and protection as 1st party.

Monitoring the third party support arrangements for your clients is important to ensure that their subscriptions and renewals are up-to-date. Equally, you should ensure that you have appropriate relationships with your Suppliers for contingency support purposes.

Questions to consider internally:

What support arrangements do you have in place with your Suppliers?

What level of contact do you have with your key Suppliers?

What level of contact do your clients have with key Suppliers?

How do you monitor and manage your client's care packs, subscriptions, and renewals?

What system(s) do you use to manage support/subscription information?

How far do you liaise on behalf of your clients with other Suppliers they use?

Recommendations:

Take out your own support/care package with the hardware and software manufacturers whose products you provide to clients. Monitor or manage your client care packs, subscriptions, and renewals so they can plan their budgets in addition to remaining up-to-date.

Strive to have dedicated account managers at key third party suppliers. Allow for clients to directly contact third party suppliers if need arises and understand contact details additionally any SLA terms.

For further integration of the supply chain and client, implement a CRM application to monitor contacts as well as for key third party suppliers. Introduce them to relevant clients and discuss support handovers.

Going above and beyond could see the business volunteering to act as a central support contact liaising with all key third party IT Suppliers the client has.

Don't forget to take notes!

USE APPROPRIATE TOOLS AND SYSTEMS – Implement the right automation tools and systems to achieve the business goals of managed IT services and solutions.

Network Operating Center (NOC); Remote Monitoring and Managing System (RMM); Professional Services Automation System (PSA); Asset Change/Configuration Management Database (CMDB); Software Licensing Compliance Management System; and Ticketing System are all essential to delivering remotely managed IT services. Utilize these tools and systems to meet your business goals.

Questions to consider internally:

Do you utilize a Network Operation Center (NOC)?
If so, who provides those services? (Direct employees, contracted support, vendor, etc.)

Do you utilize a Remote Monitoring and Managing System (RMM)?
If so, what vendor do you utilize?

Do you utilize a Professional Services Automation System (PSA)?
If so, what vendor do you utilize?

Do you utilize an Asset Change/Configuration Management Database (CMDB) or other system to track client configurations and system history?

Do you utilize a software license management system?

Do you utilize a ticketing system
If so, what ticketing system is used?

Do the systems (NOC, RMM, PSA, Ticketing) integrate with other internal operations systems?

Recommendations:

Implement quality, vendor-supported systems, and tools to help manage the service as well as support delivery activities. Ensure integration across systems is achievable, creating a seamless automated process for execution of the SLA.

Network Operation Center (NOC): One or more locations or teams capable of managing alerts 24/7 from one or more monitoring systems; taking preventative and corrective action so the device and/or service being managed complies with the Service Agreement.

Remote Monitoring and Managing System (RMM): An autonomous system to monitor then alert the health and status factors of the asset, device, application, and services being managed.

Professional Services Automation System (PSA): A business management system that typically includes: client relations management, service management, contract/billing management, asset data, reporting, and workflow capabilities.

Change/Configuration Management Database (CMDB): A system to track changes to client configurations and systems which maintains a history of which employee changed what program or setting at what specific time.

Software License Compliance Management System: A system to manage software license compliance and updates.

Ticketing System: A system that tracks the lifecycle of initiated trouble tickets, managing updates as the issue is resolved.

Don't forget to take notes!

Category 3

Client Relations

Repeat business from your clients relies on developing a trusted relationship and maintaining a value added relationship. Managing your client base well is far more cost-effective than continually driving new business.

DEFINED SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS – SLAs to the client are defined, documented, and actioned.

Documentation of the level of service agreed to for a client. Consider scope, response times, availability, on-site support, indemnification, liability, etc. CompTIA Premier Members have access to a Service Level Agreement template via the Insights & Tools section of the Membership website. For more information on what should be included within a SLA, please refer to this template.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you use SLAs?

Do you have a standard form or do you use the client's format?

What do you do to ensure that you meet your SLA commitments?

What happens when there is a failure to meet your SLAs?

Recommendations:

Adequate proposals containing appropriate service level commitments and evidence of client satisfaction. Basic service levels are identified in the proposal and are monitored. These adequate levels are able to be met with the resources available. For further improvement, allow for opportunities for improvement or optimization in the client satisfaction process. Well-structured proposals contain appropriate service level commitments and evidence of client satisfaction.

Don't forget to take notes!

CLIENT SATISFACTION – There is clear evidence of client satisfaction with the IT solutions provided.

Form evidence from a balanced view of spontaneous feedback and solicited research.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you record client satisfaction in the period immediately after acceptance?

How do you follow-up after that?

What do you do to ensure that follow-up discussions have both purpose and value?

What percentage of your annual business comes from existing clients (i.e. repeat business or re-activated business from lapsed clients) as opposed to business from new clients?

Recommendations:

Follow the process detailed within this standard to establish clear expectations, well-structured proposals, and feedback mechanisms to gather evidence of client satisfaction with basic service levels. Don't be afraid to ask clients to provide satisfaction feedback.

Don't forget to take notes!

HELP DESK – The responses to incoming calls and solutions to the problems raised are within the constraints of SLAs or their equivalent.

These may include: the number of calls to be processed in a day/week/month; or the type of calls being matched with the expectations of business/product/service plans.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you monitor calls to the Help Desk?

What standard response times do you offer?

How do you monitor Help Desk performance?

How do you address the issue when performance is below the SLA?

Recommendations:

Have a reporting system with a built-in escalation process in order to measure against SLA and report to required staff in order to ensure adherence to SLA. For further improvement, be able to provide evidence of a documented and implemented system for the recording, collation, and analysis of reported issues. Provide clear evidence that data has been reviewed & assessed against service level projections. Conduct reviews that are constructive and requirements for improvements are actioned then carried through.

Don't forget to take notes!

ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT – Demonstrate how you build good relationships with your clients by going beyond the basics to deliver a strategic IT service.

The relationship with your client should be more strategic than just providing support. The client should know they are in a strategic IT relationship and trusts that the relationship is more than just one of implementation and support delivery. This will keep the client engaged, informed, and happy. They will also want to see that there is dedicated ownership of their project. Having a formal approach to account management is a good way of achieving this.

Questions to consider internally:

What is your approach to account management?

How regularly do you communicate with clients, and in what manner?

What sort of things do you communicate with your clients about?

What is your approach to building a client community?

How do you gather your clients' input towards your business and product strategy?

What system do you use for Customer Relationship Management (CRM)?

Recommendations:

Assign dedicated account managers/named contacts to each client. Have regular contact with the client to both understand their evolving needs and communicate performance, information, and good practice. Ensure that the clients are viewed as a community and are kept informed. Have an approach for Customer Relation Management record keeping. Consider allowing limited access to the CRM for clients.

For further improvement, prepare scheduled account management contacts and regular meetings. To support this, account managers must be aware of all issues. Review the client's business plan and strategic IT goals during these meetings. The process is proactive with client input to the company strategy. Consider a User Group or similar for practical application.

Don't forget to take notes!

SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE – Demonstrate that you have a successful protocol in place to manage incidents efficiently and effectively with minimum impact. Be able to show what agreements you have in place with third party Suppliers.

Where you supply a software solution, your client will be looking for ongoing support, maintenance, and service. When your client has a problem, they will want to be able to contact you, then have their problems resolved quickly and effectively. This means having a systematic approach to incident reporting and management.

Questions to consider internally:

When is your support service available?

Which methods can clients use to contact you?

Do your clients know who to contact for support?

What process and systems do you have in place for recording as well as tracking incidents?

What SLA process do you have in place for managing incident severity and response times?

How is the client kept up-to-date regarding incident progress and resolution?

What tools do you provide to support staff and clients in diagnosing and resolving problems?

Who is responsible for managing support?

How far are policy and procedures documented?

What is your policy and approach regarding patches and version upgrades?

Recommendations:

Based on agreed needs, a direct support and maintenance agreement is provided to the client for the application system/solution, with SLA terms. The client should be able to flexibly contact the business (when available, contacting a named engineer/account manager) by telephone, email, support system access and web chat; dependent upon their preferences or needs. The client should know who to contact and how, for whatever the reason. Processes and staff resources are in place to ensure that the incident report is registered, and when possible resolved. Solving the problem the first time, at point of contact (within agreed business hours), by having suitably qualified staff available.

Consider making a knowledge base available. All reported incidents should be systematically recorded and tracked, with the client ideally having access. Assign incident severity levels based upon the SLA. Provide clients an upgrade path, policy, and process for the software/solution. If supplying third party application software, ensure a support and assurance agreement is in place with the third party software author. Clients should have a named contact/designated technician to monitor emails and have supports calls redirected. Assign someone responsible, such as senior engineer or help desk manager, for routinely monitoring incidents and their status. Also consider a third party or the software author to cover out of hours support.

Don't forget to take notes!

TRANSPARENT BILLING – Be accountable for all billing with a suitable system and practices to ensure the client understands in addition to approving all billing from you.

It is best practice in billing to ensure that there is full transparency between amounts charged and work undertaken or goods supplied. This is especially the case for work additional to standard activity under an SLA. Such transparency will reduce any risk of dispute.

Questions to consider internally:

How clearly are your line items, tariffs, taxes, etc.; explained to clients?

What processes are in place for clients to approve expenditure?

How are charges itemized on invoices and other documentation?

How are financial documents stored?

How are financial documents provided to clients?

Recommendations:

Where support billing exceeds fixed prices within the SLA, ensure that job control sheets are used to gain client approval for all additional work or equipment supplied. Provide a copy to the client. All additional billing should be fully itemized within invoices sent to the client. Have a centralized billing process to pull all 3rd party and partner activities into a single bill for the client.

Clients should have a written explanation of line items, tariffs, taxes, etc. Document a process for clients to consent to additional work before proceeding. Implement a supporting system for structured electronic filing of these records, including use of scanning. Incorporate billing within regular management reports to the client.

Consider allowing client access to an online portal to view all financial and work activity.

Don't forget to take notes!

Category 4

Business Management

This section focuses on the way in which you manage the business and ensure that the business is able to deliver on the commitments it makes. Whilst Operations is the key to meeting the client's expectations, they will only be able to do it if the business itself is well-managed.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM – Days per year and expenditure match the business' Training Needs Analysis (TNA).

Staff development plans are in place to make sure that staff keep up-to-date with a good understanding of the hardware, software, legislation, etc. that is appropriate to their roles.

Questions to consider internally:

Are all staff, or just selected staff, part of the skills improvement program?

What does the program look like?

Is it re-prioritized during the year?

How do you assess the value it is contributing to the business?

As it relates to technical, personal, and business skills:

- How do you define what skills are needed?
- How do you record training, certification, formal education, informal education, etc.?
- Do you have role models exemplifying the desired skills?

Recommendations:

Review personal development plans for all technical staff for effectiveness. Consider implementing a formal and documented system for the identification of skill needs (in all aspects of the business) to meet the business projections. Have a formal system of appraisal; review against business plans; with a structured plan; budgets and commitment to staff development. Maintain evidence that training, skill development, and outcomes are assessed then improved as required.

Identify Critical Technical Skills. This is knowledge of the key competencies the business needs in terms of technical skills. The optimum mix of generic- and product-specific skills needed is clearly identified.

Identify Critical Personal Skills. Staff communicating effectively with clients. This is essential as people buy from people they like and respect. They look for flexibility with minimum risk, and identify the business/people they believe will deliver it for them.

Identify Critical Business Skills. Understanding how to collaborate across functional boundaries. It takes a while for people to get a full understanding of how IT may affect them – particularly grasping any necessary IT jargon. Avoid misunderstandings when possible.

Don't forget to take notes!

APPRAISAL SYSTEMS – Have a system of appraisal and performance for staff.

Staff understands their goals and how they will be measured. Time to set and review objectives while rewarding achievements accordingly that are embedded within the execution of the business plan; as long as they do not become a seemingly optional extra.

Questions to consider internally:

What is your staff appraisal process?

How regularly do you carry out appraisals?

What do your staff think about the appraisal system?

What evidence do you have that the system has made a real contribution to the business?

Recommendations:

Have a method to track basic improvements in performance so that they're recognized and documented. For further improvement, personal development plans for all staff are reviewed for effectiveness. The effectiveness of learning is measured through job targets, standards of workmanship, and the speed that a job can be completed in.

Personal goals could be items like:

- Gaining a broader knowledge of IT.
- Improve optimization of installations.
- Establish secure transfer of data from static product X to mobile product Y.
- Implement an upgrade to clients still using an old version of the product.
- Centralize virus checking, desktop system health checks, and software audits.
- Keep the business' asset register up to date.
- Develop prospects and resulting projects from engagement with clients' IT.
- Respond to security incidents and calls to the help desk within SLA targets.

Don't forget to take notes!

MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY – Information pertaining to the IT solution is only made available to those with a need or right to know.

Information is only disseminated when required. Ask staff, where necessary, to sign a confidentiality agreement. Show that the need to have a confidentiality agreement has been assessed for each project.

Ensures that client and project information is kept confidential.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you ensure information is released on a need-to-know basis?

When it is released, how do you protect it?

What do you do when there is a potential exposure?

What do you do when there is a real exposure?

Recommendations:

Implement a Cybersecurity Program that takes into account aspects of IT security related to the identification, protection, detection, response, and recovery of incidents. Consider the CompTIA Cybersecurity Standard, based on the NIST Cybersecurity Framework. Consider the various industry and legal compliance regulations you as well as your clients may be subject to.

A Cybersecurity Program can be made up of a series of plans and documentation, such as:

- Risk Assessment
- Incident Response Plan
- Business Continuity Plan
- Disaster Recovery Plan
- Hardware Inventory
- Network Diagram
- Service Provider List
- Data Classification Policy
- Regulatory Compliance
- Protection Communications

Don't forget to take notes!

USE CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENTS – Ensure everyone within the business (staff, partners, contractors and sub-contractors) must sign confidentiality agreements to make non-disclosure responsibilities clear.

Guard the IP of the business and confidential information about clients. This is particularly important when the business has its own software or hardware products or services.

Questions to consider internally:

What confidentiality agreements do you use?

Are they used with all staff?

How do you reinforce them?

How do you ensure they stick after people leave?

Recommendations:

Staff contracts should include confidentiality agreements. Consider how this would extend beyond their employment. Confidentiality agreements should also be in place with clients. Be able to show that the need to have a confidentiality agreement has been assessed for each project and raised where necessary.

Don't forget to take notes!

HEALTH AND SAFETY – Legal requirements are met and employees are safeguarded.

Identifying and complying with all relevant Health and Safety legislation that is pertinent to your business. Document this when required to fulfill any statutory requirements.

Questions to consider internally:

What is your Health and Safety policy?

How do you assess Healthy and Safety risks?

How do you handle incidents that arise?

What do you do to make staff aware of Health and Safety issues?

Recommendations:

Comply with all legal and industry-based health and safety regulations. For further improvement, compliance should be paired with evidence of a culture that embraces the health and safety of employees, partners, contractors, and clients.

Don't forget to take notes!

JOB DESCRIPTIONS – Recruit staff with well-thought out job specifications.

Projects may require certain skill sets. These can be transferred to job descriptions which consequently aid decisions regarding the development of existing staff or external recruitment.

Questions to consider internally:

How many people do you typically recruit each year?

How do you plan your headcount?

How do you define what you are looking for?

How do you source job applicants?

Recommendations:

Formalized job descriptions in place that are reviewed annually. Clearly defined and detailed job descriptions are split into essential as well as desirable skills. One way to demonstrate job profiling is well executed, is by pointing to minimal terminations.

Don't forget to take notes!

SCREEN APPLICANTS FOR SENSITIVE JOBS – Due diligence is ensured when sending people to work in a client's premises.

A client may have specialized security requirements. This may affect access by the business' own staff to parts of its own premises used for work pertaining to several clients. Remember to be responsive to relevant laws, regulations and ethics.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you go about screening the job applicants?

How do you assess which jobs are critical?

How do you screen applicants for critical jobs on a more selective basis?

How do you cover really sensitive jobs?

What do you do to comply with relevant laws, regulations, and ethics?

Recommendations:

Maintain information on file showing employee history. Establish evidence of decisions to screen or not based on company policy. Employ staff relevant to business area such as those you will not employ if they're at risk to client. Ask for references and follow up prior to appointment. Detail appropriate identity check/confirmation (e.g. passport/driver's license).

Don't forget to take notes!

ACTING ON CUSTOMER FEEDBACK – Ensure good communications and effective feedback.

An effective process is implemented where feedback is both responded to and acted upon.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you solicit input from your clients?

Who receives that input and analyses it?

What do you do with positive and negative input?

How do you feed the resolution back into the business?

Recommendations:

Ensure staff are aware of their objectives as they relate to the SLA. Be able to show evidence of an ongoing process of evaluating activities with documented support for major tasks. Projects are reviewed, assessed, with lessons learned once completed.

Follow processes set out in SLAs to log and promptly report to those who are authorized to do something effective about them:

- Positive and negative feedback
- Opportunities and risks to the successful operations of the business
- Problems and successes with products and services

Don't forget to take notes!

TERMINATION PROCEDURE – When people leave the business, they shall return equipment and have access rights withdrawn and transfer any knowledge.

To protect the physical and intellectual property of the business, as well as prevent sabotage or theft. This may also be required if responsibilities change.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you handle termination issues?

What external guidance do you get on termination?

How do you ensure that your property is returned before they leave?

What do you do to minimize your exposure once they have left?

Do you remind them of their commitments on confidentiality when they leave?

Recommendations:

Have a formal disciplinary process in place in line with legal requirements. Notify employees as part of their contract of employment, as appropriate. Define and publish disciplinary processes in employee handbook. Records of disciplinary actions should be recorded on personnel records. Keep an eye on performance and other job requirements. Inventories of valuable equipment are kept; time is not wasted trying to retrieve it as well as company data and information being protected while kept secure. Think about log-in sequences which should not be shared but may have been for convenience. Think about laptops, mobile devices, flash drives or expensive technical books bought with the business' money. Think about clients' information as well as hardware.

Don't forget to take notes!

CASH MANAGEMENT – Adequate funds are maintained to support the business requirements.

Matching the requirements to purchase hardware and software components with reserves, stage payments, credit facilities, etc.

Questions to consider internally:

What triggers invoice payments?

What is your average number of creditor days?

How do you handle disputes and incorrect billing?

Recommendations:

Implement a well-documented & efficient process that clearly identifies quality of invoicing. Be able to provide evidence that invoicing details are prepared in a structured way to support the project activity without additional resources being employed. Invoice should replicate PO. Have some form of electronic accounting system. Have a formal record of the client's acceptance of cost. Have good discipline on projects to ensure invoice is accurate and detailed sufficiently. Contract Terms & Conditions are agreed and maintained.

Don't forget to take notes!

COMPLIANCE TO STANDARDS – Be able to demonstrate a good track record of compliance with legal obligations, IT standards and cultural sensitivity.

Policies on legislation relevant to activities have been documented, understood, and enforced. Compliance to laws and regulations that are relevant to the business will have been achieved.

Questions to consider internally:

What legal obligations do you feel you need to comply with?

What standards do you feel you need to comply with?

How do you assess compliance with both legal obligations and standards?

How do you deal with cultural sensitivity issues: between you and your clients; between you and your employees; between the business and the community?

Recommendations:

Specifically apply the Cybersecurity Program to industry and legal compliance regulations. Maintain an auditable paper trail of compliance with privacy requirements. Refer to the CompTIA Cybersecurity Standard, based on the NIST Cybersecurity Framework for more details on the plans and documentation recommended for regulatory compliance.

Don't forget to take notes!

CONNECTED SYSTEMS – Be able to demonstrate how you integrate your business processes and systems to benefit your clients.

As a Managed IT Service Provider, end-to-end integration from client acquisition through help desk; resourcing; SLA management; knowledge management; and client management also helps reduce cost while improving client relationships.

Questions to consider internally:

How integrated are your operational processes?

What system or systems do you use to support your operations and how integrated are they?

To what extent are your processes documented?

How are your processes and procedures communicated to your staff?

How do you review and update your processes?

What access do your clients have to your system(s)?

Recommendations:

Incorporate as much automation and interconnected systems as possible.

- Help desk
- Resource/dispatch scheduling
- Service level management (including installed products and subscriptions)
- Job/project management
- Knowledge management
- Client relationship management

You need to work in a joined-up manner to ensure that you work efficiently and effectively, while also providing clients with the best possible service and information. This means ensuring that you have processes and systems that integrate key diagnostic, help desk, scheduling, service management, client management in addition to financial activities. For example, is there a fully integrated computer system with the same User Interface to prevent rekeying or manual integration?

Don't forget to take notes!

SOFTWARE AUTHOR RELATIONSHIP – Be able to show you maintain successful third party software author relationships to benefit your clients.

Where selling third party software tools, ensure you have complied with all your obligations and responsibilities under the terms and spirit of any Reseller or Developer agreement with the software author.

Questions to consider internally:

Do you comply with all your obligations and responsibilities under the terms and spirit of any Reseller or Developer agreement with the software author(s)?

How do you remain up-to-date with new developments and products?

What account management relationships are in place?

If providing open source solutions, how do you remain actively aware of issues and developments?

Recommendations:

When selling third party software tools, ensure you have a Reseller or Developer Agreement with the software author and that you comply with all obligations and responsibilities under the terms in addition to the spirit of it. Attend User groups/annual conferences held by the software author and subscribe to all relevant newsletters, publications, forum, and knowledge bases. If providing open source tools, ensure that you are actively aware of issues and developments. Consider having a dedicated account manager at the Supplier. Ensure staff has received full product training and are qualified to sell, develop, etc.

Don't forget to take notes!

Category 5

Business Direction

This section is all about your business planning process. Not to worry, this is not an exercise in which we will be going through your business plan line-by-line and nit-picking the detail. What we are looking for is the way in which you establish your overall business direction, set your targets, and assess your progress in achieving your plan. There is one other important area: how you translate the plan down into meaningful goals for your staff.

BUSINESS PLANNING AND CONTINUITY – Aspirations and objectives are planned and understood.

Maintain an up-to-date plan setting out clearly defined objectives with contingency measures to minimize the effects of unexpected and unplanned disruptions.

Questions to consider internally:

What is your business planning horizon?

Who is involved in the plan?

What period is covered by the plan?

How does it link into your business operation?

Have you found it useful to have a plan?

Recommendations:

Document and maintain a plan that determines competency and headcount requirements. Consider an exit strategy, if appropriate. For further improvement, maintain evidence of business plans, and mission statement being communicated to all. Individual objectives are monitored through appraisals.

Don't forget to take notes!

RE-USE – Be able to show how you identify and re-use common elements within your business to reduce risk.

Use proven steps, processes, and templates helps to minimize the risk to projects. Wherever possible develop, to use standard project plans or sections of plans, specification, and job control sheets that you know work. Where you have developed software components/ frameworks, seek to maintain libraries, and re-use them where possible.

Questions to consider internally:

What is your approach to using standard documents, procedures, and templates?

To what extent do you maintain a configuration management system?

How is the availability of reusable components communicated to staff?

What standards do you have in place for document formats?

What revision controls do you have in place?

How far are standard components managed and changed in alignment to a project management methodology?

How do you file as well as store your standard documents, procedures, and templates?

Recommendations:

Maintain a configuration management system. Wherever possible, develop and use standard project plans or sections of plans, specification and job control sheets that you know work. Ensure all forms and templates are approved, communicated to, and used by all staff. Document revision controls are in place. For further improvement, consider an electronic document management system, knowledge base or intranet, etc. Produce any templates to corporate style guidelines. Assign responsibility for managing and updating re-useable items and templates.

Consider reuse and agility as an approach that ensures you are able to adapt to change, implement new technology when it is available, and maintain your service level to clients while implementing that change.

Don't forget to take notes!

AGILITY/RESILIENCE – Ensure the number of change requests does not exceed the need to innovate.

A business has a structured approach to recognizing and implementing the need to innovate. Be aware of situations in which a major change would avoid a series of slower step changes. Fundamental objectives are fixed with a degree of flexibility for the component objectives that comprise them.

Questions to consider internally:

How rapidly can you adapt to change?

How readily can you adapt your systems and your people?

When you implement change, how do you maintain the resilience aspects of your business?

What do you do about business continuity?

Recommendations:

If the business is receiving too many requests for change it may have failed to capture the client's requirements adequately. Monitor against the business plan and be aware of instances where clients are not carrying out their obligations. Have the commercial acumen and honesty to review whether a venture is showing ROI. Be able to communicate to clients the impact of requests when they are beyond the standing objectives. For further improvement, be able to show evidence that business planning is supported by professional advice, information, and guidance on ROI issues. For major technological investments, be able to show evidence that a clear business case has been produced.

Don't forget to take notes!

OPERATIONAL REVIEWS – To make sure that the business works effectively in its day-to-day activities.

Ensure that the business is following best practice to achieve its objectives. Staff know what they are meant to be doing to contribute to the successful realization of the business plan. Maintain useful records of what has been done and who it has been done for.

Questions to consider internally:

How do you carry out operational reviews?

What aspects of the business do you assess?

Who do you involve in the review process?

How do you capture the outcomes of the reviews?

How do you translate the outcomes of the review into individual objectives for staff?

Recommendations:

Utilize an established framework such as this CompTIA Channel Standard to review and adjust operations. Implement a basic job management system that can be used by all those who need to. An excellent project plan and execution supported by a robust workflow with post installation evidence of conformance is one example of Operational Reviews in action.

Don't forget to take notes!

MEASUREMENTS – To control what the business is doing and be aware of its performance.

Establish a scorecard of measures that are relevant to the business so progress can be measured in terms of the business plan.

Questions to consider internally:

What key metrics/criteria do you review?

How do you assess whether there has been a significant change?

What variance analysis do you perform?

How do you record the metrics for the next review?

Recommendations:

Regularly collect basic data that is acted upon. Check profitability of jobs against time, products, and resources. Ensure your work flow includes analysis of key business metrics that monitor performance and identify critical hotspots.

Don't forget to take notes!

SELF-ASSESSMENT – To ensure good practice in IT.

Complement external assessments with regular internal assessments.

Questions to consider internally:

Do you have the time for management walkabouts?

How do you assess what is really going on?

When you spot something that you did not expect, how do you handle it?

Recommendations:

Leverage the CompTIA Channel Standards as a way to set a bar for review. Look at lessons learnt from installations - either good or bad, and apply these to future installations. Continually assess the processes and practices against industry standards; act on areas for improvements. Annually assess the processes and practices against industry standards; identify areas for improvements.

Don't forget to take notes!

CompTIA