Creating an L2 Support Organization for Future-Ready IT Teams

Building capabilities for operational excellence

bmc

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Executive Summary

Across the globe, the last two decades have all been about disruption. A plethora of innovations and advancements have brought radical changes in the way companies and departments work. Similarly, for enterprises and management—the opportunities, challenges, and competition have increased by multitudes. A robust IT organization is imperative to successfully run an enterprise ecosystem.

Given the fact that customer satisfaction steers businesses across the globe, the story is no different for IT. It is no-brainer that IT teams must be swift and agile to support customer needs. Plus, it has become critical for IT teams to exhibit new thought processes to bring in significant ROI as part of riding the technology wave in the industry. For IT leaders, constantly striking a balance between engineering and operations within a given set of resources and tight budgets remains a challenge. A little imbalance of focus between the two not only impacts the turnaround time for the value delivery but also creates disruption in the operations.

The IT leadership at BMC recognized the need to transform how it leverages its resources and that this transformation would be a multi-year journey. It started working on strategies to change its operations for an enhanced experience. This included enabling the latest technologies, empowering the employees with the power of digital acceleration and bringing in a strategic change in the organization structure. Together these paved ways for creating a unique experience, which would allow IT teams to align with respective business units for focused deliverables.
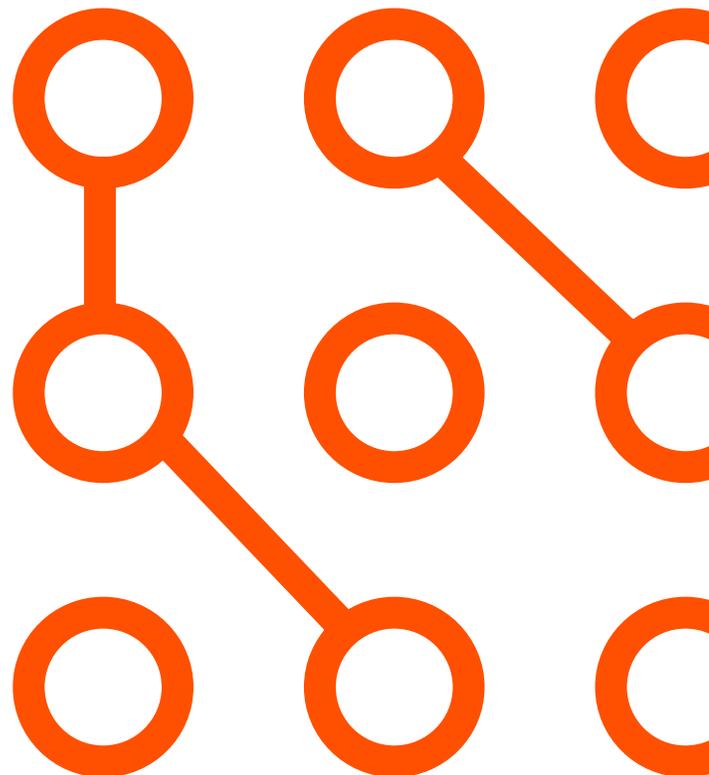
Thus the concept of an L2 Services Organization was conceived.

Now in its third year, the success of a dedicated L2 services organization at BMC IT speaks of its accomplishments including a remarkable set of workload optimizations, greater ROI, and building cognitive capabilities. This move, while creating a clear career progression path for the L2 employees, has also been instrumental in generating a technology rich pipeline for various engineering and architect teams within IT to address the need to hire new staff. This talent pipeline is now engrained in the culture of the organization that has started delivering results faster.

This white paper encapsulates the journey of creating an L2 organization within BMC IT, a journey that has delivered more focused operations to efficiently run the business, while allowing us to reinvent how we deliver services through automation and innovation. It provides insight into the timelines and various strategies adopted in building an efficient L2 organization, which works like an engine, fosters a culture of passion and constant learning, and embraces digital disruptions as it moves forward.

In this paper, you'll learn:

- What an L2 Organization means to BMC IT
- The process of creating an L2 Services Organization
- Achieving workload optimization through segmentation
- Building a career path across the IT organization
- Achieving operational excellence in the workplace
- Creating a culture of passion, learning, and going beyond support services

Looking at the Bigger Picture

Enterprises typically see their IT organizations as cost centers that address business needs reactively, while at the same time expecting IT leaders to introduce innovative cost-saving tools within tight budgets. Hence, IT leaders work relentlessly to reduce the operational costs and invest their skills in more valuable projects that can transform the user experience.

In a typical IT organization, the teams are segregated under operations and engineering verticals that are distinguished based on their core technology expertise and job responsibilities. While L1 is mostly acting as a frontline service desk, the development or the engineering team also offers regular support (L2 requests), maintenance, and capital projects simultaneously.

However, regularly using the skilled staff of a development organization for support requirements is certainly not an optimized structure.

This evaluation led to the outset of creating an L2 support organization, which would be a dedicated support arm of the BMC IT organization and was to be a part of the core operational group in addition to existing NOC and Service Desk. This included a lot of thought processes around repurposing resources, streamlining responsibilities, and creating a more focused group. Looking back, this new organization structure has truly proved to be instrumental in changing the perception of IT at BMC from being a cost center to a value driving center.

Institutionalizing an L2 support organization at BMC IT can be attributed to the following goals, which typically are points of considerations for most IT organizations.

Eliminate organizational overlaps and establishing better alignment with business

Increase accountability across IT

Deliver incremental customer value in 30/60/90 day windows

What an L2 Organization means to BMC IT

On a routine business day, the predominant goal of support services is to offer swift resolution to requests and prevent Service Level Agreement (SLA) violations, thereby providing great customer satisfaction and faster MTTR. But, for long term effectiveness, it is important to classify the repetitive and mundane activities for business users and take them to level 0, which could either be through automation or by retiring such activities completely. At BMC IT, besides being a focused support group, the L2 team contributed remarkably by listening to customers more closely. This helped in bringing good operational innovations to the table in the form of automation as well as by enabling novel technologies for simplification. The result is a well-aligned, focused support service organization made up of:

- **L1 - Service desk**: Delivering excellent frontline support to all BMC.
- **L2 - Dedicated support arm for complex support issues**: Working under corrective, preventive, perfective, and adaptive approaches.
- **L2 - End-user client service**: Provisioning and supporting end-user devices and technology boosting employee productivity.
- **NOC**: Minimizing outage time and facilitating crisis calls for faster resolution.

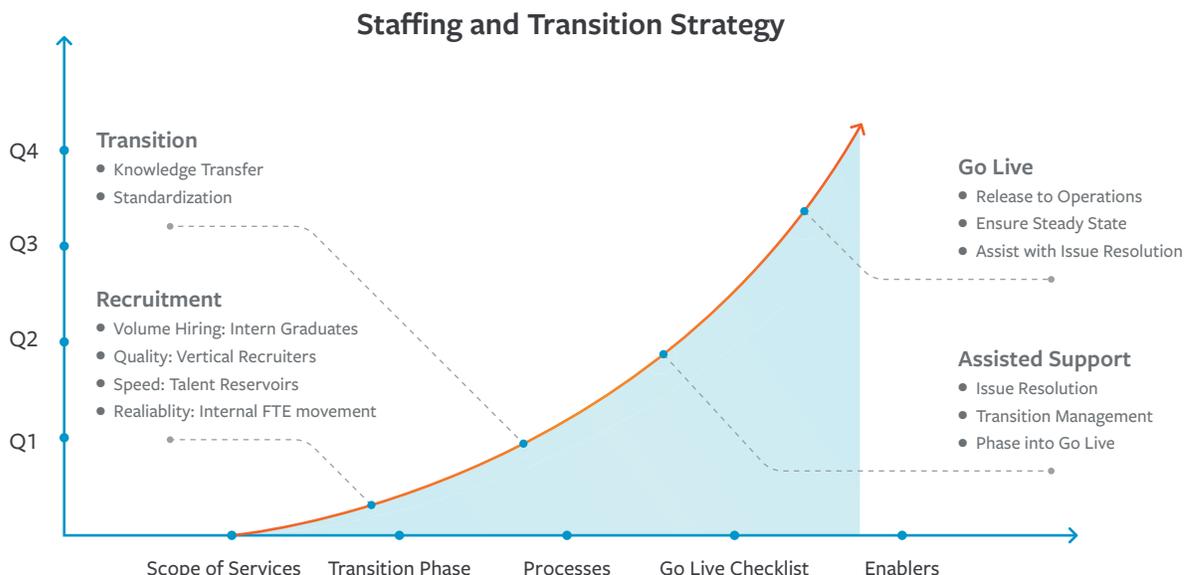# Process of creating an L2 Services Organization

For any strategic move to be successful people and processes are the crucial determinants. While creating an L2 support organization at BMC IT, we took a meticulous approach towards these two elements. It took us approximately six months to build a functioning L2 organization across a single platform. This activity consisted of onboarding the right mix of talent; defining the scope of the organization; building processes around the transition management; RACI, and playbooks as well as internal checklists, which are typical for any operations.

Staffing Strategy: It is all about the extensive thought process used to create the right talent pool. The goal was not just to acquire the right skills, but to build a team of motivated professionals, who were excited about being a part of the support organization as well as inclined towards learning the newer technologies.

A deliberate resource plan was created for onboarding the talent with the right mix of interns, experienced vendor resources and internal talent, who were ready to move to be part of this new organization. This strategy spread across a complete fiscal year provided good OPEX favorability.

- **Volume Hiring**: Engineering graduates were onboarded as interns for L1 and L2 level issues depending on their caliber and skill set. The organization adopted an 'Invest to Groom' approach, where they were trained for specific business and technical knowledge required to perform their roles diligently. Based on their

Staffing and Transition Strategy

Transition
- Knowledge Transfer
- Standardization

Recruitment
- Volume Hiring: Intern Graduates
- Quality: Vertical Recruiters
- Speed: Talent Reservoirs
- Realiablity: Internal FTE movement

Go Live
- Release to Operations
- Ensure Steady State
- Assist with Issue Resolution

Assisted Support
- Issue Resolution
- Transition Management
- Phase into Go Live

Q4 | Q3 | Q2 | Q1

Scope of Services | Transition Phase | Processes | Go Live Checklist | Enablers

performance during the first two quarters and potential for the future, the star performers were converted into full-time employees. This approach gave us ample opportunity to choose the right fit from the lot.

- **Vertical Recruiters**: Skilled professionals were hired through the third-party agencies. Most of this recruitment included a 'Contract to Hire' clause, which allowed us to hire these staff as full-time employees after a specified period. This enabled us to choose the best fit after these individuals had spent considerable time supporting the business.
- **Speed and Reliability**: The existing internal pool of senior talent was tapped, which allowed an influx of experts with BMC business knowledge to enable speed and quality, which also helped in making the overall transition rapid and successful.

Transition Strategy: One of the pre-requisites to begin the transition process was to define the scope of services. The scope of services was designed with a focus around corrective, preventive, perfective as well as adaptive activities.

- **Knowledge Transfer**: Using the existing knowledge articles to start with, the teams were also involved in creating extensive knowledge repositories leveraging and updating the existing playbook to the latest state.
- **Standardization**: Creating knowledge champions on different platforms helped ensure that a regular cadence was maintained for creating and updating the articles.
- **Access**: Application and instance access based on profiles was enabled to deliver support efficiently.

Assisted Support: This was a period of shadow support from the Development/L3 organization, where the processes around rolling to production instance and unfolding to operations were set up. This was about ensuring:

- Monitoring for performance and availability has been set up for the applications
- The ticketing system has been updated/created with the right queues to absorb the influx of support requests
- Proper handshake established between L1, L2 & L3
- Reporting cadence setup

Go-Live: Finally, this period was about ensuring the go-live checklist was met, that there was steady state, and assistance with support resolution.

Achieving workload optimization through segmentation

With the L2 support organization live, workload optimization was the next major goal to achieve. Each hour contributed by L2 contributed to the efficiency of L3 teams. Thousands of hours were saved in different segments, which translated into greater bandwidth for capital projects.

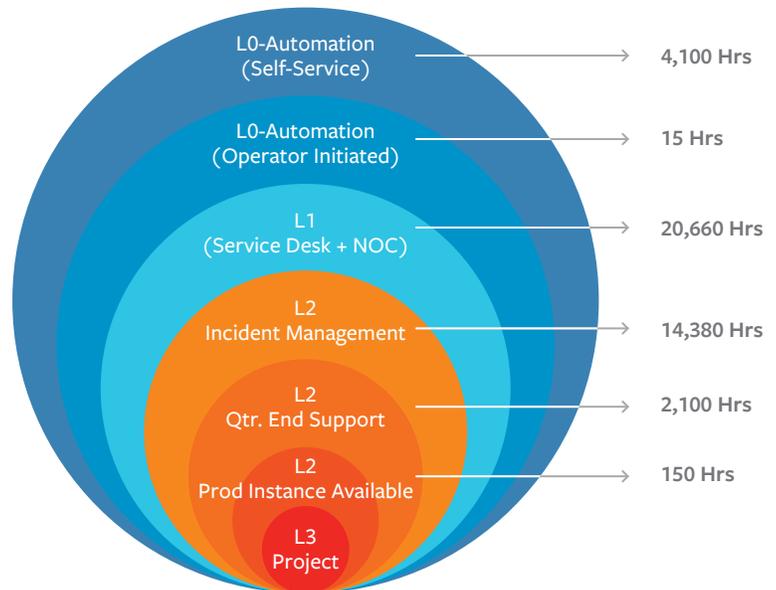Segregation of roles and responsibilities within Operations and Engineering created a whole new efficient system, where it was easy to identify training needs, train employees in pockets and reskill as required.
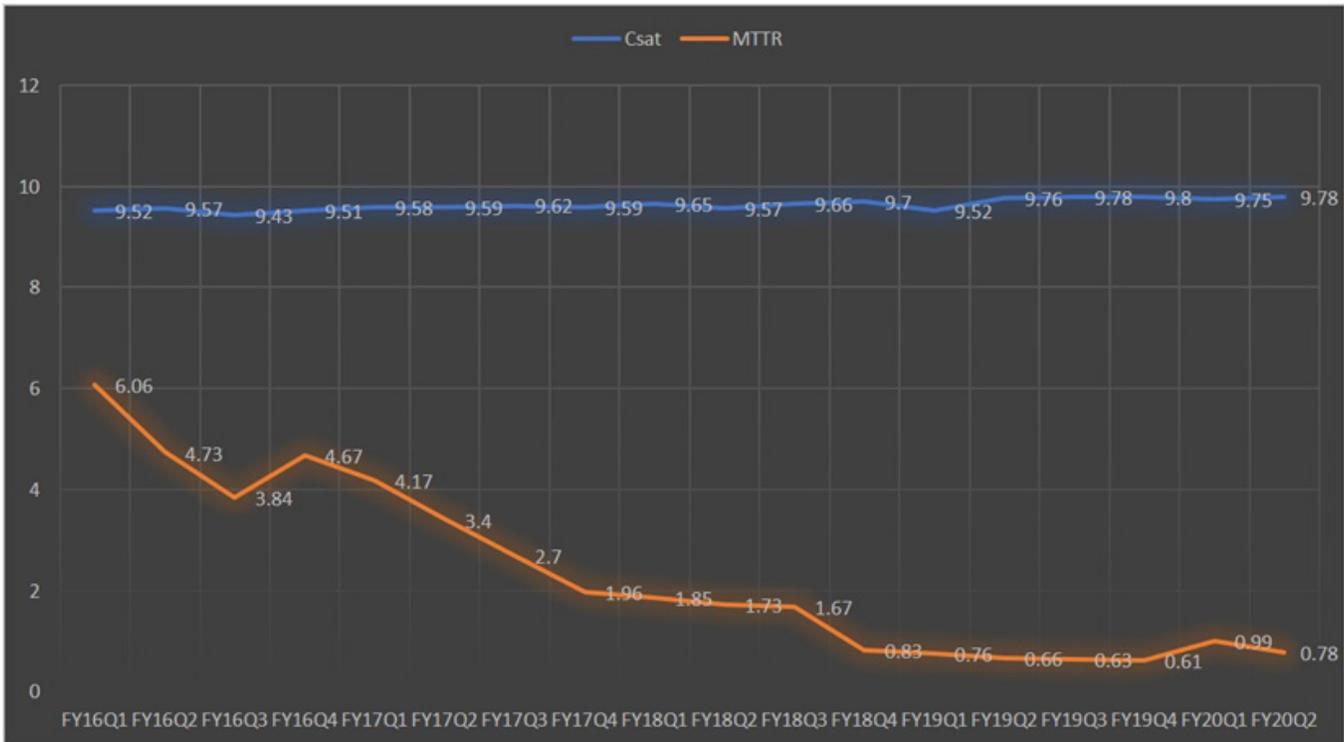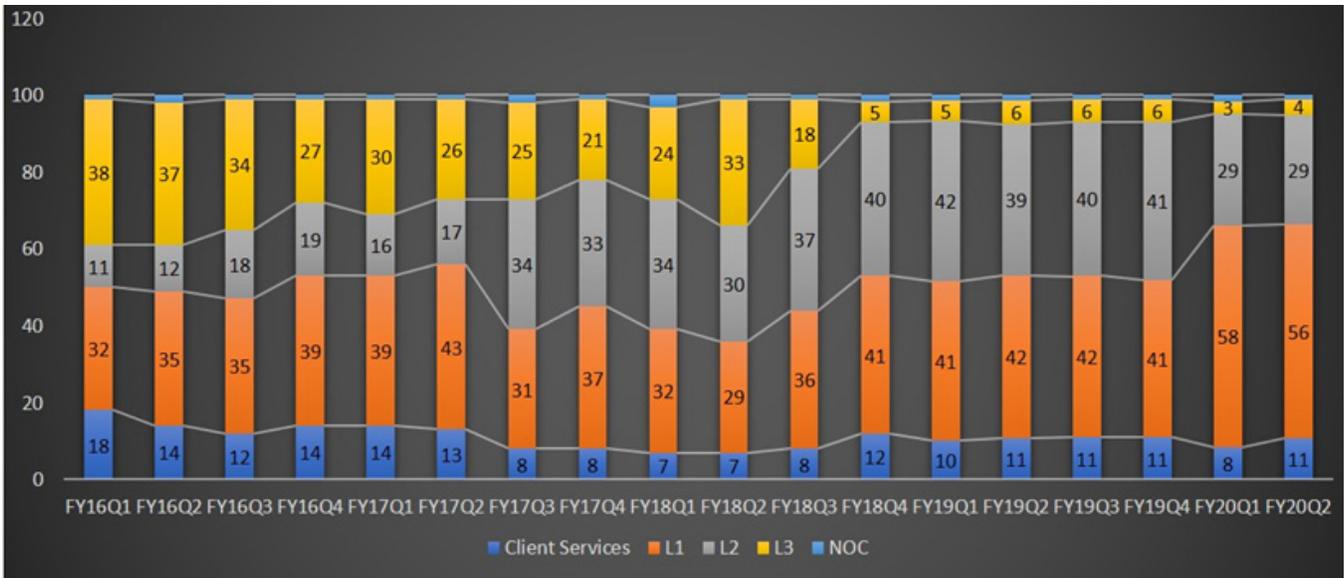
The picture below shows a detailed ROI per quarter demonstrating the work hours saved through the new organizational system and a few of the milestones achieved in the first year.

Workload Optimization/Hours Saved Per Quarter

Outcomes:
- Operations Ownership with Support Services
- 24x7 Coverage
- L2 Support includes:
  - Incident Management -14,380 Hrs.
  - Quarter End Support -2,100 Hrs.
  - DR/Production Instance Availability-150 Hrs.
- Ll Support Includes:
  - Service Desk -14,600 Hrs.
  - NOC - 6,000 Hrs.
- LO (Automation) includes:
  - Operator initiated -15 Hrs.
  - Self Service - 4,100 Hrs.
- Fully leverage ITSM/ITIL features
- Extensive Documentation
  (Video recordings, Knowledge base articles)
- Pushing workload down to Service Desk & NOC to lower operational costs
- Leveraging NOC for post-patching testing/crawling activities, server restart and automation
- Pipeline of trained & skilled employees

L0-Automation (Self-Service) → 4,100 Hrs

L0-Automation (Operator Initiated) → 15 Hrs

L1 (Service Desk + NOC) → 20,660 Hrs

L2 Incident Management → 14,380 Hrs

L2 Qtr. End Support → 2,100 Hrs

L2 Prod Instance Available → 150 Hrs

L3 Project

The graphs above show how in a period of four fiscal years the focused effort to segregate the work efforts between L3 and L2 gradually increased from a mere 11% to 29%. This helped in reducing the context switching for our L3 engineers, who were supposed to focus on project work rather than get distracted with operational issues.

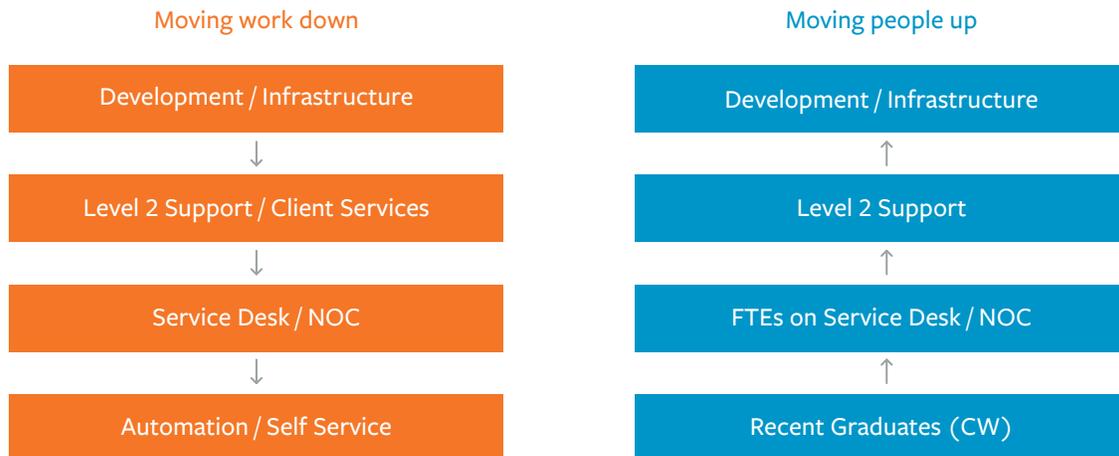# Building a career path across the IT organization

From the start, a planned career progression path was created for employees beginning at the entry level. While the work was being pushed down to either L1/L2 or L0(automate or retire) we also implemented processes to repurpose the employees to move up the ladder.

The mantra has been "**Move work down and move people up.**"

Employees used the opportunities to learn new and relevant technologies.

- **New skill acquisition/ reskilling**: During the planning stage, skilling and reskilling of employees is as significant as moving the work to the next level. The overall success of operations is determined by how the learning requirements of employees are being addressed. When work moves down, it creates ample bandwidth, which

Work and Staff Optimization – The Golden Rule

Moving work down	Moving people up
Development / Infrastructure	Development / Infrastructure
↓	↑
Level 2 Support / Client Services	Level 2 Support
↓	↑
Service Desk / NOC	FTEs on Service Desk / NOC
↓	↑
Automation / Self Service	Recent Graduates (CW)

This framework allowed our organization to listen more closely to the internal customers and better learn their pain points. This translated into identifying more automation use cases to do away with manual work as well as an opportunity to align the latest technology offerings effectively.

was utilized to reskill the staff with relevant technology upgrades.

- **Career Progression Path**: At BMC IT, a careful progression path is offered to the employees, where they can have the potential to fit in diverse roles. There are numerous success stories owing to this platform.

- **Repurposing of resources within IT**: With a periodic skill enhancement exercise, the employees are ready to take up more advanced and new roles at any given point, thereby allowing the repurposing of resources within IT.

- **Pipeline of resources**: The most valuable benefit driven out of this process is that proven performers are moving up and across the organizations for critical positions at L2 and L3, and the senior performers move to build the next generation of diverse leaders.

There are many internal movement opportunities that the skilled employees could take up. For instance:

1. If there is an opening in the network team due to attrition, a NOC resource is a more probable candidate now to be rotated internally by virtue of his network knowledge gained over a period of time working with NOC and upskilling.

2. Any Service Desk employee by virtue of the knowledge gained over a broader application or the platform can find a suitable opening within the L2 or L3 organization as a Business Analyst, Technical Support Analyst, or Technology Specialist.

3. We also have had people from Service Desk moving into Service Management Office with complete ITIL® certification.

Achieving operational excellence in the workplace

Against the prevailing pattern of an essential L3 involvement in operations, L2 support organizations can truly deliver much more. Certainly, the well-crafted approaches and strategies have a large stake in making it successful. At BMC IT, besides saving a remarkable number of hours for L3, the L2 model has provided meaningful exposure to the teams including a substantial collaboration with multiple business units and different teams within IT, which in turn offers them an **overarching view of operational functions** and enables them to **become the voice of the customer**.
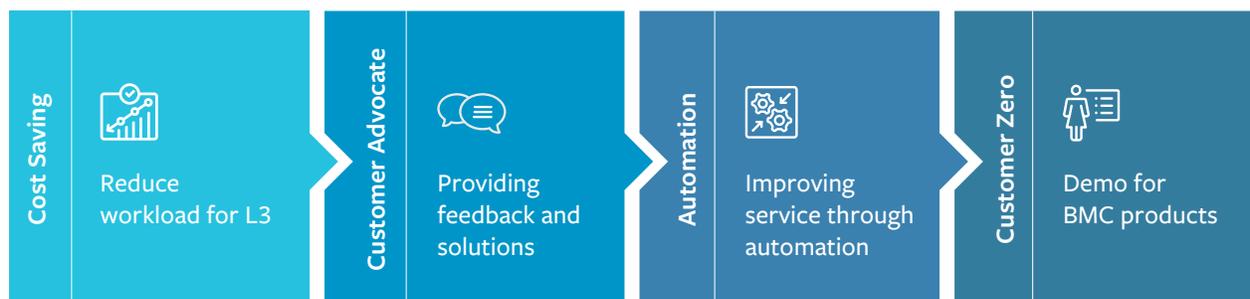
Being a Customer Advocate

They say to bring about innovations it is important for the sellers to know about their customers' problems and needs. Because of the regular connection with customers, the L2 support team has used its strengths to meet the necessary requirements and expectations.

Adapting Newer Technologies—Leverage AI to bring great user experience

The automation use cases created in the past are instrumental in enabling new cognitive capabilities. It is not about reinventing the wheel; rather it is to optimize existing resources.

Opting for Proof of Concept (POC) for enabling chatbots allowed us to do away with manual intervention for tasks that are repetitive in nature as well as dependent on human interaction (elevated access). This was achieved by using insights from the trends of service requests and identifying the patterns that can be resolved without manual intervention, moving beyond cost saving to adding value in true sense. This has empowered the business users as information can be made easily available at a single click.
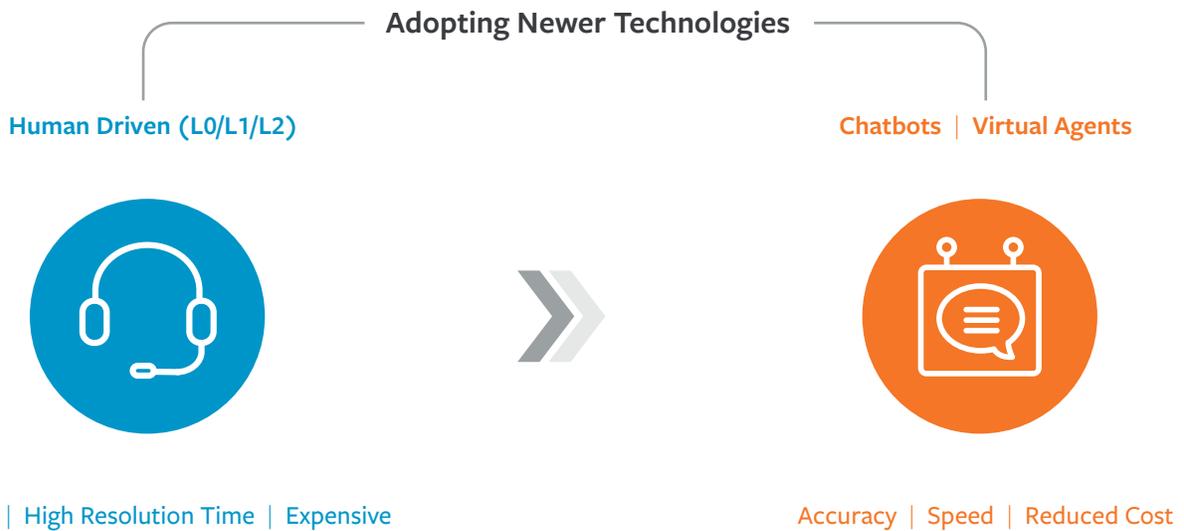
Moving beyond cost saving to adding value

Cost Saving	Customer Advocate	Automation	Customer Zero
Reduce workload for L3	Providing feedback and solutions	Improving service through automation	Demo for BMC products

Now we see that the regular connection with our internal customers has enabled L1 & L2 teams to identify the use cases of bringing automation and implementing cognitive tools. Therefore, this customer-facing insight is instrumental in creating the far-reaching AI journey of an IT team.

Along the lines of 'Drinking its own Champagne' IT services at BMC have been working in close partnership with the sales organization. The team is the first customer of BMC products and shares its own experience of using these products coupled through live demos with the prospects. This overall exercise of being a Customer Zero marks a significant benchmark for the success of the L2 Support Organization at BMC IT. The concept of Customer Zero not only works as a catalyst for bringing confidence in BMC products among the customers, but also has often been instrumental in winning business for the company.

Adopting Newer Technologies

Human Driven (L0/L1/L2)

Chatbots | Virtual Agents

Manual | High Resolution Time | Expensive

Accuracy | Speed | Reduced Cost

Creating a culture of passion, learning, and going beyond support services

Human instincts are such that feelings and concerns around job security, career growth and learnings among the group members do surface during the initial stages of change. During such times, there are some who emerge as leaders, some decide to become followers, and there are some looking for safe and risk-proof work zones. These can simply be attributed to the mix of diverse personalities at workplaces.

During the organizational changes, doubts and conflicts can amplify and the situation at BMC IT was no different. The accountability on the leadership was to bring out diligent strategies required to keep the morale high. BMC Software in India was ranked as the 10th best place to work by the Great Places to Work Institute® in 2019. Committed to offering an enabling environment, various initiatives were implemented at BMC IT L2 to address the concerns for employees. A few highlights include:

Friday Learnings: Open houses were organized to discuss the doubts, opportunities, and prospects that each and every one saw. Special emphasis was given on motivating the teams by recognition sessions, and by celebrating early success.

Dedicated Learnings: Challenging and creating an environment where employees go beyond their scope of work to learn new arenas is critical. Fostering a culture of continuous learning is essential to keep the skills of employees relevant with new technologies. Regular in-house courses are offered for employees. Additionally, a comprehensive education assistance plan is offered as part of the Cost to Company (CTC) for employees to build their skills consistently.

Growth Prospects: Provide opportunities to grow and learn outside of current responsibilities. Consistent career development plan discussion with the management enables employees to map out their career path.

Employee Advocate: Becoming an employee advocate is an effective strategy for building a culture of passion, where the workplace is not just a job.

The strategies opted at BMC IT were successful in building career paths across the IT organization and achieving operational excellence in the workplace. This not only proved to be the making of an efficient L2 support organization, but also created a culture of passion and learning.

Conclusion

Emerging from under the tag of cost center to become a true value provider remains a point of discussion in many thought leadership circles. While the emphasis on innovations and cognitive capabilities is a stepping stone, a 360-degree approach addressing the skilling and reskilling of employees, building teams based on segregation of roles and responsibilities, and offering them a clear career progression path are vital in establishing IT organizations as business partners.

Creating the dedicated L2 Support organization at BMC IT dispelled several myths in terms of efficiency and operational excellence. It was realized in fact that a diligent focus on building capabilities goes a long way in sustaining the success. In a matter of 2-3 years at BMC IT, the multifold rise in constructive customer insights has led to the successful implementation of cognitive tools for many of the mundane support tasks. With the adoption of DevOps, there are numerous opportunities for skill orientation, skill enhancement, and team building.

With a strategic approach towards the roadblocks that are bound to come, there can be perfect harmony between the customers, support and timely delivery. All you need is to know to leverage the right strengths at the right time.

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For more information
To learn how you can add cognitive capabilities to your service management function, be sure to visit: http://bmc.com/helix

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