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Metric of the Month: Cause and Effect for Desktop Support KPIs

By Jeff Rumburg

Every month, in the Industry Insider, I highlight one key performance indicator (KPI) for the service desk or desktop support. I define the KPI, provide recent benchmarking data for the metric, and discuss key correlations and cause/effect relationships for the metric. The purpose of the column is to familiarize you with the KPIs that really matter to your support organization, and to provide actionable insight on how to leverage these KPIs to improve your performance.

This month, we depart from our usual format. Instead of discussing a single metric, I will explore the cause-and-effect relationships between desktop support KPIs. The companion to this article, which explored the cause-and-effect relationship between service desk KPIs, was published in the **November 2012** issue of the Industry Insider.

Cause and Effect for Desktop Support KPIs

Many of us have heard the sage advice that "you can't manage what you don't measure." This is particularly true for desktop support, where effective performance measurement is not just a necessity but a prerequisite for effective decision making. Despite the widespread belief in this statement, few desktop support groups use KPIs to their full potential. The vast majority of desktop support groups use metrics to track and trend their performance—nothing more! Unfortunately, in this mode desktop support misses the real value of performance measurement by failing to exploit the *diagnostic* capabilities of KPIs. The true potential of KPIs can only be unlocked when they are used holistically, not just to *measure* performance but also to *diagnose* and *understand* the underlying drivers.

The key to using KPIs diagnostically is to understand the cause-and-effect relationships between them. You can think of these relationships as a linkage where all of the KPIs are interconnected. When one KPI moves up or down, other KPIs invariably move with it. Understanding this linkage is enormously powerful because it provides insight into the levers you can pull to achieve desired outcomes.

The diagram in Figure 1 illustrates the desktop support KPI linkage. The metrics shown in green have been the subject of past Metric of the Month articles, which can be found in the archives at www.ThinkHDI.com.

Figure 1: Desktop Support Cause-and-Effect Diagram
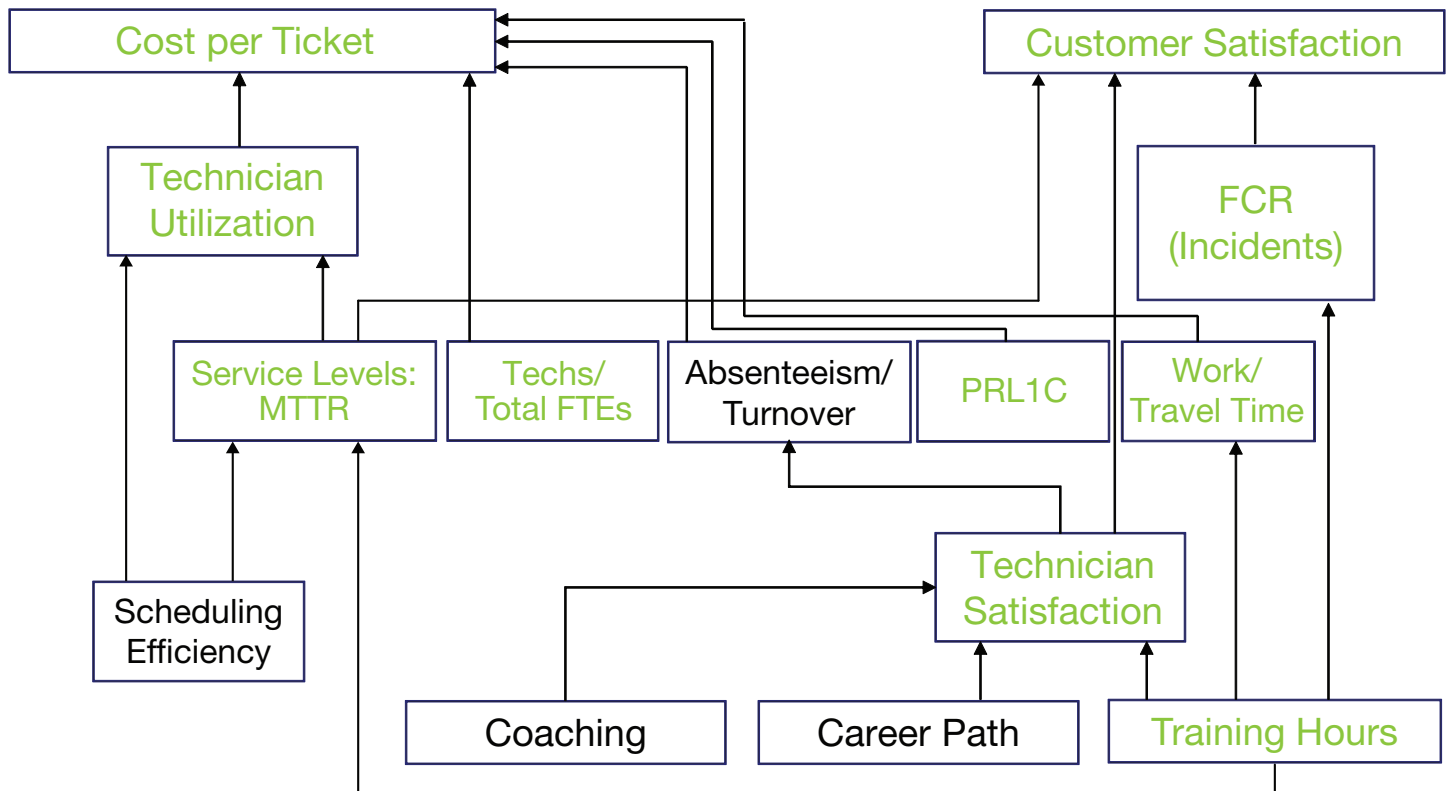
The Foundation Metrics

Virtually everything a desktop support group does can be viewed through the lens of cost and quality. Will this new technology reduce my costs? Will this new process improve customer satisfaction? This insight is crucial because it greatly simplifies the decision-making process for desktop support. Any undertaking that doesn't have the long-term effect of improving customer satisfaction, reducing costs, or both, is simply not worth doing. This is why cost per ticket and customer satisfaction are known as the *foundation metrics*.

These metrics are also very useful for telling the story of desktop support performance. Most people instinctively understand cost and customer satisfaction, so it's easy to have a discussion about desktop support's performance in the context of these metrics. It's important to note, however, that foundation metrics cannot be directly controlled. Instead, they are controlled by their underlying drivers.

The Underlying Drivers

Every KPI in desktop support is either directly or indirectly connected to cost per ticket and customer satisfaction. Those that directly impact the foundation metrics are called *underlying drivers*, and they include technician utilization, first contact resolution rate for incidents, technician job satisfaction, and mean time to resolve (MTTR). Improvements in any of these metrics result in corresponding improvements in the foundation metrics. But unlike foundation metrics, which cannot be directly controlled, underlying drivers *can* be directly controlled. In fact, this is where you have the greatest leverage to impact the cost and quality of desktop support.

If desktop support is struggling with high costs, for example, reducing the cost per ticket can often be achieved by increasing technician utilization or reducing technician absenteeism and turnover. Likewise, if the goal is to improve customer satisfaction, that can often be achieved by improving the main service level metric, mean time to resolve. The cause-and-effect relationship between incident MTTR and customer satisfaction has been discussed in an earlier Metric of the Month article (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Incident Mean Time to Resolve vs. Customer Satisfaction
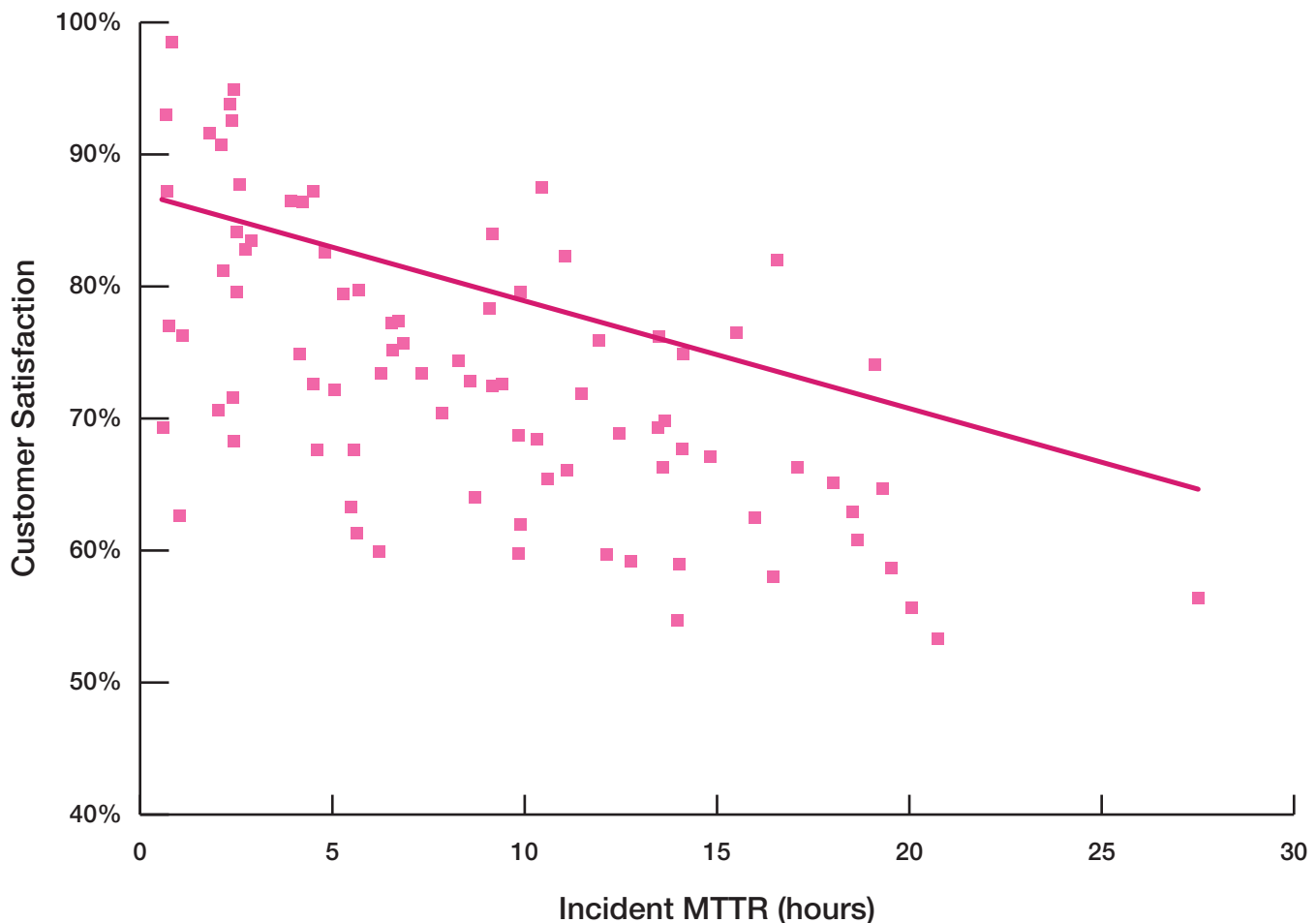
The Bellwether Metrics

Technician satisfaction and technician training hours are considered to be *bellwether metrics* because they are at the base of the KPI cause-and-effect diagram, meaning they impact virtually every other metric. Any movement in the bellwether metrics will be felt throughout the KPI linkage, and will eventually have an impact on the foundation metrics. If I know the technican satisfaction statistics and training hours for a desktop support group, I can almost always predict what the cost and customer satisfaction will be.

High levels of technician job satisfaction translate into lower absenteeism and turnover, which translate into lower cost. Likewise, training hours that are above average almost always have the effect of producing higher first contact resolution rates for incidents, which then drive higher customer satisfaction levels. Moreover, training hours are also one of the key drivers of technician job satisfaction, and therefore represent a high-leverage opportunity for desktop support to improve both its cost and quality performance. Figure 3 illustrates the impact of training hours on technician job satisfaction.

Figure 3: Technician Training Hours vs. Technician Job Satisfaction
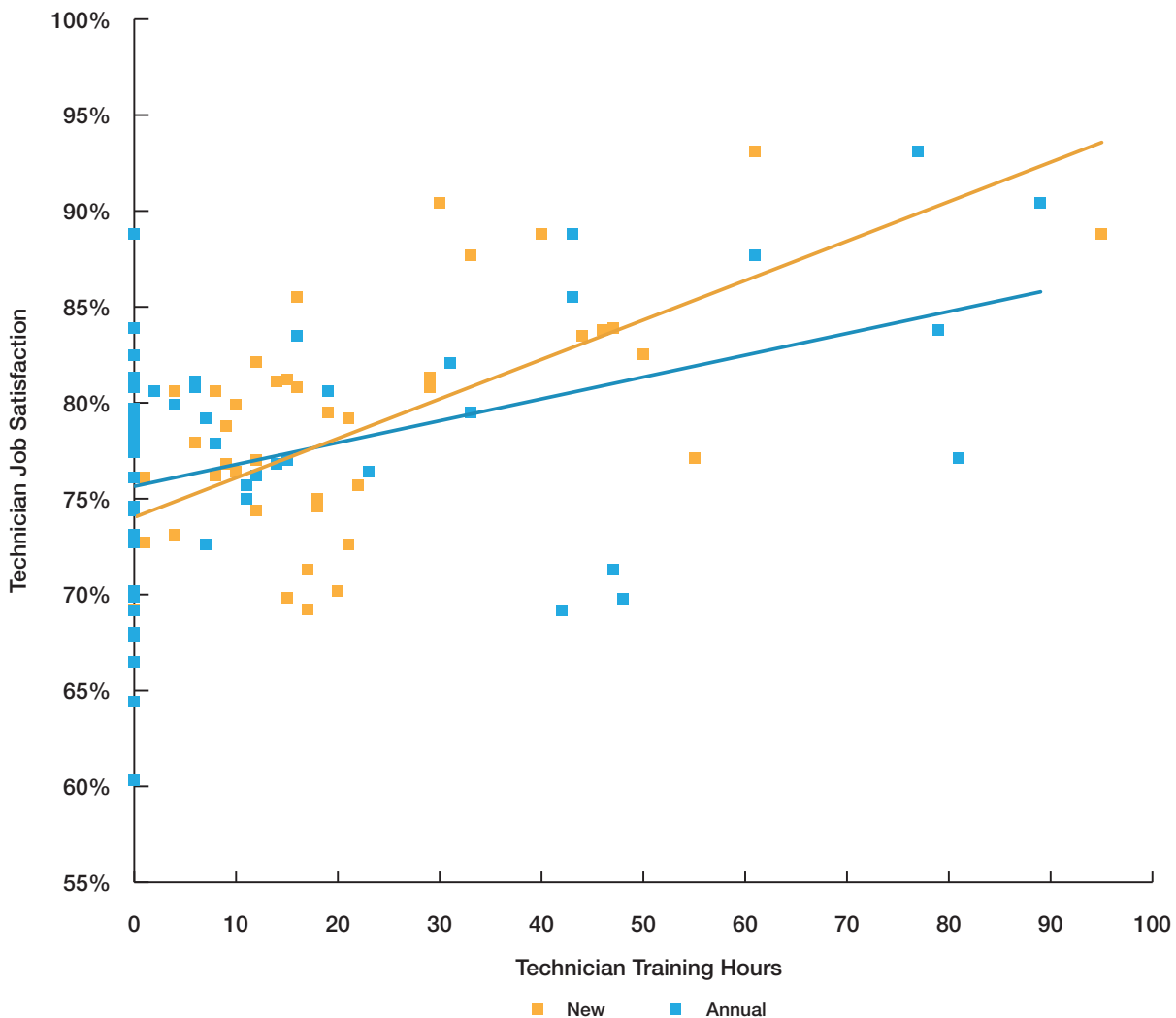
Once you become familiar with the cause-and-effect relationships between desktop support KPIs, you will be in a much better position to identify, diagnose, and act to close any performance gaps. This includes positive performance gaps, which you want to perpetuate, and negative performance gaps, which you can eliminate by modifying the underling drivers.

Please join us for next month's Metric of the Month, **net promoter score**, an increasingly common quality metric that is used by both the service desk and desktop support.

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