Ten Tips for Empowering Your IT Support with AI

opentext™

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This white paper explains more about the AI-enablement of IT support and what you need to be doing about it now.

The pressures on IT service desks and wider IT support teams are relentless. In particular, because the mantra of "better, faster, cheaper" has superseded the long-felt need to "do more with less"—with the focus now also on speed, value creation, and a providing a better employee experience. There's also much being talked and written about an artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled future for IT support, from chatbots to predictive analytics.

However, to view the AI-enablement of IT support as a thing of the future is a mistake. That future is already here, as are many early IT support use cases for AI. It's also dangerous. Firstly, because AI-enabled capabilities are perhaps already being used by your company's competitors. Secondly, because IT service management (ITSM) and IT support teams presented with new technology have traditionally needed significant time to change ingrained ways of working and then to get things right. Think of this as a slowly turning tanker, where the turn needs to be started long before it actually occurs.

The adoption of AI-enabled capabilities is also inevitable. As with automation, AI breaks the traditional business rule of "time, quality, or cost—pick any two" by providing improvements across all three. Plus, as with the almost hidden influx of AI-enabled capabilities into our personal lives, the same will be true of IT support—the technology makes operations and outcomes better. Usually much better.

This white paper explains more about the AI-enablement of IT support and what you need to be doing about it now.

The Opportunity of AI for IT Support

Most IT support teams are currently faced with a combination of challenges, including:

- Handling higher IT service and support volumes
- Budget caps and potentially cuts
- More IT services, technology, and complexity to manage and support
- Business demand for faster change and greater innovation
- Higher employee expectations of service and support
- Issues with what should be ITSM basics, such as getting employee self-service and knowledge management right
- The need to understand and leverage large data sets
- Skilled-staff recruitment issues.

All of which are barriers to IT support teams being "better, faster, cheaper."

To help, new ways of working are needed. Ways that employ AI-enabled capabilities to firstly free IT support staff from the high-volume, low-value tasks that drain their time and reduce their value. And secondly, staff knowledge and skills can also be augmented by AI-enabled capabilities. There's more on this in the early use cases section.

The generic benefits of AI for IT support are very similar to those of automation, with the combination of AI and automation delivering even greater benefits.

The Benefits of AI for IT Support

The core benefits of AI for IT support are very similar to those of automation, with the combination of AI and automation delivering even greater benefits. These include:
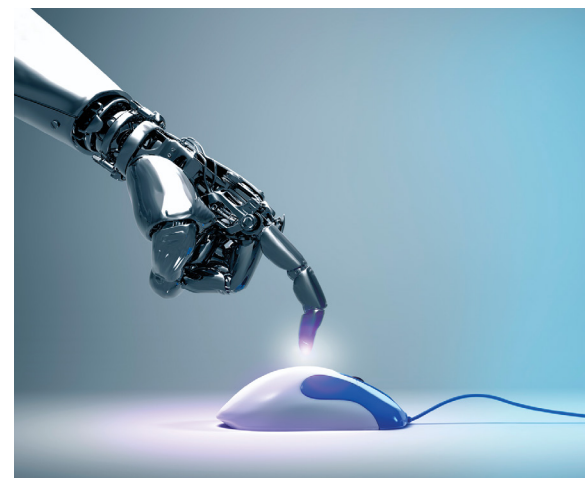
- Increased speed—for tasks, activities, and workflow execution
- Reduced operational costs, with the use of human labor optimized
- A reduction in human errors and their impact—for instance, delays and rework costs
- Improved outcomes—because everything consistently works as it should, and quickly
- Improved employee experience
- 24x7 operations, where this is currently prevented by budgetary or recruitment issues.

More specific real-world benefit examples are covered shortly.

The Early Use Cases of AI for IT Support

The use of AI-enabled capabilities in service and support scenarios is still a maturing area. However, a number of use cases are already gaining traction, these include:

- **Smart news and notifications**—the proactive notification to employees of issues that may impact them and the known resolutions they can apply.
- **Chatbots**—an automated 24x7 first-contact support capability for handling simple issues and requests.
- **Virtual agents**—where the AI augments service desk analyst knowledge and capabilities, making them better, more productive, versions of themselves.
- **Smart ticketing**—where employees submit tickets as if writing a tweet and the AI knows what it means and what needs to be done.
- **Smart ticket processing**—the automated categorization, prioritization, assignment, and potentially actioning of incidents and requests based on historical data and patterns.
- **Smart knowledge management**—smart search and "recommendations, smart email autoresponders that provide the most likely solutions, the identification of knowledge gaps, and automated knowledge article creation.

- **AI-assisted decision support and trend identification**—from hot topics and problem management to demand planning and staffing optimization.
- **AIOps**—AI-powered event management that pinpoints what's important amid the "noise" and takes appropriate action. Plus, predictive issue identification and automated remediation.

Real-World Examples of the Benefits of AI for IT Support

OpenText™ customers are already benefitting from the AI-enablement of their IT support teams. Four example customer success stories, where AI-enabled service and support capabilities have been adopted, are detailed below:

	Scientific Organization	Bank in EMEA
Challenge	Create a service portal to capture IT and non-IT requests, to deliver an improved user experience and more efficient service	Provide support for a new core banking platform with 270 independent systems
Goal	More efficient and transparent service delivery	Faster responses with intelligent service desk automation
Results	▪ 50% survey response rate—increased from 10% ▪ Positive user feedback and enthusiastic engagement ▪ Hot Topics Analytics helps prioritize next activities ▪ Thousands of knowledge article views support wide-spread self-service	▪ Automated ticket assignment speeds dispatching ▪ Fast and accurate ticket management ▪ Self-service ticketing ▪ Quicker response times

	Healthcare Service Provider	University
Challenge	A constant increase in the number of incidents—resulting in too slow and reactive problem management	A massive understaffing issue on the service desk—supporting 150,000 users with 8 service desk analysts
Goal	Accelerate incident management	An intelligent (smart) service desk
Results	▪ 50% faster completion of self-service requests ▪ 10% time reduction on phone calls to the service desk ▪ 25% more availability of service desk resources	▪ 60% reduction in interaction capturing time ▪ 970 person-hours saved on the service desk per year ▪ The higher quality of service results in satisfied users

10 Tips for AI Adoption

Hopefully, the above benefits and possible AI-enablement use case opportunities have you, and your organization, interested. If so, what should you do next? To help, here are ten tips for starting out with AI adoption—with these also relevant beyond both IT support and the IT organization:

1. **Set people's expectations of AI as early as possible.** Your colleagues who are "champing at the bit" for the introduction of AI need to understand what can be achieved through AI technology today. Plus, how this will advance over time. Staff that are interested in, and perhaps worried about, the impact that the introduction of AI-enabled capabilities will have on them and their jobs need to be communicated with as early as possible. Especially as AI is replacing IT support tasks not roles right now. Emphasize what will change—from the potentially changing roles and skills sets, to the opportunities ahead as IT support staff are freed up from monotonous tasks to undertake more engaging work.

2. **Understand where the IT support industry is right now with AI adoption.** When looking at statistics related to the use of AI in IT support, there's a need to appreciate that an organization's appetite—and capacity—for AI adoption will depend on a multitude of factors ranging from company size, though company industry, to the region(s) of operation. Hence, different surveys, with different survey population makeups, will no doubt deliver differing views of where the IT support industry currently is with AI adoption. With this in mind, indicative AI for IT support adoption levels can be seen in the Service Desk Institute's (SDI's) June 2019 "A View from the Frontline" report:

Has your organization started looking into implementing AI/machine learning technologies?
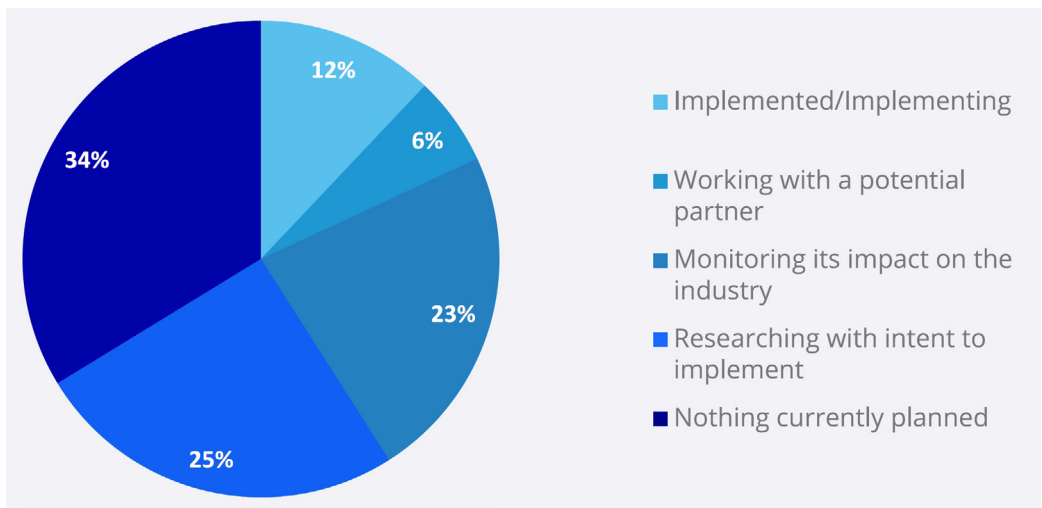
Figure 1. Source: SDI, "A View from the Frontline" (2019)

Has your organization started looking into implementing AI/ machine learning technologies?

> A key piece of learning here is the appreciation that AI adoption will be a people change initiative not just a technology implementation—because it changes traditional ways of working. Hence organizational change management tools and techniques will be necessary to help ensure that employees buy-in (to AI) as they understand what will happen and why.

3. **Appreciate the required investment for AI success.** Here it's advisable to talk with peers in other organizations, or perhaps even your own, to gain an appreciation of the effort and cost involved in getting an AI-enabled capability "road ready." Importantly, with AI, it's not the case of simply switching the technology on and finding that it does everything your organization needs. As a minimum, it will need to be directed as to what's needed and spend considerable time learning.

4. **Ensure that lessons have been learned from IT's earlier "failed" technology adoptions.** A good example is IT self-service technology, where circa 80% of organizations have implemented the technology but many still struggling with employee adoption. In fact, SDI research from mid-2017 found that less than 12% of organizations had achieved the expected benefits and return on investment (ROI) from their IT self-service investments. A key piece of learning here is the appreciation that AI adoption will be a people change initiative not just a technology implementation—because it changes traditional ways of working. Hence organizational change management tools and techniques will be necessary to help ensure that employees buy-in (to AI) as they understand what will happen and why. Plus, importantly, the "What's in it for me?"

5. **Also look at AI capabilities through a consumer-world lens.** As with any other corporate service or technology-enabled capability, employees' expectations will be influenced by their consumer-world experiences. Hence, the success of your AI-enabled service and support capabilities will often be dependent on employees considering them "fit for purpose." Where the provision of what are considered subpar capabilities, relative to business-to-consumer (B2C) equivalents, will make it difficult to achieve a sufficient level of employee adoption to deliver the expected benefits.

6. **Invest in the quality of your data and knowledge.** Assess the status quo to understand what you have and haven't got, plus the quality level. You'll likely need a quality-based cleanup project and then further investment to ensure that everything needed for success is available. Plus, don't underestimate the importance of knowledge management to AI success—it's a critical fuel for machine learning.

7. **Look at both the frontend and backend opportunities for AI and automation.** Again, take IT self-service as an example, where early adopters created an Amazon.com-like front end but neglected to add automated backend capabilities for fulfillment—missing the biggest opportunity for speedier service and cost reduction. In terms of the self-logging of tickets, using AI and automation at the backend is a significant contributor to being "better, faster, cheaper."

8. **Assess more than your suppliers' AI capabilities and roadmaps.** It doesn't matter if they're existing or potential future suppliers, it's important to understand what their customers are achieving with AI. So, speak with as many customers as possible to understand both what went well and what didn't. Also, ascertain the level of resources and costs involved for their initial and then improved AI-enabled capabilities.

9. **Don't simply replace existing manual practices with technology.** Over the last 30 years, corporate IT organizations have often replaced the human effort in manually intensive processes with technology. However, with AI you should look to do more—looking for opportunities that previously weren't possible. For example, natural language processing (NLP) could be used to listen in on service desk calls, to capture the relevant details in the ticket, and to proactively offer knowledge and recommendations to the service desk analyst for them to share. Leaving the analyst to focus on the user experience rather than their keyboard.

10. Start now. Even if you've no plans or budget for AI until next year. Remember the slowly turning tanker mentioned in the introduction? The adoption of AI, even from just a technology-selection perspective, will likely take your organization longer than it wants (and needs). So, as a minimum, start your AI-related thinking and research now such that you're prepared for the inevitable when your organization commits to realizing the benefits and ROI of AI-enablement for IT support.

Next Steps

This white paper has provided you with much-needed insight into:

- The opportunity of AI-enablement for IT support
- Examples of the early use cases of AI for IT support and some real-world success stories
- What you and your IT support team should be doing to get started with, or at least to prepare for, AI-enablement.

If you would like more information on how OpenText™ SMAX's machine learning based service management solution, can help your IT support organization, a good starting point is **www.microfocus.com/itsm**.

About the Author

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