Xcession
ITSM CONSULTING

End-user experience, automation and self-service

ITSM PREDICTIONS FOR 2021

INTRODUCTION

What does 2021 hold for enterprise IT? Will it be dominated by the continued impact of Covid-19 and the shift to remote working as we await the completion of the ongoing vaccination programme? What do the next 12 months hold for ITSM professionals? Will more long-standing trends re-emerge as businesses adapt to advancing automation, or will a global recession stymie the advance of the digital workflow?

Over the past year, we've certainly learnt that predictions can be a dangerous game, but our team of experts are prepared to offer their top six predictions, based on their own extensive experience.

In order of appearance, this eBook includes predictions thoughts from:

MURRAY SHERWOOD
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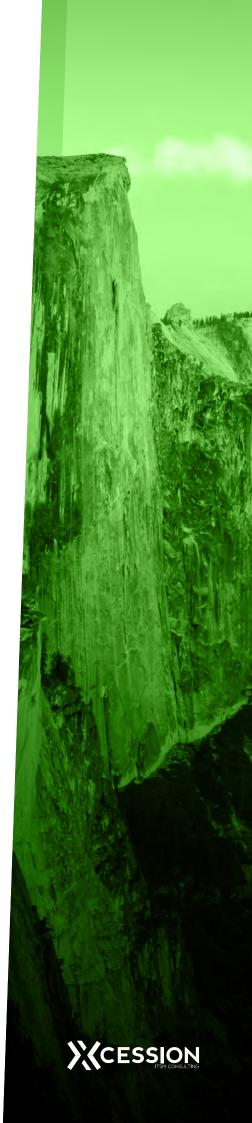CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, XCESSION

NEIL PEERMAN
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//1 THE DIGITAL WORKFLOW WILL SPREAD FURTHER

The dominant trend in IT for me in 2021 is the digital workflow. The rise of the hybrid workforce, which works partly at home and partly in the office, will drive the digital streamlining of processes and procedures. We'll see fewer manual tasks, fewer emails and spreadsheets, more integration and orchestration and use of technology to remove bottlenecks and threats to efficiency.

Performance will be monitored more accurately, while automation will handle routine tasks. Many of us will be working digitally with people we have never met face-to-face. Leadership teams will use collaboration platforms in a more sophisticated way to optimise workflows and manage their teams. Coaching and mentoring will be done remotely, which will require new thinking about content.

//2 THE RISE OF THE EXPERIENCE LEVEL AGREEMENT (XLA)

As we enter 2021, I believe we should expect to see a far greater emphasis on customer experience in IT with XLAs supplanting the SLAs that have been standard for years.

The sharper focus on customer experience was underway before the pandemic but has been accelerated by it. Working remotely, employees depend on fast resolution when their employer's IT and systems go down or shut them out.

As the year progresses the different aspects of customer experience will feature in performance agreements. It will no longer be acceptable to keep people waiting, or to leave them unsure if their problem has been fully resolved. Too often the end-user has been seen as an irritant who gets in the way of hitting the right SLA metrics. 2021 should be a year in which end-users start being treated more like customers.

This is an important shift in outlook that will force a major reassessment of how IT management operates and monitors its own performance. The XLA will help drive significant improvements which will ultimately provide a better outcome for the customer.

XLAs will gain plenty of interest, but ITIL 4 will definitely have increasing impact too. This is the updated set of best practices that have become even more relevant since the coronavirus erupted. If you follow ITIL 4, you should only be delivering services that create value for the customer and add to the bottom line. That includes having the tools to monitor and measure how IT service management (ITSM) is delivered.

I agree, though, that the customer experience, which once seemed a fluffy concept, will be part of the reassessment of ITSM.

//3 AUTOMATION WILL MARCH ON

This year automation will be on the agenda for many enterprises, even if they are cash-strapped after the pandemic. Automation was a strategy for many boardrooms before Covid and it will remain so. But they will weigh the up-front costs of automation tools against the cost-reduction, efficiency, compliance and security gains generated. The calculations about budgets and timing are more finely-balanced in a post-pandemic recovery, yet I still think it will progress.

At the moment a lot of ITSM automation is API-based. We will see that develop with more use of RPA (robotic process automation) in how IT Services are delivered and maintained. Tasks such as creating application accounts or processing Excel or Salesforce data are ripe for automation using these tools

Personally, I see automation advancing in IT service management. Artificial intelligence solutions have a wide range of uses. They can, for instance, flag up problems very early from thousands of service desk tickets, allowing for pre-emptive action. It's no longer a far-away technology of which we know little.

RPA will grow too and be aligned to remote working. We already have digital workflow tools that pretty much talk to one another, but RPA is going to glue systems together, moving from one platform into another and back, mimicking what humans do but far faster and with hugely greater accuracy.

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//4   NEW SOLUTIONS VERSUS SQUEEZING MORE VALUE FROM WHAT YOU HAVE

I think many organisations will choose to squeeze more out of what they already have, particularly after a year like 2020. But those who have come out in good financial shape probably will invest in automation. What they need is good advice and a no-nonsense implementer. Our research earlier this year revealed more than nine-in-ten organisations (92%) believe an implementer has failed them in some way. I don't think the market will change radically in 2021, so enterprises need to find implementers who are transparent and have broad market expertise.

Yes, organisations have plenty of unused licences and software they don't use. 2021 could well see a push to clear out the cupboards, reduce excessive licences and extract more value from software already bought. We know from our research that about one-in-four enterprises has more licences than required or software they don't optimise. As with automation, they will need help to work it all out.

Another trend I expect to see is the emergence of cheaper and more stripped-down ITSM solutions that don't have the bells and whistles but are just as effective at the essentials as the established names.

//5 SELF-SERVICE, CHATBOTS AND VIDEOS

Increased adoption of chatbots will be another significant trend this year – part of the move towards greater self-service so that employees can sort out more commonplace problems or challenges for themselves.

Phone calls were replaced by emails. Now email exchanges will be replaced by chatbots. Chatbots have such advanced conversational abilities that you often don't know it is a machine you are conversing with. Employees get the answers they want quickly and simply, with human intervention from IT and HR only necessary for the more complex problems.

The expansion of self-service will include video libraries. Many of us use instructional videos for DIY tasks at home so their use is bound to expand, enabling employees to resolve IT problems for themselves. It's not about cost-saving. Using a video is faster than trawling through articles and we also know younger employees are less willing to read long texts. It means IT will move away from text-laden guides available via portals, rethinking how they manage information and present it. This again, is part of improving the customer experience.

Service desks will become knowledge managers, responsible for the data in automation applications used by employees to serve themselves.

But the service desk is not going to disappear in 2021 even though chatbots and AI-based applications take over more of the routine work. While IT will spend less time on run-of-the-mill matters on the other side, there is a need for better employee training and IT awareness. This, I suspect, is where IT will collaborate with HR.

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//6 WELLBEING AND THE WORKFORCE

Wellbeing in a workforce working remotely, even if only part-time, will remain a major question that is not divorced from IT. There has already been much discussion of mental health and isolation but the challenges will not disappear – especially if vaccination roll-out is slow and anxiety levels remain high.

Many organisations will use collaboration and employee assistance platforms to alleviate stress, but workers will need more training in their use so the full benefit is extracted. We need to replace the lost conversations around the coffee-machine that build cohesion and generate ideas. If you use Zoom or Slack just to have a two-minute chat about dog-grooming, or football, people find it strange.

Although remote working has been in place for months, there will still be a need to conduct checks to ensure employees (especially new recruits) have all the hardware they need and the space to operate. That includes the mental space to work without distractions. We will see more rigorous audits of what employees need, while HR will become a more technology-based function as they address wellbeing in a dispersed workforce.

To find out more about Xcession and its expert, vendor-independent approach to ITSM implementation please visit our website, **www.xcession.co.uk** or email us at **info@xcession.co.uk**.

ABOUT XCESSION

Xcession is an expert ITSM implementer, application managed services provider and consultancy.

With experience of working for major enterprises across the UK and Ireland, Xcession is vendor-independent, wholly customer-focused and highly committed to delivery, using the optimum mix of on-shore, near-shore and off-shore consultants.