Consortium for Service Innovation™

BMC SOFTWARE
Proving that Swarming Does Work!

HOW SWARMING WORKS AT BMC SOFTWARE

The swarming model has been implemented in two different ways at BMC. The first scenario seeks to improve how the team handles critical cases. In this situation, a team of three TSAs are scheduled for a one week rotation where their primary responsibility is to provide immediate response to critical cases and resolve the customer case as soon as possible. They select a lead to own the case and facilitate all customer communications. The other two members of the swarm participate by researching and testing. While not actively engaged a critical case, the members of this swarm continue to work on any remaining cases in their queue and are able to opt-in to help team members with challenging cases.

The second scenario of swarming has been implemented in the case dispatch system. In this scenario, two team members rotate into the dispatch swarm for one week. This swarm evaluates

KEY BENEFITS
- *Improvements in teamwork and communication across a remote workforce*
- *Fewer escalations to Development and TSAs now have time to participate in product requirements and development of higher quality products*
- *Predictable schedules and greater team support reduce stress levels for TSAs*
- *Managers are freed from the pressure of reacting to escalations and more focused on working with the team on proactive items such as development plans and new programs to add value for our customers*
- *Enabling a shift to a customer-centric "boutique" support model new offerings like AMIGO (Assisted Migration Offering)*

BMC SOFTWARE

Recognized as the leader in Business Service Management, BMC offers a comprehensive approach and unified platform that helps IT organizations cut cost, reduce risk and drive business profit. BMC Software employs approximately 5,800 employees that support 15,000 worldwide customers to manage highly complex, heterogeneous and decentralized IT environments. Approximately 96% of the Forbes Global 100 and 81% of Fortune 500 companies rely on BMC Software. For the four fiscal quarters ended June 30, 2010, BMC revenue was approximately $1.92 billion.

This case study is about one support team within the larger BMC support organization.

THE CHALLENGES
- Moving to a personalized "Boutique Support model" with a static workforce
- Supporting customers with increasingly complex implementations
- Improve teamwork, communication and knowledge sharing within the team
- Reducing interruptions to Support Analyst (TSA) in the form of Severity 1 issues

WHAT THEY DID
- Implemented swarming as a way to address business challenges
- Involved the team in designing the swarming process
- Started small (14 people) and expanded to a global team of 50 people

THE RESULTS
- Improved customer satisfaction scores; from 81% to 87%, an all time high.
- Teamwork and morale improved dramatically (and unexpectedly) as the team became more comfortable communicating experiences and best practices to one another
- Reduced back log per person from 19 issues down to 12 per person while total back log age reduced by 29 years (total backlog age added together and represented as hours/days/years) from 1957 to 1986.
- Reduced new hire training time by 50%
- Increased knowledge share and communication led to improved customer and issue management skills

each incoming case utilizing desktop sharing software (they are not all in the same location). The swarm schedule is predetermined and participation is rotated enabling people to work with different team members; different perspectives and strengths. The goal of this swarm is to resolve the case if possible. If resolution isn't feasible in a short time, then the swarm ensures that required information is gathered from the customer and then it is assigned to the TSA with a skill set that aligns most closely to the customer case.

During the weeks when TSAs are not scheduled on either swarming scenario, they are dedicated to working their case backlog, new cases dispatched to them, and helping fellow team members as required. They have the advantage of well-prepared cases when assigned a new case. When not participating in a swarm, TSAs have a very predictable

work environment, without the interruptions of critical cases. This ability to focus without interruption results in a significant improvement in both productivity and job satisfaction. However, they do have visibility to the incoming critical cases and often opt-in to share helpful knowledge or suggestions.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES THAT ENSURE SUCCESS

Guiding Principle: Leaders communicate the goals, listen, support and then get out of the way.

Innovative ideas are very vulnerable at the early stage of their lifecycle; many great creative ideas are stalled or dismissed because leaders don't listen. At BMC Software, innovation is encouraged. Curtis and Wade (the managers) are always looking for "the next dragon to slay". This creates an environment where ideas such as swarming are heard, evaluated for their potential and acted upon. When Patrick Gay (a lead TSA on the team) introduced and promoted the idea of swarming, they were open to the possibility that it could be the solution to achieve needed improvements for their organization and their customers. Parameters and goals for the problem-to-solve were clearly defined for the team with management involved early on to ensure that the focus remained on the specific goals and that the effort didn't get redefined or grow in scope.

After that, they participated at a high level, realigning the swarm to the organizational objectives and goals when necessary; otherwise, they let the team tweak the design and iterate the process. After management defined some basic parameters such as rotating schedules, the team went to work designing the process and developing best practices. Too often, managers are passionate and want to

be engaged in all aspects of designing a new process. However, when the team is aligned to the organizational goals they are in the best position to build a process that works for them. BMC found success by involving the team early in the process and empowering them with the ability to make changes. With each cycle their experience grew leading to a constantly evolving and improving process.

Guiding Principle: Outcomes are more important than the activity.

Curtis and Wade demonstrated a high tolerance for discovery when they took the approach of "do no harm." They set expectations that they would continue to monitor their existing key measures; customer loyalty and team productivity but allowed changes to the process to achieve improvements. They did not demand projections of ROI up front, but instead trusted the team's intuition and focused on the outcomes. Curtis said "I knew the team was on to something good when I saw the employee morale improve. It is a leading indicator of customer loyalty and productivity"

Guiding Principle: Trust the team

Setting objectives and empowering the team to develop a process to achieve them requires a high level of trust on the part of leaders. At BMC, TSAs are trusted to do the right thing. They were given autonomy to make regular updates to the process. Process changes like the implementation of swarming aren't possible if leaders don't trust that people will do the right thing. Over the course of several months, the team was constantly tweaking and iterating on the process to make it work better for their customers and for them.

BENEFITS TOO NUMEROUS TO LIST

After implementing swarming in these two scenarios, both the tangible and intangible benefits of swarming are

almost too numerous to list. In fact, it seems almost impossible to have so many benefits arising from a single initiative. Of importance is that this list mostly comes from the team members themselves and was not built by management.

1. Customer satisfaction scores rose from 81% to 87%

2. Total back log age (total backlog age added together and represented as hours/days/years) reduced by 29 years from 1957 to 1986

3. Customer and case management skills improved and new hire training time dropped by 50%

   • *Senior team member "I have probably doubled my knowledge of the products in the past year because of swarming, and I have been here a long time"*

4. Teamwork exploded across the virtual team with people communicating more frequently regardless of location.

5. Fewer escalations to Development and TSAs are now participating in product requirements, contributing to higher quality products based on their understanding of the customer

6. Dramatic reduction in Customer and TSA stress as a result of predictable schedules and greater team support

7. Reduction in Managers involvement with critical cases as well as less active monitoring of the system means they are free to focus on new challenges and identify ways to work proactively.

8. Enabling a shift to a customer-centric "boutique" support model such as AMIGO (Assisted Migration Offering)

9. Corporate recognition - the team won an innovation award for AMIGO program which was made possible thru swarming.

LESSON'S LEARNED

Lesson 1: Involve the TSAs in design and ownership of the process.

TSA participation and ownership to help design a process that is driven by customer and organizational needs. Management sets the parameters and goals, allowing the TSAs input into the design resulted in a system that is the most efficient at meeting the team objectives.

SWARMING: WHAT IS IT?

The Consortium for Service Innovation has been researching the concept of "intelligent swarming" for some time. Intelligent swarming is a set of practices that facilitates and optimizes a collaborative problem solving process. It is profoundly different from the traditional, widely practiced tiered support model. This work is based on the realization that problem solving is a collaborative process and support analysts collaborate all the time to address customer issues. They do this in spite of the linear processes, organizational structures, measures and escalation rules found in a tiered support model. Swarming brings the right people to the problem enabling it to be resolved faster and more efficiently.

Lesson 2: Be ready to embrace the dynamic nature of swarming.

Swarming is a dynamic environment where the right people come together to solve a problem. It is quite different from the linear routing systems many organizations have in place today. The processes will need to be able to respond to environmental factors. You may find that your swarming process changes so fast during the early stages that you will struggle to keep the Power-Point slides up-to-date. This is a signal that you have designed it correctly.

Lesson 3: Allow time to get it right.

Success will come through iteration of the process. So give them time (90-120 days at least) to get it right. Watch for leading indicators of success such as improvement in teamwork and morale. The operational benefits will follow.

Lesson 4: Commit to a "do no harm" philosophy since predicting ROI in the absence of experience isn't feasible.

With any new approach there will be those who doubt and those who will ask to see the ROI calculations. Instead of spending precious time, attempting to provide detailed predictions on the ROI of swarming, leverage the enthusiasm of the team and take the "do no harm" position. This implies that it will be no worse and could have an upside. Also, you can implement swarming without additional resources.

Get buy-in to focus on the outcome and provide assurances that everyone is working toward improvements in the same shared objectives.

Lesson 5: Celebrate the successes no matter how large or small.

Any improvement should be recognized and celebrated as an accomplishment. Management should look for opportunities to recognize the team when they get it right, celebrating even the misses as a lesson learned.

Lesson 6: Deal with exceptions as exceptions.

Be prepared to overcome the skeptics who have a tendency to slow or stop implementation of new initiatives by raising "corner cases"; those "what if" scenarios that are the exception rather than the rule. We have become so conditioned in support to linear processes and directed work assignment that the idea of a swarming model, for many, will be counter-intuitive. Swarming is particularly vulnerable when the devil's advocates use extreme situations as examples for why it won't work. It is not possible to build a swarming model (or any process for that matter) that addresses every "what if" that is raised. Stay focused on the possibility of dramatically improving the process for the majority of the work. Remain disciplined and manage the exceptions as exceptions.