
Guidelines for Establishing A Software Support Practice

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Abstract

Software Support and Quality Assurance processes are crucial to any user-oriented organization in any sector. While the focus of most software development firms is development work, it is important to maintain a client focused approach to ensure high customer satisfaction and increase retention rates. Establishing said processes and teams in an existing development environment can be challenging due to a multitude of reasons, this document aims to provide a framework to work off of to make the procedure less challenging.

Author Keywords

Software Support; Quality Assurance; Organizational Procedures; IT Support; Organizational Leadership; Automated Testing, Establishing Processes.

ACM Classification Keywords

K.6.5. Management of computing and information systems.

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for organizational leadership to establish a

support/quality assurance practice in an existing software development environment or in organizations being built from scratch. The document covers a wide array of topics ranging from client management to utilizing open source ticketing systems and other free tools such as GitHub for issue management across support, QA and development teams.

The document is broken down into 5 sections:

- Developing a Set of Support Procedures
- Internal Communication Management
- Client Communication Management
- Support/QA Team Management
- Picking Internal Tools and Methods for Evaluation

Problem Statement

Companies and business across all industries need a support procedure to keep clients informed and involved in the product development as well as maintenance. The focus of most companies is on the actual development of the project and maintenance often takes a backseat.

However, in applications with a growing user base it is imperative to maintain a consistent channel of communication for all kinds of support requests and hence requires a dedicated team that follows a set of procedures and processes to provide said user support.

The challenge, however, is finding a starting point in companies and firms that have been in existence without a practice of this nature. Another challenge is reallocation of available resources to dedicate to the practice.

Research Questions

Establishing a support practice can be challenging and frustrating because it adds several layers of hierarchy to organizational structure and communication methods. What considerations need to be made when establishing a support team? What values does a support team need to keep at the forefront of their practice? What communication methods work best – both internal and external? What tools have the best impact on the smooth functioning of the support practice?

Research Methods

Information Technology Solutions Center (ITSC) at the University of Cincinnati (UC) is a software development company that faced a similar challenge in 2015. The software support team was a much needed addition to the organization and started off with one part-time student worker and has since grown to a combination of more than five part-time and full-time employees.

The processes and procedures used to establish the support practice have impacted the growth of the company as well as helped streamline the communication process with clients which helped in retention and renewal of support contracts.

The support practice at the ITSC is documented and values/guidelines established in the company are documented in this paper.

Research Contributions and Significance

The methods employed at the support practice in the ITSC have been successful in supporting a user group over over 3000 people. The challenges faced by the company in establishing this system have important

takeaways that can alleviate any confusion and frustration other firms might experience when doing the same.

Support is a growing practice that is making itself indispensable in all industries. It is the reason companies like Amazon are flourishing and monopolizing the e-commerce world. A set of guidelines for beginners will have a great impact on the way the organizations grow and make support a crucial part of their companies by putting consumers first.

References

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