



Saudi Postal Service Centralizes IT Operations and Support, Enhances Service

Overview

Country or Region: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Industry: Government—Postal services

Customer Profile

Government-owned Saudi Post is the official postal service for Saudi Arabia. Established in 1961, the organization employs more than 10,000 people and owns the postal service brand Wasel.

Business Situation

Saudi Post wanted to improve its existing IT management practices to increase service reliability and meet business goals for next-generation postal services.

Solution

Saudi Post embarked on a two-year service improvement program that combined best practices from the Microsoft® Operations Framework and Microsoft Services offerings to address the most critical areas of the IT service life cycle.

Benefits

- Improved productivity by 25 percent
- Reduced operating costs
- Improved service reliability
- Aligned business and IT processes

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Dr. Usamah M. Altaf, CIO, Saudi Post

IT is business-critical for Saudi Post, an organization that relies on technology for effective and efficient delivery of high-quality and modern postal services. The IT department saw itself as a reliable service provider that met and exceeded customers' needs, and IT management knew that processes, people, and the IT service life cycle were critical to this effort. When Saudi Post unveiled a plan for its next-generation postal services, the IT department reviewed its operations to see how it could best support Saudi Post's business goals. An IT Service Management Assessment determined that the creation of a Network Operations Center would help the IT department manage, operate, monitor, and support all IT services more effectively and efficiently. Now, Saudi Post has reduced IT operations costs and improved service reliability and has an organized IT operations structure.

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Eng. Majed Al Esmail, IT General Manager, Saudi Post



Situation

Since its establishment in 1961, Saudi Post has been solely responsible for the provision of postal services for every individual, private, and public organization in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Technological innovation is a guiding tenet at Saudi Post. As one of the top government-owned technology pioneers in Saudi Arabia, Saudi Post provides an exceptional range of high-quality postal services, such as private resident mail delivery through the brand Wasel. Other electronic services include:

- My Post Online, through which customers can access Post Today, E-Bills, and Post Address Validation, and request package pick-up.
- Post Today, which customers can use to check the contents of their P.O. box or Wasel box for various kinds of mail.
- Saudi Locator on the Saudi Post portal and Locator NAV, a navigation system based on postal addresses.
- Automated Postal Services, such as Point of Sale and Postal Kiosk.
- Postal Mobile Services.
- Ability track and trace various kinds of mail.
- Postage Calculator.

Today, with more than 10,000 employees, Saudi Post is developing a blueprint for next-generation postal services in Saudi Arabia. The government service plans to deliver business transformation through a visionary e-commerce platform and service-centric model that connects the organization, its customers, and potential partners. Saudi Post expects that the new system will not only provide high-quality postal services at reduced costs but also promote collaboration and deliver many socioeconomic benefits to the kingdom. To meet Saudi Post's goals for technologically advanced postal services,

the postal service's IT management knew it needed to examine the processes, people and IT service life cycle to identify ways to improve service reliability and productivity.

Solution

The journey began in May 2008, when Microsoft® Services Premier Operations Consulting conducted an IT Service Management Assessment (SMA) of Saudi Post's most critical IT service and process areas. The SMA addressed the IT life cycle, the effectiveness of the IT organizational structure and operations, and process effectiveness. The result of the assessment was a two-year Service Improvement Program (SIP) roadmap for improving service management practices and shifting IT deliverables to be more service-centric. In addition, the SIP roadmap included several integrated Information Technology Service Management (ITSM) projects to assist Saudi Post with aligning the goals of IT with the goals of the program.

Saudi Post chose Microsoft Operations Framework (MOF) as the set of best practices to adopt and adapt because MOF is simple, relevant, practical, and concise. *“We found MOF very helpful in establishing the NOC and overcoming challenges. MOF helped us create the right team structure, clear roles and responsibilities for every team member, the right mission for the NOC, and the right processes for systems and applications for the production environment,”* says Dr. Usamah M. Altaf, Chief Information Officer at Saudi Post.

In July 2008, Saudi Post started work on projects outlined in the SIP roadmap. Abdullah M. Qashish, Systems &

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Applications Director at Saudi Post, led the SIP.

Introduction to MOF

The first activity of the program was to introduce the Microsoft Operations Framework to employees in the IT department. This paved the way for IT personnel to learn about the concept of IT Service Management (ITSM) and why there was need for change. A combination of the MOF 4.0 Foundations workshop and the Managing Change, Configuration, and Risk Advanced workshop were provided in four sessions to several groups based on the planned project needs. “McKinley Airport” simulations supported the sessions by delivering ITSM concepts and providing real-life scenarios. The classes helped people see how processes could be improved and repeated.

Creation of the Network Operations Center

Establishing the Network Operations Center (NOC) was a business requirement that evolved during the early days of the SIP program. The Saudi Post Data Center was run on a “best effort” basis by the Systems and Applications department. To centralize IT operations and support and free up the Systems and Applications department, establishing the NOC became a key step in Saudi Post’s IT improvement strategy. Sultan Al-Omar, Networking Department Director at Saudi Post, led the effort.

“We envision proactively preventing 80 percent of major IT service failures and resolving any issues within 24 hours, if they happen,” says Engineer Majed Al Esmail, IT General Manager at Saudi Post. This can only be achieved by operating and supporting NOC systems as “services” in a predictable, repeatable,

stable, and proactive computing environment with clear accountabilities and responsibilities.

The Microsoft Operations Framework (MOF) 4.0 Operations Service Monitoring and Control, Team, and Reliability SMFs and the related Operational Health Management Review were customized to establish the NOC services operation and support model and processes. Additionally, a custom Roles and Knowledge Management (RKM) service offering was employed to form the most optimized team structure, to share an approach for identifying the required ongoing work for all accepted systems, and to provide a platform with which NOC staff could log their activities, measure their efficiency, and measure NOC capacity. Finally, an Enterprise Service Map was created to show the dependencies between services.

The NOC is now seen as the heart of IT, operating and supporting the most critical systems at Saudi Post. It is also positioned as the second line of support, after the Service Desk. Incidents and problems are escalated to other departments only when dealing with complex problems that may require changes. Further, IT Service Management roles have been customized to fit and combined according to the organizational needs at Saudi Post.

Service Acceptance and Operation

To ensure the effective transition and operation of IT systems and applications in a production environment, every IT service must go through two key processes, Service Acceptance and Service Operations. Based on the Release Readiness Management Review (MR) in MOF, the Service Acceptance project plan template was designed to assess

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existing services in other departments for transition to NOC.

During the “Service Acceptance” process, IT management identifies required tasks, including duration estimates, frequencies, and roles, to estimate staff utilization. This process helps calculate the current and future capacity of the NOC and exposes hiring requirements. Once a service has been accepted, the service shifts to Service Operation, which is based on the MOF Operate Phase, to evaluate the value of the service.

Once services are in production, Service Review Meetings, based on the MOF Operational Health MR, help make the state of services in production transparent to all service teams. An Operations Management Portal (OMP), created as part of the custom RKM service offering, acts as the central repository for all service operational tasks and documentation. The majority of the NOC combined practices are implemented using the OMP. Finally, the NOC Dashboard shows ongoing operational activities. Some key goal indicators (KGIs) and key performance indicators (KPIs) have been created to serve the overall vision to help make the NOC a reality. These are communicated as part of the agreed-on reporting schedule to Service Owners and to the IT General Manager.

“It is the moment of truth when we see the IT Service Management practices applied at Saudi Post in reality. MOF has helped us establish a true service desk center and a professional data center,” says Mohammed Swyena, Service Desk and NOC Director at Saudi Post.

Benefits

The MOF SIP program has made a positive impact on the most tangible business services of Saudi Post. This includes the higher reliability and availability of IT services that support Saudi Post business processes and cost reduction due to streamlined operations and more efficient staff utilization.

“When we made the decision to implement SIP, we envisioned a highly available, more reliable, and service-oriented environment. That vision has now become reality,” says Qashish.

Reduced Operating Costs

IT operations now perform more effectively because the department can handle a heavier workload and duplicate tasks have been eliminated. This streamlined process has significantly reduced expenditures. In addition, the Service Acceptance process has helped management more accurately perform resource estimation and has reduced service outages, all of which help cut support costs.

Increased Productivity

With the MOF Team and Operations Service Management Functions (SMF), Operations Management Portal, and the Service Desk tool, IT management can measure the work level of their staff, which has led to more efficient staff utilization and a 25 percent increase in productivity. Says Anwar M. Bakhawain, NOC Manager at Saudi Post, *“We had an absolutely positive experience with how MOF helped us define a clear vision for the NOC, run the show as a service, and articulate roles and responsibilities clearly.”*

Improved Service Reliability

By identifying and performing regular preventive maintenance and by adding

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advanced monitoring tools, the IT department at Saudi Post has been able to reduce downtime.

Aligned Business and IT Processes

With an Enterprise Service Map, Saudi Post has bridged the gap between business processes and the IT services supporting them to help provide a traceable route between the two.

More Value from IT Documentation

The RKM service offering has helped improve knowledge sharing through the use of the Operations Management Portal to make documentation easier to locate and to improve document control.

Organized and Structured Operations

The Service Acceptance process provided IT personnel with a better understanding of service components and service operations guides, as well as operational and monitoring requirements. *“The NOC Continual Service Improvement Plan was designed in such a way that allows Saudi Post culture to gradually absorb these Service and Measurement culture changes,”* says Khalid Hakim, Senior IT Operations Consultant at Microsoft.

As a result, a services-based team was established with clear responsibilities to better manage services. Further, KPIs help drive continual service improvement throughout the organization.

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Microsoft Operations Framework

Microsoft Operations Framework (MOF) 4.0 provides relevant, practical, and accessible guidance for today's IT pros. MOF strives to seamlessly blend business and IT goals while establishing and implementing reliable, cost-effective IT services.

For more information about the Microsoft Operations Framework, go to:

www.microsoft.com/mof

Software and Services

- Microsoft Operations Framework
 - Operate Phase (with Management Review)
 - Deliver Phase (with Management Review)
 - Team SMF
 - Change and Configuration SMF
 - Business/IT Alignment SMF
 - Reliability SMF
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 - Service Management Assessment (SMA)
 - Software Update Management (SUM)
 - Roles and Knowledge Management (RKM)
 - Service Level Management (SLM)
 - Service Mapping (SMAP)