

BEST PRACTICES



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Key Tenets In Service Desk Organization Redesign

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The growing movement to improve IT service delivery and support has led many companies to rethink the structure and composition of their service desks. When planning such a reorganization, IT management must keep in mind that customers of the support organization do not have technology problems, they have business problems. The technology is merely a tool that these users need to use to accomplish a business task. With this in mind, the result is a set of basic principles that should guide organizational design and planning.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Chief information officer, IT operations/engineering professional

ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN MUST BE USER-CENTRIC

Help desk or service desk organizations grow and evolve organically over time as specific needs emerge and different groups within IT and the business respond. As a result, many organizations find themselves with multiple, potentially redundant support organizations with suboptimal structures and processes. Concurrent with any service desk process improvement program, an evaluation of the organization's structure should occur. During this evaluation and any subsequent reorganization, IT management should strive to:

- **Flatten the organization.** Check your organization chart. Envision support scenarios requiring communication and allocation of resources outside of the service desk, and see how high in the organizational chart you have to go to find a common point of contact between the service desk and the resources required to fix or change the relevant systems.

For example, an organization may have key business systems developed, hosted, and supported by a US-based development organization. However, each international service desk may report through a local country operations manager who in turn reports to a vice president of a larger geographic region. As a result, the lowest common point of management between the local support and the IT applications developers could easily be the chief operating officer of the corporation. Such an organizational structure jeopardizes the satisfaction of non-US-based users. Without the ability to reorganize across these geographies, ensure that escalation paths and expected responses are clear and mutually agreed upon by all parties.

- **Combine all resources required to support the desktop technology stack.** When possible, a single support organization should maintain the resources required to resolve issues, whether hardware- or software-related. In this structure, overall first contact resolution rates will rise, time to resolution will fall, and there will be less bouncing of issues between groups without end-to-end accountability.

Many organizations have separate groups providing telephone support and hardware support. In these organizations, a technical support issue is typically initiated by phone to the service desk where an attempt is made to diagnose and resolve the issue. However, if it appears that a desk-side visit is required, the trouble ticket is routed to a separate desktop hardware support group that will dispatch a technician to deal with the issue. During this time, the end user is not able to perform required tasks. In organizations with such segregations of resources, up to 30% of tickets routed to the field support organization could likely have been resolved remotely, thereby decreasing costs and resolution times.¹ However, organizations that combine their phone and field support groups in an organization that was previously segregated into phone support and hardware technicians may be forced to deal with the perception by a subset of the technicians that they are being “demoted” by becoming attached to the help desk.

- **Centralize management of the entire support organization.** As should be clear from the previous two points, having a management structure that spans as much of the global support organization as possible is preferred. With such a structure, communications lines are streamlined, a single group is responsible for the end-to-end user experience and metrics, and resources can be better allocated to meet needs as they ebb and flow.
- **Decentralize support resources to personalize support services.** Although a single, centrally located support organization may provide ease of management and reduce service desk technical infrastructure, co-locating support resources with business users in those locations where there is a sufficiently large nexus of employees will improve satisfaction with the support organization. Any tradeoffs in internal communication will be offset by increased awareness of the business context of a support issue, as well as encouraging the users to engage with the support organization rather than attempting to resolve technical issues themselves.

When organizations are overly reliant on centralized resources, this leads to the blossoming of multiple support organizations outside of IT. Remote users, feeling that the centralized support organization is not responsive to their needs, establish their own technical support group. While solving this tactical problem, the creation of these additional groups leads to less efficient resource usage, reduced knowledge sharing, and fragmented knowledge of the organizationwide picture of support costs.

- **Expose the economics of any IT-centric choice to the user community.** Choices made for political or technical expediency that do not improve the user experience should only be made when the cost of such changes are prohibitive in relation to any potential service improvements. In such cases, the economic justification for these decisions should be exposed, allowing the customer community to better understand that such decisions were made on the basis of an overarching corporate imperative, rather than a lack of IT responsiveness.

The importance of such transparency became clear when one organization renegotiated its contract with an outside service provider changing the service-level objectives for hardware support from 4 hours to 48 hours. At this large organization, IT estimated that such a change would save the company about \$40 million over four years. Exposing the economics of the change ameliorated the impact of this change and prompted some groups to “depot” a backup PC for use during a potentially extended outage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

USE AN ORGANIZATION REDESIGN TO REINFORCE SERVICE VALUES

Rather than use any reorganization or redesign to streamline internal processes, such an event can become the catalyst for improved IT services and an increased perception of IT responsiveness and alignment. When considering organizational redesign, remember that:

- **The service desk should be just that.** Improving service should be the guiding principle for all changes. Potential improvements must be evaluated from the customers’ perspective rather than IT’s.
- **One model may not be appropriate for all of the organization.** Specialized groups, whether their needs are for higher service levels (such as on a trading floor) or lower allocated costs (such as within a high-volume, low-margin business unit), may require different choices for organization design.
- **Successful organization redesign requires a personal touch.** Any time that groups reorganize; there will be perceived “winners” and “losers.” Blanket statements and pronouncements do not take the place of personal contact, personal career planning and counseling, and open communications. Remember that a few dissatisfied malcontents can torpedo the best laid plans.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ It should be clear that dispatching a technician who spends 45 minutes visiting the user and resolving the user’s problem is three to four times more costly than having a remote technician spend an additional 10 to 15 minutes on the phone using diagnostic and remote resolution tools. Likewise, as this same field technician may not be able to visit the user’s desktop for some number of hours or days, user productivity will greatly suffer.

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