



Adopting a "Shift Left" Strategy to Transform Technology Support Services

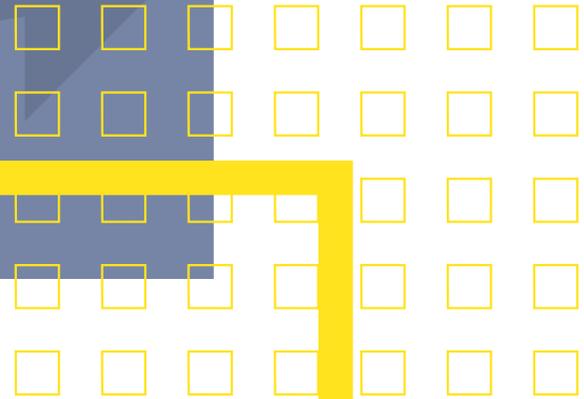


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Summary

Companies and IT organizations that provide technology support services (either internally or externally) are struggling to find a service approach that moves knowledge closer to their customers—one that lowers costs, improves customer experiences, and, importantly, balances technology and the human connection.

Adopting a "Shift Left" strategy addresses these needs. It works best when automation is balanced *with*—not blocking or inhibiting—the human factor to provide a personalized customer experience.

What is a Shift Left Service Strategy, and What Does it Mean in Technology Support Services?

Shift Left is a practice that originated in software delivery. In traditional software development, requirements live on the left side of the plan and delivery/testing requirements live on the right side. The aim of Shifting Left is to improve quality and cost-effectiveness by moving critical activities as early as possible in the development lifecycle of a product, process, etc.¹

Shift Left Strategy Definition: *For technology support services, the Shift Left approach is built on the concept of moving a person, process, or technology closer to the customer, resulting in a faster, more efficient, and more effective resolution.*

More than just self-service or web submission (automation), Shifting Left makes experts and knowledge more readily available to customers. Its adoption provides enterprises with better service and better business results.

In this context, Shifting Left seeks to optimize the customer experience by combining the efficiency and speed of technology with the intelligence of human expertise and the warmth and personalization of exceptional customer service to resolve issues or accomplish tasks with the highest possible customer satisfaction.

This transformational approach positions technology support providers to better meet new customer demands for services. A goal of Shifting Left is to break down organizational silos in order to allow providers and customers to solve problems or address issues more quickly and cost effectively, thereby co-creating value.

A Shift Left approach can include a **technology** focus, a **human** focus, or a **combined focus**.

Technology Focus

Some IT support service providers are shifting knowledge through technology – putting organizational and product expertise in an information warehouse that is front-ended with automated self-service. Although this can lower the cost to deliver support services, an overly automated Shift Left decreases the level of personal service by increasing the level of self-service. This may streamline service provider processes but can hide the true service cost because customers spend extra time and money that would otherwise be expended by the service department.

The Shift Left approach is already occurring in non-IT domains where enterprises are challenged with balancing high-tech and high-touch service experiences.

In a recent CIO Dive article, Sarah Miller, Neiman Marcus CIO, described how the retailer applied the concept of Shifting Left to provide a more personal shopping experience with in-person experiences powered by digital technology.

¹BMC Software, Inc., "What is 'Shift Left?' Shift Left Testing Explained," July 31, 2017. <https://www.bmc.com/blogs/what-is-shift-left-shift-left-testing-explained/>

Human Focus

Alternatively, a human-focused Shift Left has experts and their deep knowledge moving closer to customers seeking assistance. This may seem counterintuitive to an automated, technology-focused shift, but its outcomes can be equally effective. This strategy creates an avenue for two-way communication where services and support are powered by people – the experts with the answers. Addressing the need for expert knowledge of an issue, deep analysis of a unique problem, or a consumer demand for personalized attention are human approaches to co-creating value by addressing issues more efficiently and effectively.

A Combined Shift Left Focus

Here, technology support services are powered by people *and* enabled by technology. This approach recognizes that, while technology has a place in service delivery, it isn't the primary interface between the human needing help and the organization obligated to provide it.

In a recent blog, Kevin Johnson, Starbucks CEO, described a concept similar to a combined Shift Left where Starbucks is using technology to free up time for partners to spend with customers.

This hybrid Shift Left approach recognizes that human experts need technical agility and prowess to resolve complex issues. You can see this in action at Rimini Street, where a unified, personalized, human-centric support experience is provided, backed by an AI-powered service platform that delivers faster routing and human response.

Why is a Shift Left Needed in Technology Support Services?

Technology support services are being disrupted by digital transformation: automated response systems have replaced help desks, chatbots are used instead of call centers, and software is leveraged to analyze business instead of simply being used as a system of record. As digitization occurs and matures, enterprises risk losing the human touch.

At the same time, personalization is becoming a differentiator, as customers demand excellence in the services they receive. For many, this includes a higher degree of human service, coupled with technology that empowers them to self-help when desired.

Three trends that highlight the need for a Shift Left approach in technology support services are:

1. Balancing supplier efficiency with customer resource needs

Traditional technology support services, especially from large technology industry incumbents, place a high level of emphasis on automation and cost reduction, with experts hidden behind several layers of escalation. This results in high operating margins for technology providers—as high as 95% for some enterprise software companies, for example—but can result in higher costs and inefficiency for customers who must put teams in place to navigate self-service portals and inexperienced help desk personnel.

2. Digital transformation requires enhanced, consolidated service

Changes in technology are also affecting support services. As hybrid IT has enabled vendor and platform proliferation, the need for support services has increased. This seems to contradict a broadly assumed benefit of digital transformation: a reduction in the need for support. For example, as ERP platforms shift from tightly integrated suites to more flexible, fit-for-purpose solutions, they beg for comprehensive, seamless support across a multivendor portfolio.

3. Service-level support dynamics

The current barriers between traditional levels (or tiers) of support (see Table 1 below) make providing a seamless experience challenging, especially when different service providers are responsible for separate tiers of support. When issues are escalated between tiers, it takes too long to solve a customer’s problem, and the quality of service generally decreases. From a service provider’s point of view, service costs are increasing while the ability to deliver knowledge and assistance to customers in an innovative way is becoming more challenging.

Table 1. Adapted from Traditional IT Support Levels

Support Level	Function	Description
Level 1	Basic Help Desk	Record user requests, answer user phone calls, reply to emails, log issues, provide basic troubleshooting through questionnaires related to an issue
Level 2	Technical Support	Offer troubleshooting and technical analysis, request support from hardware/software experts, apply adequate knowledge and experience to a specific product/service
Level 3	Expert Product and Service Support	Provide the highest level of technical support, root cause analysis, issue resolution, and new feature creation by subject matter experts and/or engineers
Level 4	Outside or Vendor Support	Offer outsourced support for products/services not directly serviced by the Level 3 organization, including printer support, machine maintenance, or vendor software support

How Shifting Left Helps Improve Technology Support Services

Considering a provider’s goal for delivering technology support services and a customer’s goal for receiving them, adopting a Shift Left strategy provides mutual benefits:

- Knowledge and expertise are moved closer to customers:** When issues and their resolutions are generally clear-cut and occur frequently across a large base of customers, an automated Shift Left via self-service excels when customers simply require access to information to consume on their own. This approach delivers faster access to answers, reduced time and effort, less downtime, and frees man-hours to address other issues or initiatives.
- Improved customer experience/better customer service:** While a technology-enabled Shift Left can provide easier access and lead to happier customers, a human-powered or combined Shift Left, with experts on the front line, provides the personalization and extra care that customers with complex, mission-critical systems demand.

- **Lower service costs through automation:** Strategic uses of technology—such as AI-powered self-service or AI as a tool helping engineers perform with higher quality, greater efficiency, and better scalability—can reduce service costs for providers, translating to lower support costs for customers. Note: beware of over-reliance on technology to reduce costs at the expense of the customer service experience.
- **Customer service as a differentiator:** Even though a service can be provided via technology, customer expectations of service are sufficient to drive a human-powered Shift Left. Sometimes, technology isn't enough to meet the need. When more human involvement is demanded or human experience is critical, Shift Left personalization can provide competitive advantage.

Interestingly, moving more experienced (and therefore more expensive) experts closer to the customer—even on the front-line engaging directly with customers from the initial service request—can not only improve service levels and satisfaction, but may also result in a scalable, cost-effective support model in certain high-value support scenarios. When the systems are critical and the cost of downtime is high, experts on the front line can provide tremendous value through experienced problem-solving.

The Impact of Shifting Left on the Technology Support Service Model

As Shifting Left moves services closer to the customer, it provides access to better people, delivers a better service model, and creates better outcomes. In order to achieve this, a new strategy must be embraced.

■ Access to better people

A human-focused Shift Left that gives access to better people can increase the need for experts. When the walls between a service requestor and provider are removed, getting help becomes easier. Don't be surprised if end users begin to ask for help more often. As the need for more experts increases, headcount and costs are affected. Assess the potential pent-up demand as you estimate staffing needs for this approach and use improved service levels and customer satisfaction to offset the costs.

■ Delivering a better model

Shifting Left creates a better service model by eliminating the barriers between services levels. For example, some or all of a Level 1 professional's role in this "catch and dispatch" function may be replaced by self-service or by personalized experts on the front line. So instead of always starting at Level 1, customers needing Level 2, 3, or even level 4 services may be able to start at the level where service will ultimately be provided. As services move closer to the customer and Levels 2, 3, and 4 converge, headcount and budget will need to be assessed and realigned.

■ Creating better service outcomes

Most technology service providers are not organized or staffed to deliver a Shift Left model, and that impacts resource expertise in several ways. For example, service desk staff can be replaced with technology, potentially reducing service headcount and costs. However, in order to create better service outcomes, the ability to capture knowledge and the data science behind it is paramount. This creates a need for experts who can make sure that the right answer is provided.

■ Embracing the new approach

In a traditional technology support service model, experts often apply trial and error—or at least some analysis—to identify and fix the root cause of a problem. This is typically done "behind the scenes" before presenting an answer or delivering a service. When the barriers come down between the service expert and the customer, the issue-resolution/problem-solving activity becomes transparent.

In a Shift Left approach, the experts are not focused on just closing cases—they are solving *problems*. Ideally, case count goes down when the root cause of the problem is identified and addressed. End users also need to embrace this change to problem solving—the addressing of root causes for long-term solutions. Education and reinforcement may be required to ensure that providers and customers adapt to the new model.

How Service Providers Can Best Adopt a Shift Left Strategy

IT service providers will be best served by walking the fine line between leveraging digital investments (such as AI-powered self-service) that put information right at the customer's fingertips and delivering personalized assistance from enabled and empowered experts.

- **Avoid over-automating to reduce costs:** Experimentation is often necessary to achieve the proper mix of automation and personalization for a customer base and corresponding industry. Be careful not to lose the human touch. Some application vendors have shifted so far left that their self-service technology has left customers unable to speak to a live expert, resulting in frustration and reduced satisfaction.
- **Redesign the support organization:** Service desks, help desks, hot lines, etc. will no longer act as gatekeepers, but rather as enablers of services. The modern IT service desk becomes the interface between the provider and the user community. Instead of a clearinghouse for requests, it serves as the user's true representative. After the proper mix of digital technology and expert human touch has been established, a complete redesign of the service model may be necessary.
- **(Re)Invest in the human connection:** Digital investments providing self-help and self-service where appropriate can pay off quickly by reducing headcount and improving customer service. Don't stop there—ensure that services technology is being used to free up time for team experts to enhance the human connection with customers. Build bonds between the technical support service teams and their end users; customers will appreciate expert capability they can readily access.
- **Develop new service processes:** Shifting Left may result in three sets of processes: one for self-help, one for personalized expert services, and one for any of the pre-existing processes that don't naturally fall into the first two categories. Avoid allowing the separate processes to become siloed, as customers appreciate a holistic view of all service requests irrespective of channel or process.
- **Redefine service levels:** Map the workflow of each Shift Left service to incorporate the organizational shift. Consider whether application management services should be integrated into the new service model—particularly where Levels 2, 3, and 4 converge—for greater transparency, fewer support barriers, fewer service escalations/shorter wait times, and consistent case ownership and management. The help desk can then become the user advocate within IT. If an AMS provider is being utilized, note that most AMS provider agreements have been negotiated based on cost, capacity, and tactical SLAs. [Alternatively, an integrated model may be based on issue resolution versus man hours.](#)

Moving Forward

When transforming a technology services model, be aware that technology can be isolating. A balance must be struck between convenience and connection. Allow industry expertise and customer profiles to guide which legacy processes to preserve and which to evolve. Identify where the human element in services can improve overall outcomes. [Consider a Shift Left approach that includes value-driven experts utilizing thoughtful innovation to provide a reliable and personalized experience to customers.](#)

As the leading independent, third-party enterprise software support company, Rimini Street was founded in 2005 to provide enterprises with the best service support experience by bringing experts closer to customers, thereby enabling a Shift Left strategy through personalization and efficiency.

Purchasing professionals seeking enterprise software support should consider providers who integrate technology with a human connection. Seek partners who have the wisdom to balance digitization with personalization—those who have Shifted Left.

[See Shift Left put into practice with the Rimini Street expert support program for enterprise services.](#)

About Rimini Street, Inc.

Rimini Street, Inc. (Nasdaq: RMNI) is a global provider of enterprise software products and services, the leading third-party support provider for Oracle and SAP software products and a Salesforce® partner. The company offers premium, ultra-responsive and integrated application management and support services that enable enterprise software licensees to save significant costs, free up resources for innovation and achieve better business outcomes. Global Fortune 500, midmarket, public sector and other organizations from a broad range of industries rely on Rimini Street as their trusted enterprise software products and services provider.

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