BECOMING AGILE IN TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Overview: Technical support groups, just like the businesses they serve, can benefit greatly from adopting Agile practices. Keeping your AMI DevX software current and leveraging zAdviser data can help provide maximum value to your end users and your organization as a whole.

This message is for mainframe Technical Support, more specifically, the managers of the Technical Support Groups in mainframe shops, and their business sponsors who are responsible for resource allocation. It's a message about investment and returns on investment, it's about continuous improvement, and it's a tough message about the need for change.

I've been with AMI DevX for nearly 21 years in the Field Technical Support group, but Technical Support is my background, and that is really my natural place in the field of data processing. I'm a Systems Programmer. Are you a member of NaSPA? If you are, I'm in your crowd.

A Journey of Continuous Improvement

The eBook "Ten Steps to True Mainframe Agility" describes a 10-step approach to modernizing mainframe practices. These steps are a never-ending journey of continuous improvement, and while its primary audience is the development side of your shop, there's a message in it for you as well. Nine of the ten steps have tools associated with them, and that's where Technical Support comes in.

Software, as we all know, is not static—it is continuously maintained, updated, and enhanced.

That eBook contains the rationale for transforming mainframe business practices. It says, "The slow, inflexible processes and methods of the past have become intolerable impediments to success in today's innovation-centric digital markets." Frankly, "slow and inflexible" is, unfortunately, an accurate description of many Technical Support groups in the mainframe space. Other words like "overworked," "understaffed," and "outsourced" may also apply. Does this sound like your Technical Support group?

Your internal customers, members of your development organization, are on a journey of continuous improvement toward transforming the mainframe. BMC is going along with them—with you—on this journey, doing our part by making significant software updates available to our customers every three months, like clockwork. And we have done so for 22 quarters, as of April 2020.

Every organization, including yours, is at some point along that journey. Where is your organization? Are you making progress? At what speed? It stands to reason that an organization can only move forward at the pace of its slowest component. What is holding your organization back? Be careful how you answer because it might be you!

Deriving Maximum Value

When I was a systems programmer in the 1980s and 1990s, we installed new releases of vendor software and any current maintenance. Then we forgot about it until one of two things happened: 1) We were out of support or 2) there was a problem. So, basically, if a release of vendor software was supported for three years, that's how often we applied maintenance. And our internal customers were perfectly happy with that, as far as we knew. In my role as a Solution Consultant at BMC, I'm still seeing this at many of our customers today.

This way of doing business needs to change! Again, referring back to the eBook, the first step is, "Determine your current and desired state." Among the goals in your desired state should be to enable your users to gain the maximum value from your organization's investment in AMI DevX software. Doing business the old way deprives your organization of this, and it devalues your entire mainframe investment.

Keeping Maintenance Current

For your development organization to modernize their mainframe practices, then you, as the Technical Support organization, must allocate the necessary resources and implement the required processes to keep your AMI DevX software current. Yes, it will require an investment, but we can assure a significant return rate, and we can prove it! Our machine learning-based service, AMI DevX zAdviser, can measure your Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and your progress over time.

You may object, saying, "we don't want to be on the bleeding edge," or "the risk is too high that we may introduce a problem." Look at it this way. Updating your AMI DevX software frequently is safer than waiting for over a year between updates. In the past, when mainframe tools were pretty much the same year to year, it didn't matter much. But now, because aggressive, agile companies like AMI DevX are building in so much functionality, it makes better sense to phase those changes in more gradually, as they flow out from the vendor, rather than grouping them up and making significant wholesale changes. It allows your developers to use each enhancement as it comes rather than discovering a batch of new features. The software world has changed, and it is no longer a wise

strategy to wait until others try updates before making them available to your users. If you wait, then you allow your competitors to jump ahead of you. Furthermore, you hold your organization back in its quest to transform its mainframe practices.

If you are responsible for Technical Support in your organization, ask yourself some hard questions. Does your organization value its mainframe? Does it consider the mainframe to be a competitive advantage? Is Technical Support in alignment with these values?

Are you current in your AMI DevX maintenance? When was the last time you applied all available PTFs? Do you have a working test environment where you can apply maintenance to your AMI DevX software and easily roll it out to your end-users? Are you sharing zAdviser data with BMC AMI DevX so you can measure and track progress on your KPIs? Don't know how to get started? Do you have any questions? We're here to help! Contact your BMC Account Consultant or Technical Account Manager, or visit us at bmc.com.

A version of this post originally appeared on LinkedIn.