


K-12 IT SUPPORT PLAYBOOK

Practical Ways to Reduce the Strain on IT Support Teams in K-12 Districts



An orange brushstroke graphic that tapers from left to right, serving as a background for the title text.

Improving Efficiency in K-12 IT Help Desk Operations

It's no secret that most K-12 technology departments are stretched thin these days – and it is equally evident that this is not going to change anytime soon.

So how can IT Leaders across K-12 alleviate the drain on their teams & support systems?

- 1. Deploy a Stellar Portal** – for students, parents, teachers, and staff. This should be a district wide portal with information and request management for every group – from IT to requests for meetings and more – all on one platform.
- 2. Bolster the Knowledge Base** – use crowdsourcing to enhance the content in the knowledge base so that technicians can resolve issues faster, and end-users can be more efficient at self-service.
- 3. Adopt True ITSM** – IT teams need technology as much as the end-users; you simply cannot do proper IT support if you are missing key components such as asset discovery & management, change management, and SLA tracking. These are all elements of the ITIL framework. Adoption can be slow – but without a plan, you will never get there.

This playbook will teach you how to get this off the ground; it is easier than it may look!

IT MATURITY IMPROVES SERVICE FOR ALASKA'S MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Like most K-12 school systems, Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District finds funding to be a constant struggle.

The district's IT department, which consists of 32 full-time staff members, must support nearly 14,000 devices used by 18,800 students and approximately 2,200 staff in 47 schools and three additional facilities spread across a geographic area the size of West Virginia. This task would be nearly impossible without improving the maturity of its IT management. But with the help of certain tools and processes, Senior IT Program Manager Justin Michaud and his colleagues are delivering more value to the district—while adopting a “customer-focused” mindset.

For instance, the district uses a self-service portal and knowledge base hosted by TeamDynamix, which allows users to resolve many of their own IT issues—such as resetting their network password.

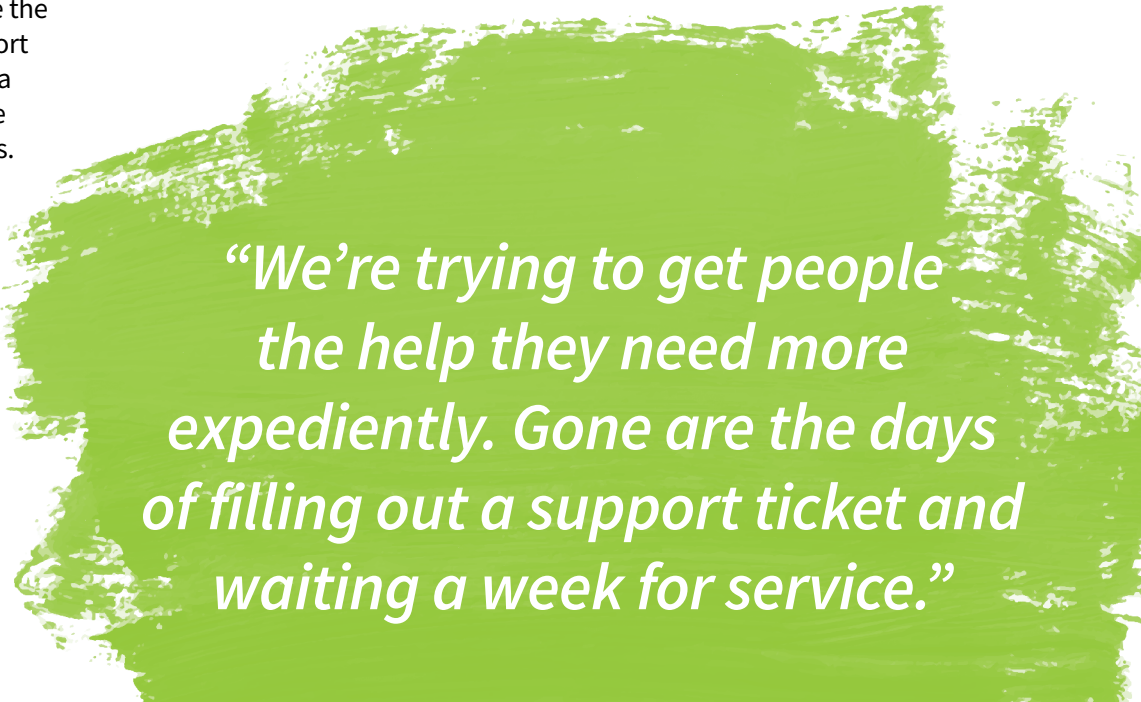
Students and staff can search the district's knowledge base for articles or advice pertaining to their question. “We have made it easy for end users to find what they are looking for,” says Michaud. “We're trying to get people the help they need more expediently. Gone are the days of filling out a support ticket and waiting a week for service.” Matanuska-Susitna has identified a “digital first responder” (DFR) in each school. These are teachers who are paid a stipend to help resolve issues that users can't solve for themselves. If the DFR can't fix the problem, then it gets escalated to an IT support employee.

The TeamDynamix platform helps IT staff keep track of which service requests are still open, so no request falls through the cracks. It also provides valuable metrics that help IT leaders measure their success in resolving issues, so they can set goals for continuous improvement.

“If we're not meeting our service level targets, it jumps out at us now,” Michaud says. Having the ability to measure success has helped the district's IT department reduce how long it takes to respond to IT problems.

In moving toward a more mature approach to IT management, Michaud and his colleagues now project costs and manage projects more effectively. In addition, IT staff closely monitor software usage to see if they should renew contracts as they expire. “You need tools in place to help you make those decisions,” Michaud says.

He observes: “IT maturity is not going to happen overnight. It requires process changes. The way you look at things has to change over time.”



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YOU ARE NOT ALONE: From Surviving a Pandemic to Doubling Project Efficiency, Florida Southwestern State College Shines as an Example

When the global pandemic forced U.S. colleges to shift to remote learning within a matter of days, the IT department at Florida Southwestern State College was flooded with requests from students, faculty, and staff. “There’s no way we would have survived the pandemic without TeamDynamix,” says Jason Dudley, associate vice president for information technology at the college. Many students and even some faculty members didn’t have the technology they needed for teaching and learning remotely. Florida Southwestern State’s IT team set up a technology checkout system using the IT Service Management functionality within the TeamDynamix platform, allowing students and faculty to request laptops and other necessary equipment by filling out a service ticket.

Faculty also had several questions about how to use Zoom and other applications to connect with students remotely. “We posted a number of FAQs to our TeamDynamix client portal for remote support,” Dudley says. “We started directing faculty, staff, and students to the client portal to search for answers to their questions. Self-service reduced inbound IT service requests by at least 25 percent.”

“Our tickets doubled, and yet we were able to manage them all without any issues,” Dudley says proudly. While he attributes much of this success to the professionalism of his IT staff, having a high-quality IT service management platform (ITSM) also played a critical role.

“There’s no way we would have been able to do that with any other system I’ve used before,” he says.

Eliminating Silos – Bring IT Service & Project Management Together

Florida Southwestern State’s experience with TeamDynamix actually began with the Project Portfolio Management (PPM) module in 2018, before the college added the IT Service Management component the following year.

Before acquiring TeamDynamix, “we were not very efficient at completing projects,” Dudley admits. “We approached them with more of a firefighting mentality. Whatever projects we heard the most complaints about would be the ones we would focus on.”

Each department within IT managed its own projects via spreadsheets, and there wasn’t much communication between departments. “The group responsible for managing the college’s ERP system might have been waiting on the programming group to do something, but the programming group might have had a backlog of projects,” Dudley explains. “There were a lot of silos within IT. No one really knew who was working on what.”

This made effective resource allocation very difficult. “We weren’t maximizing resources within IT to make sure we were meeting the needs of the college,” Dudley says.

Dudley tried a few other web-based project management tools but found they were lacking. “They were geared more toward businesses, and they didn’t give us the flexibility to establish the workflows and approvals we needed for a higher-education environment,” he says.

When he heard about TeamDynamix from a colleague at another Florida college, he realized it was just the solution he’d been looking for.



Full Transparency

With the TeamDynamix ITSM and PPM single platform approach, Dudley and his staff have full visibility into all project work as well as tickets, incidents, and problems. All work can be viewed in one place and resources allocation across this work is in one place. In his words, IT projects no longer disappear into a “black hole”; instead, there is full transparency.

College personnel can submit project requests through the TeamDynamix client portal. Dudley and his staff have created a scoring system within the platform that helps college leaders understand how mission-critical a project is. This gives them a formal project intake framework that can be leveraged in high level stakeholder discussions.

“I meet with the other vice presidents on campus quarterly,” he says. “I provide them with the list of projects that have been submitted through TeamDynamix, along with a scorecard for these projects, and we use this scorecard as one of the driving factors in making decisions as a team about which projects we should move forward on and in what order of priority.”

Since implementing TeamDynamix, “we’ve become much more efficient at completing projects,” Dudley notes. “Our project completion time has stayed consistent; however, we’re now able to complete twice as many projects in the same time frame. In our most recent analysis, we showed a 60-percent increase in the number of projects we completed over a six-month period.”

One reason for this increased efficiency is that Dudley and his colleagues can allocate IT resources more strategically. “Now, we can see who’s working on what,” he says. “When we get a new project request, we can allocate resources that might be idle to get that project moving.”

Service Management Across Campus

“From an ITSM perspective, we had been using an outdated system that was not user-friendly and had lots of limitations in what it could do for us,” Dudley says. “There was no user portal or knowledge base, and users couldn’t find information that would allow for self-service.”

As the college’s experience in moving to remote learning demonstrated, having a robust IT service management solution has greatly improved staff efficiency — and this is true not just within IT, but in other areas as well. “We’re expanding its use as a service management tool in other departments,” Dudley says. “For instance, our student services team has created an inquiry form in which questions from students are submitted as service tickets and then routed automatically to the appropriate department for a response.”

What’s more, being able to view and manage both IT projects and service requests within the same application has proven to be very useful.

“Now, we don’t have to go into multiple systems to get data,” Dudley indicates. “We have created a one-stop shop not only for end users, but also for technicians. Everything is visible in one application. With some of the automated communications available, we can talk to each other within TeamDynamix without having to communicate through email where a message might be missed.”

He concludes: “To me, that’s huge. Communication is so important, but it can be challenging to keep everyone on the same page. We have an easy way of doing that now, and it has been eye-opening how much we’ve been able to accomplish. TeamDynamix allows us to meet the needs of the college more effectively.”



CREATE A STELLAR END-USER PORTAL

Understanding the core elements of a stellar end-user portal are critical – equally so is finding the right platform to easily spin up and deploy this portal without any coding or scripting.

WHAT MAKES A STELLAR PORTAL?

- ✓ Easy to navigate
- ✓ Highly indexed content
- ✓ Quicklinks to most commonly used content
- ✓ Clear language
- ✓ Ability to enhance content
- ✓ Mobile
- ✓ Accessible (WCAG 2.0 AA)
- ✓ Content permissions

Does your school or district have a website where students, teachers, and administrators can find their own answers to commonly asked IT questions, as well as service catalogs and request forms for all types of IT services, from a single, convenient location? If not, then you're missing a key opportunity to reduce your service workload.

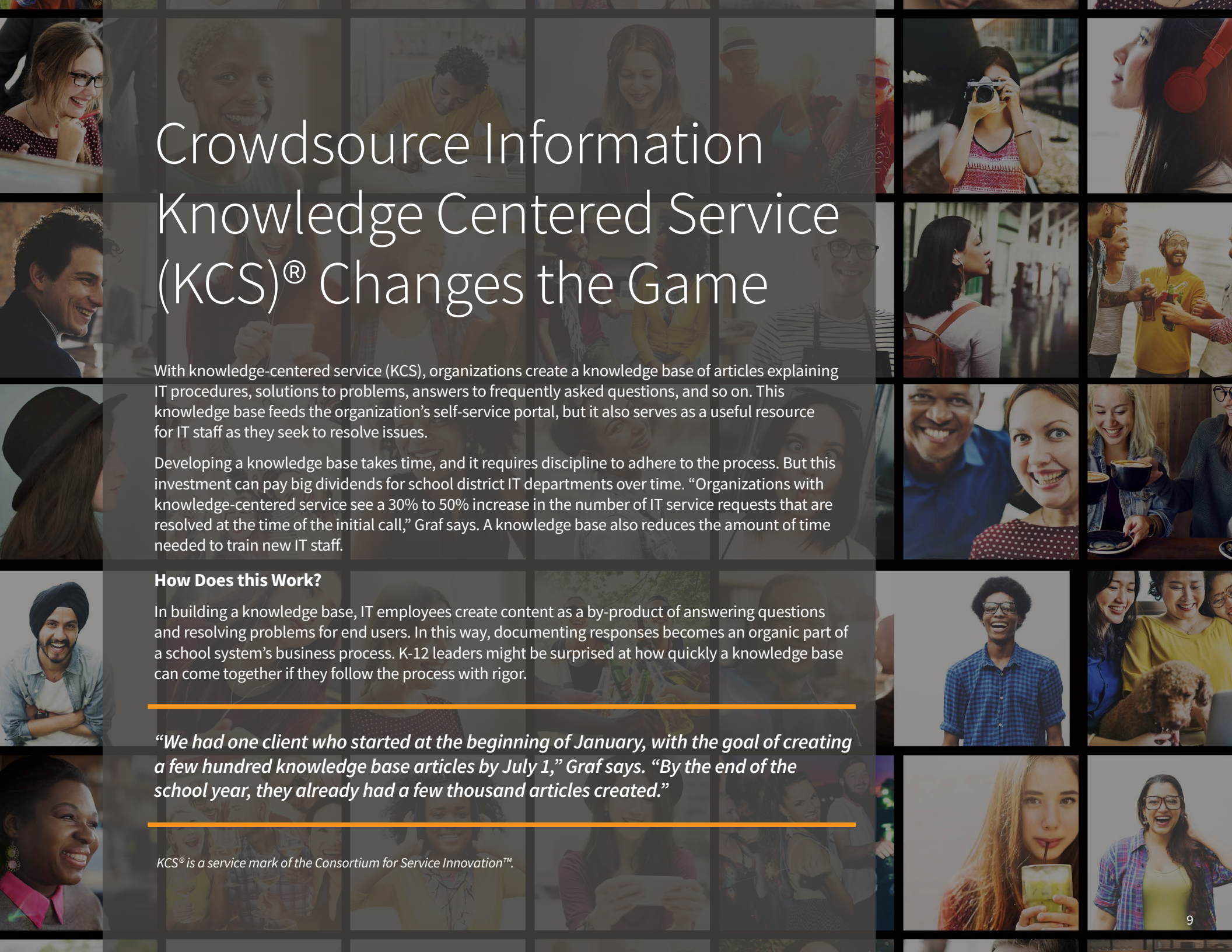
“Many IT departments end up answering the same questions over and over again,” says Andrew Graf, chief product strategist for TeamDynamix. This is very time-consuming—and it's a waste of staff labor. Having users consult a self-service portal before contacting IT with their questions can reduce inbound service requests by up to 70%, a review of TeamDynamix customer data suggests.

IT maturity is about “moving from a break-fix mentality to having the IT department become a strategic partner” in helping the district meet its goals and objectives, says Justin Michaud, senior IT program manager for Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District.

Besides freeing up IT staff to focus on other priorities, “self service empowers users. It gives them tools to do their jobs more effectively,” Michaud says.

Using a self-service portal is also less expensive than having IT staff resolve tech-related issues. An analysis from the Help Desk Institute shows that the average labor cost of a service call is \$22; for self-service resolution, it's just \$2.

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Crowdsource Information Knowledge Centered Service (KCS)[®] Changes the Game

With knowledge-centered service (KCS), organizations create a knowledge base of articles explaining IT procedures, solutions to problems, answers to frequently asked questions, and so on. This knowledge base feeds the organization's self-service portal, but it also serves as a useful resource for IT staff as they seek to resolve issues.

Developing a knowledge base takes time, and it requires discipline to adhere to the process. But this investment can pay big dividends for school district IT departments over time. "Organizations with knowledge-centered service see a 30% to 50% increase in the number of IT service requests that are resolved at the time of the initial call," Graf says. A knowledge base also reduces the amount of time needed to train new IT staff.

How Does this Work?

In building a knowledge base, IT employees create content as a by-product of answering questions and resolving problems for end users. In this way, documenting responses becomes an organic part of a school system's business process. K-12 leaders might be surprised at how quickly a knowledge base can come together if they follow the process with rigor.

"We had one client who started at the beginning of January, with the goal of creating a few hundred knowledge base articles by July 1," Graf says. "By the end of the school year, they already had a few thousand articles created."

KCS[®] is a service mark of the Consortium for Service Innovation[™].

Engage in True IT Service Management

Adopting a more mature approach to IT management can seem like a daunting undertaking. School district IT leaders can start by defining the problems they most want to solve.

“Identify problems that are easy to articulate, and then work backwards from there,” Graf recommends. “When you begin with simple problem statements, it’s easy to see what to focus on—and then you can choose the right tools and processes that will help you address these issues.”

With IT maturity, a lack of resources doesn’t have to stifle the adoption of new technologies for teaching and learning. By optimizing their use of resources, K-12 IT departments can “spend less time on the tasks they are doing now, which frees them up to do many new things,” Graf concludes.

One Platform Can Take You There...

- ✓ Self-Service Portal with Request Routing
- ✓ Embedded Knowledge Base with Crowdsourced Content
- ✓ Ticketing Workflow / Automation
- ✓ Change Management
- ✓ Asset Discovery & Management
- ✓ Integrated Project Portfolio Management



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