The Technical Support Center of the Future
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Today’s consumers have at their fingertips more tools for communication, collaboration, and creativity than were hardly even imagined just a decade or two ago. They also have greater access to skilled technical support teams dedicated to helping them take full advantage of technologies designed to enhance workforce productivity. But with technology continuing to evolve rapidly and becoming even more integral to business operations — and users’ expectations about their technology experience and anytime, anywhere access to tools only rising with each new advancement — technical support centers likely will need more diversified skill sets, including staff with nontechnical skills, to meet the needs of their organizations in the future.
The Technical Support Center of the Future builds on research conducted for The War for Talent, a 2012 report by Robert Half Technology, a leading provider of IT professionals on a project and full-time basis, and HDI, the leading professional association and certification body for the technical service and support industry. That report highlighted the types of skills today’s technical service and support professionals need to be successful, including customer service skills, problem-solving/trouble-shooting skills, and communication skills.

To gain insight into how or if IT support organizations might be changing their hiring practices to secure in-demand skill sets for their teams — and what other abilities soon may be required in their organizations — Robert Half Technology and HDI reached out to several subject matter experts for in-depth interviews.

Through a combination of interviews conducted in early 2013, an April 2013 survey of 403 professionals in the field, and other industry research, Robert Half Technology and HDI found that the technical support center of the future is poised to play an even more integral role in helping businesses innovate — and hence, gain competitive advantage.

The ability of IT support teams to provide an outstanding level of customer service will be important to helping organizations and their employees understand how to appropriately leverage both known and emerging technologies in the business. IT support teams will also be instrumental in helping organizations find new ways to use technology to streamline operations, reduce costs, and better meet the needs of end users.

According to the research, industry professionals believe that technical support organizations will need staff with these top five* characteristics:

- **A passion for supporting customers (i.e., a customer service mindset)**
  - 88%
- **A desire to continue learning about technologies and trends (on and off the clock)**
  - 80%
- **Social intelligence (i.e., human connection in a digital world)**
  - 75%
- **A proactive approach to solving problems and/or creating efficiencies**
  - 71%
- **Greater collaboration with staff inside and outside the technical support center**
  - 71%

* More than one response permitted.
Characteristics the support center needs in the next three to five years:

- A passion for supporting customers (i.e., a customer service mindset) 88%
- A desire to continue learning about technologies and trends (on and off the clock) 80%
- Social intelligence (i.e., human connection in a digital world) 75%
- A proactive approach to solving problems and/or creating efficiencies 71%
- Greater collaboration with staff inside and outside the technical support center 71%
- Adaptability/ability to embrace change 70%
- More frequent and formalized knowledge sharing 70%
- A deeper understanding of the business being supported 69%
- The ability to multitask effectively 69%
- Creativity/innovation 66%
- A higher level of technical skills 66%
- Skills for providing support through chat 63%
- Strategic thinking 48%
- More generalists providing support 42%
- Other 3%

This research also brings to light some of the technology trends and workforce dynamics already in motion that are likely to make these characteristics as important as technical aptitude for many technical services professionals in the future.
The consumerization of IT — the introduction by employees and others of consumer devices and applications into the enterprise — has unleashed a disruptive wave of change within many businesses. On the positive side, the usability and advanced feature sets of these tools can help to enhance workforce productivity and innovation. But introducing tools such as smartphones and collaborative work applications that heretofore were not issued or supported by corporate IT departments is creating a wide range of challenges, from enterprise security risks and regulatory compliance concerns to user-support challenges and network performance issues.

In the enterprise, another significant and related evolution is under way: IT organizations are making a dramatic transition from being “a back-office component to a core operational constituent that can improve business performance and increase shareholder value … [and is] as important to the enterprise as finance, marketing, and sales.”1 Stepping into the spotlight has not been easy for many IT departments, however, because they have long held a low profile in the organization. But with more IT leaders looking “to refocus their teams on business results, customer service, and product innovation,”2 disruptive change actually may be the status quo for IT teams for some time to come.

Technical support organizations are also changing in response to these trends. “These teams are on the front lines every day working to support users who have increasingly higher expectations about the availability, reliability, and performance of the technology they need, or simply want, to use for business,” says John Reed, senior executive director for Robert Half Technology. “This is why today’s technical support professionals must engage in continuous learning, so they are always ‘at the ready’ to respond or adapt to change.”

In a series of interviews that Robert Half Technology and HDI conducted in the first quarter of 2013, technical support leaders identified three workforce trends related to the consumerization of IT that are creating disruptive waves of change for their IT services organizations—and also will likely impact future skill set requirements for their support centers:

- **Mobility**
- **Bring your own device (BYOD)**
- **User demand for anytime, anywhere access to IT services and support**
According to one technology industry estimate, the number of mobile devices will exceed the world’s population by the end of 2013. As employees, and the business as a whole, become increasingly dependent on smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices, IT support organizations will need to have workers with the skills to support them. Technical support professionals already sense this need: Eighty percent of support professionals surveyed for this report said the desire to learn about technology both on and off the clock will be an essential characteristic of support center staffs today and in the near future.

The sheer number of Internet-enabled mobile devices already present in today’s organizations is enough to give any technical support team pause. Todd Klopfenstein, director of IT service management for OfficeMax, an office supply retailer headquartered in Naperville, Illinois, says that mobility has essentially tripled, in a short period of time, the number of physical assets under his team’s control. “We need to manage, at an enterprise level, the thousands and thousands of proof-of-delivery devices that our truck drivers carry,” he says. “There are also thousands of laptops, smartphones, and other wireless devices, including printers, throughout our organization in the United States and Canada. Factor in traditional desktops, and that means there are probably 15,000 to 20,000 devices floating around.”

MORE THAN HALF
of the survey respondents said they believe technical support centers will serve as liaisons to mobile device vendors within the next three to five years.
Mobility isn’t just about the proliferation of mobile devices, however. Also multiplying rapidly are the number of Wi-Fi networks — many of them public and not secure — that allow employees to work far beyond the confines of the traditional office. Many technical support organizations are already addressing a growing number of requests for support from users trying to access the company network from off-site locations — at home, on the road, at customer facilities, or at the local coffee shop.

Some organizations are even deploying specialized technical support teams specifically to help manage the mobility “problem.” At global insurance firm AIG, for example, Robert Barnes, vice president and global head of service desk, field support, and end-user technology (EUT), is setting up a mobility organization to centralize administration of mobile devices in the company. This team will work directly with mobility vendors to help ensure mobile devices integrate securely with corporate Wi-Fi. “In my view, the complexity around mobile devices demands a centralized mobility organization — otherwise your head is in the sand,” he says. “There are increasingly larger groups of mobile device users in the organization, and that means more challenges in terms of controlling assets.”

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—Robert Barnes, AIG
Mobility is also fueling the BYOD phenomenon: Enterprise users not only want to be able to work where they want, they also prefer to select their own mobile device, and they want to be allowed to use that device for both personal and business purposes.

For many reasons, namely security concerns, many businesses have been slow to follow the BYOD trend: Related research by Robert Half Technology shows that only one-third of US organizations allow employees to access corporate networks using their personal smartphones, tablets, computers, or other devices; notably, however, 94 percent of those organizations offer at least limited technical support to those users.4

Without question, rolling out a BYOD program that meets employee demands and protects the business from data loss, compliance breaches, and other risks creates additional responsibility for IT. Columbus, Ohio-based L Brands, Inc., which owns and operates retail brands like Bath & Body Works and Victoria’s Secret, is among the companies that have responded to pressure from a large workforce seeking freedom of choice in mobile tools. L Brands initiated its BYOD program almost two years ago — a move that required the deployment of additional IT resources just to support a specific group of users. Greg Daugherty, director of the company’s technical assistance center, explains: “We made a decision to partner with an external company that provides cellular wireless support specifically to our home-office associates so that our core team could keep its primary focus on supporting BYOD users in our stores, which are our profit centers.”

Even in organizations where only select employees are allowed to choose their own devices, technical support personnel find they need to stay apprised of device and application trends in the mobile space. As HDI analyst Roy Atkinson notes in “The Mobility Revolution and Its Consequences for Support,” “In every support environment, from higher education to healthcare to manufacturing, mobility can be a benefit to both productivity and profitability, but it can also be a treadmill of keeping up with rapidly changing platforms, standards, and applications.”5

“It seems that every week, a new mobile device is released,” observes Kelly Napoli-Floto, Robert Half Technology’s senior director of enterprise customer support. “Staying current on new developments in technology is an essential skill set for IT professionals, especially because of the consumerization of IT. When a user comes to us and says, ‘This is the device or application I want to use,’ we need to be able to respond to their request with some meaningful knowledge about that technology.”
Thanks largely to mobility and BYOD, “whatever I want, when I want it” has become the mantra for most enterprise users today. Todd Klopfenstein from OfficeMax says, “Everything is taking place in real time now. The days of, ‘I write a letter, put it in an envelope and send it, and if I get a response in three weeks, that’s cool’ went away in the 1990s when we learned about email. Then, it became, ‘I’ll send an email and get a response back in a few days, or maybe a week, and that’s cool.’ Now, I literally get phone calls from customers and colleagues asking if I’ve read an email they sent four seconds ago. This is what we’re seeing — the demand for anywhere, anytime connectivity, availability, and usability.”

At Costco Wholesale Corp., for example, these types of user expectations (or demands) recently prompted significant change in the technical support center. Jennifer O’Brien, IT support and deployment director for the retailer, explains: “Looking back just five years ago, we were a help desk. We waited for calls and had a high escalation rate. But now, users expect almost immediate resolution to issues. They want it to work — and work their way. So, we had to become a service desk. We’re now more multifaceted and we’re doing more to help support the business, such as anticipating and correlating issues.”

O’Brien’s observation aligns with a key finding from the survey: Seventy-one percent of respondents said being proactive about problem solving will be a necessary skill for technical support professionals in the near future.
Adapting to user demands around mobility, BYOD, and anytime, anywhere access to IT resources is requiring technical support teams to work more collaboratively. In fact, 71 percent of technical support professionals surveyed for this report said they expect to see greater collaboration with staff inside and outside the technical support center in the near future.

Another key driver for increased collaboration is the expectation from senior management that IT resources in the organization create more value for the business instead of just operating as cost centers. Companies want to move away from the “catch and dispatch” support models of the past and, ideally, employ fewer support personnel, reduce the need for costly field support, and automate processes wherever possible.

For many technical support personnel, working collaboratively, even with their immediate team members, is new territory. But teams that are making a concerted effort to share knowledge and coordinate efforts are creating efficiencies for their organizations. More than that, by detecting patterns in how users are utilizing IT resources and what types of problems they are encountering, technical support professionals are helping the business avoid service disruptions and other risks, preserving productivity and profitability.

“True problem management is something that our technical support teams work on all the time,” says Brian Fox, senior program manager for CompuCom, a Dallas, Texas-based IT outsourcing specialist. “Collaboration is a significant input for the success of the entire IT organization. Being able to identify past trends and then target where future issues might occur creates advantages. And while investing in the technology and training to enhance collaborative working in technical support may be expensive up front, being able to avoid a massive disruption that could impact the organization’s ability to drive revenue is even more important. Mitigating issues is all right, but avoiding issues is better.”

At Intel, in Santa Clara, California, the need to focus more on creating value and working more efficiently is leading to a

**New Expectations: Collaboration and Innovation**

**SIXTY-SIX PERCENT**

of IT support professionals believe a higher level of technical skills will be required in the technical support center of the future.
“shift-left” in the technical support center. Chris Sellers, director of IT service operations for the chip maker, explains: “We’ve been moving Level 2 skills and Level 2-type work into Level 1, and Level 3-type work, which is almost higher-level development-type support, into Level 2. So, we’re shifting higher skill sets down to the lowest level possible, and looking to automate more lower-skill-type work.”

He adds, “We’re also pushing Level 1-type work into self-help and into predictive incident management where we have self-healing, and we’re predicting and addressing problems before they even happen. Our goal this year is to cut down overall incident volume — which in our service desk right now is about a million incidents per year — by about 40 percent.”

A similar “shift-left” has been taking place in the service organization at L Brands, according to Greg Daugherty. “Bringing a higher and higher percentage of break-fix support to the service desk team is critical to our ability to further enhance collaboration and improve end-user productivity,” he says. “We’ve been focused on improving first-call resolution in our stores, and now, 98 percent of all issues are resolved without ever leaving my team. When this happens, Level 2 and Level 3 associates with higher technical skill sets are able to focus more of their time on work that’s going to help drive new revenue and new functionality in the future.”

Automation is having a positive impact on collaboration, as well. Tony Jones, client executive for HCA Parallon Business Solutions, in Nashville, Tennessee, a provider of business services to healthcare providers, says his company’s service desk personnel were constantly distracted by attending to alerts that really weren’t “hot ticket” items. However, trying to guess which alerts were false alarms proved risky. So, the company opted to automate monitoring of recurring issues that are not a high priority. The result: more time for collaboration within the service desk.

“Before automation enabled greater collaboration, our service desk was essentially working in a silo,” Jones says. “Personnel were left to build their own knowledge, solve as many issues as they could on their own, and not bother other areas of IT if they didn’t have to.” Another upside of automation at HCA Parallon Business Solutions, according to Jones, is that technical support professionals have more time to devote to earning certifications and helping to improve the overall knowledge base for the service organization.
The Technical Support Center of the Future

Collecting and Leveraging Technical Knowledge

Almost every technical support leader interviewed for this report underscored the importance of collecting and leveraging knowledge in the technical support center, both now and in the future. They cited a number of benefits to centralizing the information that is collected and generated by the support desk, including:

- Empowering users to resolve or troubleshoot technical support issues on their own, such as password recovery or connectivity problems.
- Enabling technical support personnel to work more efficiently by reducing the number of user requests and providing teams with quick access to relevant information.
- Ensuring valuable knowledge is not lost when skilled and experienced team members leave or move to other parts of the organization.

Knowledge management has become such a priority for today’s technical support centers that nearly three-quarters (74 percent) are using some type of knowledge management technology, according to research conducted by HDI. In other research, HDI found that organizations that use knowledge management internally resolve 44 percent of tickets (median) by referring to knowledge articles.

Ron Willbanks, director of restaurant services for Whataburger, a restaurant chain based in San Antonio, Texas, says his...
organization’s knowledge base allows new personnel to ramp up quickly and has made his organization more efficient overall. He says, “In the past year, we saw an increase in first call resolution from 65 percent to 82 percent. I attribute that in large part to our ability to solve issues once and reuse the same information many times.”

Mary Kay O’Brien, director of IT services for Emory Healthcare, an Atlanta, Georgia-based hospital system, says her service desk is in the process of implementing Knowledge-Centered Support to help “reduce the service desk’s time and effort in trying to solve problems for which we already have solutions.” She says, “We have a Remedy call ticketing system, and we’re launching the knowledge base within that. Our goal is real-time knowledge gathering, and the information we collect will be shared with other teams.”

Seventy percent of industry professionals polled for this report said they believe even more frequent and formalized knowledge sharing will be prevalent in the technical support center of the future. However, don’t expect knowledge sharing to be confined to the service organization: At many companies, there is already a concerted effort under way to connect end users with information that will allow them to solve problems quickly, without having to devote much or any time to calling the technical support center. “The reason people contact our team, of course, is because something is wrong,” says Bob Barnes of AIG. “Part of our job is to empower users with the knowledge, processes, and tools that will help them be successful.”

One way Robert Half’s service desk is encouraging users to become more self-sufficient is by providing informational videos on the company’s technical support site. “We realize that not everyone is fond of looking up answers to their how-to questions,” says Robert Half’s Napoli-Floto. “So, we’ve tried to put a creative spin on things by developing videos that walk users through common inquiries, such as how to create a .PST folder in Outlook. If a user calls with a question that we address in a video, we will send them a link to that video. It helps the user learn because they have a visual as they walk through the process.”

“More and more customers want the flexibility to choose the channel and method of having technical support delivered: phone, web, chat, and so on,” observes Darin Vandecar, executive director of operations in the Utah region for ViaWest, a data center and managed service provider. “Providing proactive service through all types of channels is a priority for our
team. So, too, is minimizing the customer effort required to get their issues resolved. This means delivering knowledge to users through various methods, like forums and training, and requiring them to take more ownership of solving basic issues.”

HDI analyst Roy Atkinson says many support organizations — both internal-facing and external-facing — are beginning to use the customer effort score (CES) to measure their success with addressing customers’ issues through various channels. “This score is derived from customers’ answers to one question: ‘How difficult was it to get your issue resolved?’ The rating scale runs from 1 (very easy) to 5 (very difficult),” he explains.

However, knowledge sharing is only as good as the knowledge that is shared, and not everyone sees the value in investments designed to make information more accessible. A recent HDI survey found that while 38 percent of organizations make knowledge available to customers (i.e., self-help), most organizations are still struggling with various challenges, including quality concerns and buy-in from staff and/or management.\(^\text{10}\)

The phone remains the most commonly offered contact option for end users reaching out to the technical support center. However, research shows the use of that channel is declining, while web requests and chat are increasing in both availability and use.

For many users, the support organization is their first and only point of contact with IT. With businesses and employees so dependent on technology, and poised to become increasingly more so, users may find they need to reach out to technical support regularly for a wide range of issues, from network connectivity problems to BYOD policy questions to malware infections.

Of course, not everyone who calls the support center is tech-savvy, as the results of a recent Robert Half Technology survey underscore (see “Bizarre Requests for Technical Support”). And many people who contact IT services do so when they’re feeling frustrated, even irate, because their technology is not working as it should (or the way they want it to). All of the above makes having a customer service mindset a top skill for any technical support professional to possess now and in the future.

In *The War for Talent*, the 2012 research report compiled by HDI and Robert Half Technology, customer service ranked as the most important skill that frontline and help desk employees need to be successful. This skill ranked as the fifth-most important skill for Level 2, Level 3 and desktop support professionals, who historically have had less direct interaction with the customers they serve. This research shows that a customer service mindset will become the most sought-after skill for technical support professionals at all levels of the organization in the future, if it’s not already.

“Customer service skills are becoming even more important because the support organization really sets the stage for how IT, as a whole, is viewed by customers,” says Shannon Cepica, managing director of IT Help Central at Texas Tech University. “In many ways, we are the face of IT.”

Providing a positive technical support experience for a wide range of users isn’t easy, which is another reason many employers are eager to hire technical support professionals with solid interpersonal skills. Some businesses, like Costco, are starting to look specifically for candidates who possess “social intelligence,” the ability to quickly assess what another person needs and respond in a way that the person will understand and feel positive about. Costco’s Jennifer O’Brien explains: “As a support organization, we need to be able to connect to others in a deep and direct way. We must be able to communicate effectively and ensure employees throughout the organization know how to use technology to do their jobs.”

Three-quarters of technical support professionals surveyed for this report agreed that social intelligence will be a required skill in the near future. And as employers place more emphasis on nontechnical skills, many IT support professionals may find the technology expertise that helped them secure roles before — while still valuable — may be of secondary importance. Greg Daugherty at L Brands, Inc., says, “I don’t need an IT hero anymore. I need people with well-rounded skills, who I can develop technically through our training program. Candidates just need
to have the aptitude. If they understand PCs or iOS software and the products that go with them, we can get them where they need to be.”

When CompuCom’s Brian Fox helped automaker Volkswagen transform its log-and-route help desk environment to a service desk organization with end-to-end incident management, he says he made a conscious decision to hire people with “sound social skills, a good phone presence, and a good personality.” He explains, “I needed people who could convey, over the phone, that they cared. So, instead of hiring technical people and hoping they had some social skills, we hired social people, and hoped they had some technical skills we could build on. And the people we hired have been able to excel.”

Writing skills are also paramount: Technical support professionals must be able to distill information succinctly, but also clearly, in communications with customers through channels like email and chat. Additionally, they are increasingly expected to contribute relevant information to their organization’s knowledge base so their colleagues, or even other IT teams, can easily apply it to their own work, as needed. “I now look for strong writing skills when I hire for my team,” says Todd Klopfenstein at OfficeMax. “That type of soft skill is much harder to find in a support professional, as well as harder to teach. It’s more innate.”

“You must be a master communicator in this industry,” adds Darin Vandecar of ViaWest. “Value isn’t in what you know. It’s in what you share.”
While many of the insights shared by IT support leaders in this report relate to changes already in motion in their organizations, what’s clear is that many businesses are in the early stages of a dramatic shift in the skill sets needed to address current and future changes in mobility, BYOD, and anytime, anywhere access. Given these trends, it is also evident that the technical support center of tomorrow is likely to differ from the previous or current version of itself in a number of fundamental ways.

The heightened importance of collaboration skills is one example. While not all roles in the IT organization will be customer-facing, most positions will require professionals to at least engage regularly with their colleagues in the department. Also, it is clear that to remain nimble in the marketplace, most organizations will continue to need technical support teams that can help ensure that all workers are able to use the technology they need to perform their jobs well — and help the business gain a competitive edge.

Additionally, as more organizations embrace virtualization and cloud services (the technologies that help to support mobility and anytime, anywhere access), it is likely that many current technical support roles will change, or become unnecessary. Not surprisingly, this research shows that more than half of technical support professionals already understand that they may soon be expected to act as a liaison to cloud/managed services providers and mobile device vendors for the organization.

In order to continue delivering value to the organization and moving in new directions as business needs dictate, technical support professionals will need to wear many hats. Therefore, perhaps the biggest changes on the horizon for the technical support industry will be less need for those who are highly skilled in just one or two technical areas and greater demand for IT services professionals with strong interpersonal skills who can quickly learn how to assist users with a wide variety of tasks.

### The Many Hats IT Support Professionals Will Wear in the Future

**What predictions do IT support professionals have for technical support centers in the near future?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer advocate</td>
<td>76%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customer productivity enabler</td>
<td>69%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liaison to cloud/managed services providers</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liaison to mobile device vendors</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business relationship manager (business collaborator)</td>
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<td>Change advocate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology innovator</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3%</td>
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*Source: Robert Half Technology and HDI survey of technical support professionals.*
range of technologies and adapt to new ways of working. It’s clear that the professionals polled for this report already know what it will take to succeed in this industry for the long term: 88 percent cited “a passion for supporting customers” as the top characteristic for technical support teams to possess in the future.

“Tomorrow’s employers will be looking for a complex mix of skills and attributes in the technical support personnel they hire. This can include everything from the customer service mindset to industry knowledge to the ability to think creatively,” says Robert Half Technology’s senior executive director, John Reed. “That’s a tall order. The research we’ve conducted with HDI over the past two years shows that many businesses are having ongoing difficulty finding skilled talent for many current positions in IT. As technology continues to evolve, it will only become more challenging to find professionals who possess the right mix of knowledge, experience, and attributes necessary to assume emerging roles and responsibilities in technical support.”

About HDI
HDI is the professional association and certification body for the technical service and support industry. Facilitating collaboration and networking, HDI hosts acclaimed conferences and events, produces renowned publications and research, and certifies and trains thousands of professionals each year. HDI also connects solution providers with practitioners through industry partnerships and marketing services.

Guided by an international panel of industry experts and practitioners, HDI serves a community of more than 128,000 technical service and support professionals and is the premier resource for best practices and emerging trends.

About Robert Half Technology
With more than 100 locations worldwide, Robert Half Technology is a leading provider of technology professionals for initiatives ranging from web development and multiplatform systems integration to network security and technical support. Robert Half Technology offers online job search services at www.rht.com. Follow Robert Half Technology on Twitter (@RobertHalfTech).
Notes


2 Lauren Brousell, “IT Department Reorgs Are on the Horizon,” CIO.com (February 26, 2013), http://www.cio.com/article/729192/IT_Department_Reorgs_Are_on_the_Horizon.


8 Ibid.


10 Ibid.

Afterword: A Call to Action

The leaders featured in this research are some of the brightest and most respected practitioners in the technical support industry. They were asked to take a futureview, to project themselves into the future and then look back at their present positions from that future point of view. They all looked ahead, but during the interview process it became clear that current conditions (e.g., accelerating change, rising customer demand for services, a recognition that the devices and support services of tomorrow look nothing like those of today) have impacted the strategic focus of directors in technical support to the point that they almost cloud the futureview.

Customers are introducing new devices to IT, rather than the reverse, disrupting the technology lifecycle, stretching existing support models, and keeping service providers in constant beta mode. Yet, this isn't really new. College students have been bringing their own laptops and devices to university campuses for more than a dozen years, and these devices began disrupting businesses nearly five years ago. Perhaps the focal point is just outside the reach of the camera lens, and the camera shutter may be stuck with the focus pinned on the technology.

Technology leaders are accustomed to change, embracing emerging technologies and seeking the latest tools. Yet, it’s not about the iPhone itself, or whether the tablet is a Kindle or an iPad or a Surface. Nor is it about mobile apps or the speed of upgrades. It’s about the overall value of business services and the business’s demand for adaptability, flexibility, and accessibility.

The groundswell to shift the focus from technology to the business requirements continues to build. But the number of organizations on that path has not yet hit critical mass. As technical support organizations join the movement, they will recognize that the core competencies required to make this shift have changed. As this research shows, customer focus, strategic thinking, and business acumen have risen to the top of the list, with technical expertise as a constant companion. As the interviewees conclude, a “passion for customer service” will make all the difference. It is critical that organizations provide staff with the tools and professional training they need so that they will be prepared to tackle the new order. The challenge at hand is for leaders in this space to step back, change the focal point, and use a longer lens.