

View Point



Develop Customer Experience Leadership through Transformed Customer Service Operations

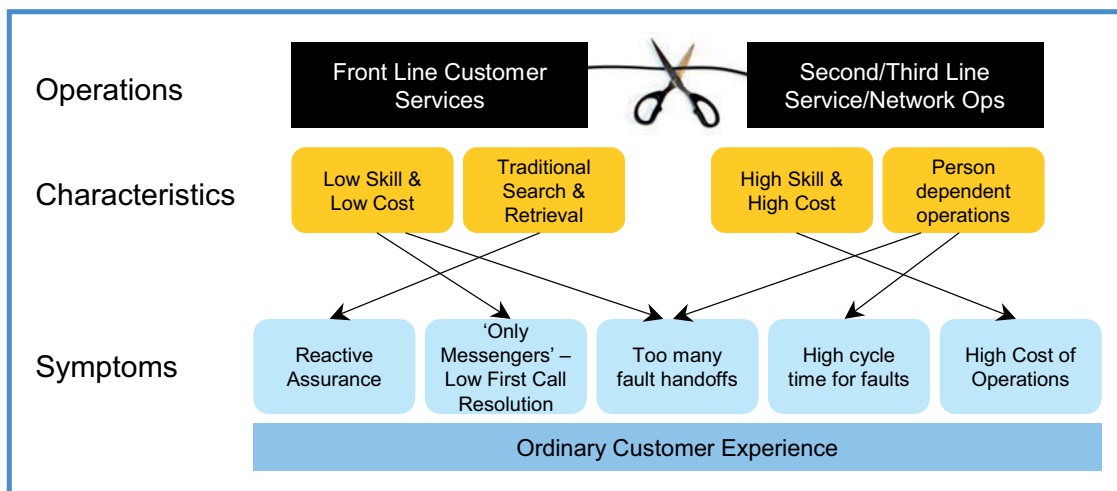
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Customer experience leadership is the next battlefield for communications service providers (CSP) considering converged services. To be successful, organizations must integrate knowledge scattered among disparate functional and operational units and deliver best-in-class customer support for converged IP-based services. CSPs must also introduce proactive and predictive capabilities for customer experience differentiation

Improving customer experience is now a board-level agenda for many communications service providers (CSP). Information management plays a key part in managing end-customer experience for CSPs. The importance of information management is being felt with the increased amount of information required to deliver best-in-class customer support for complex IP-based products. The current operational model may not be sufficient to manage new IP-based services and may result in inflated costs and an ordinary customer experience. This is counter-productive to the initial objectives of improved customer experience, sustained profitability and increased differentiation that CSPs had set while rolling out these products.

Often, service providers consider IT tools to be the solution to the service assurance challenges posed by the IP based world. In our view, IT plays an auxiliary role in improving customer experience; the real shift lies in successful transformation across the entire value chain of the customer service organization that puts knowledge integration at the heart of its future operations.

While the current operational model is sufficient for traditional services, it may be inadequate to manage customer service organizations for converged services. Converged services require operational units that can handle complexities arising out of inter-working among diverse networks, applications, and multiple access domains. Currently, operational units are often separated by product silos, and thus, may not be able to efficiently manage operations of converged services. Further, there may be non-adjacency among functional areas such as Customer Management, Service Management and Network Operations, resulting in gaps in knowledge integration. As a result, many of today's customer services organizations have become messengers of faults, adding unwanted delay to the resolution cycle time, while second/third line organizations with high cost resources add inordinate expense.



The Knowledge Integration Imperative

Knowledge management has for long been on the business and IT agenda of most CSPs. Yet, in the pursuit of converged customer service operations, the evidence point to the emerging area of *knowledge integration* which can significantly enhance an organization's ability to accomplish operational transformation. In the current environment, customer service information resides in multiple product silos, groups and organizations making it difficult if not impossible to understand and manage the customer experience. The integration of this information relies on a combination of highly knowledgeable specialist individuals and loose SLAs between various customer service groups.

While this approach has been sufficient in the past, the increasing rapidity of new product and service launches, and the demands of converged operations are outpacing this person-dependent knowledge integration. A new kind of knowledge model which acts as the customer service blueprint for each new (or existing) service is required. This new knowledge integration model will integrate disparate operational silos of information and create an organizing force that can form the basis for converged operations.

Knowledge management was about archiving the best practices of the past. Knowledge integration is about architecting the operations of the future.

At many CSPs, information available at the customer, network and application layers is not easily shared across organizational boundaries, if it is shared at all. Knowledge integration can be the critical force in transforming a customer service organization into an agile and responsive one that can deal with the complexities of new IP-based services.

An example in the context of IPTV service: Mr. Brown has IPTV service at home and frequently uses features such as digital video recording, caller ID and interactive content. He notices that the caller ID feature of the IPTV service is not displaying the caller's phone number and reports the problem to his service provider. Customer service operations in the current model typically carry out a modest diagnostic check and pass the fault to the second/third line for further investigation. The second line must have deep insight into the complex caller ID function on IPTV to diagnose, localize and resolve the fault correctly. And as the complexity of the service increases, the second line must liaise with numerous departments to coordinate the resolution process. This process has many handoffs and delays the overall repair cycle time.

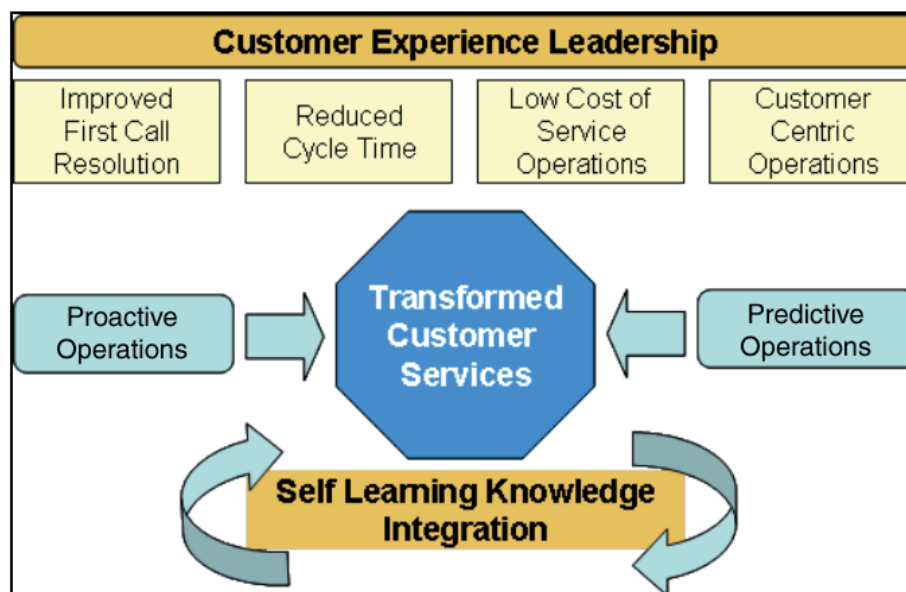
Who owns Mr. Brown's service experience? Is it the network access team? The IPTV second line support team? Or the telephony / advanced features support group? When one takes the challenges posed by convergence to their next logical step, it is clear to see that a different, customer-centric approach is the only one that makes sense for the CSP deploying triple- and quad-play services. The right knowledge at the right time, in the hands of the front-line customer support personnel (and the knowledge model) and pro-active teams, together with management incentives that foster customer advocacy rather than "pass-the-buck" service will actually deliver lower operational cost AND an improved customer experience.

With knowledge integration, CSP service operations teams will spend less time on inter-group handoffs, re-tracing steps in diagnosing problems, and increasing the likelihood of solving problems when they first appear - and in some cases even before they are reported by the customer.

Enabling Proactiveness & Predictiveness

Legacy processes were built for telephony services and as service providers added new products and services, further stovepipes were added requiring expensive workarounds. This resulted in operational silos with limited awareness of the end-to-end processes running through them. In the transformed operations, business processes in the next-generation operational model must move away from product-based silos to common operational units that make best use of shared skill sets across products.

The processes must define new operational entities that make best use of the knowledge base to proactively identify customer problems and must resolve them even before they are reported. In addition, the next-generation operational model must possess predictive capabilities to anticipate the behavior of resources within a service and must prevent faults.



Create a Self-Learning Customer Services Organization

CSPs should structure knowledge and associated functions in a customer-centric manner so that customer priorities dictate service assurance business processes. However, building this knowledge base alone is not sufficient; real value is realized when this knowledge gets constantly refreshed with service problem diagnosis and resolutions. Service providers can then automate resolution of similar problems and reduce the number of service incidents to be handled manually. This reduces repetitive jobs for customer service and network operations teams and keeps them free for tougher incidents.

Self-learning customer services organizations will have the ability to significantly improve end-customer experience on a continuous basis. They can also create a fundamentally lower price point for operations by gradually reducing dependency on expensive second/third line diagnostics.

Three steps to develop customer experience leadership through transformed customer service operations

- Change the success criteria of your customer service function from an incident management focus to a knowledge-enabled customer advocacy focus (the right metrics include increased first call resolution and reduced overall fault cycle time)
- Differentiate customer experience by introducing proactive and predictive assurance capabilities in customer service operations
- Create a self-learning operational customer service organization that continually updates and refreshes its knowledge base for increased product and business agility

About the Authors

Ankur Bhan is a Principal with the Communications Service Provider (CSP) unit of Infosys, responsible for solution offerings around customer experience management, specifically service assurance. He has managed consulting engagements for various CSPs in the areas of network lifecycle management, contract and sales management, billing operations effectiveness and OSS/BSS transformation initiatives. Ankur is also a global sourcing expert with practical experience in large scale deal management.

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