Symphony SummitAI Case Study:
A Revolution in AI-Powered ITSM

Executive Summary

EMA recently spoke with the VP Digital Enterprise-as-a-Service at a multibillion dollar global leader in its field. As our conversation illustrated, this company is also an innovator in the radical transformation that an enterprise can make when it activates the right combination of vision, leadership backing, technology, process, and sheer will to succeed. The occasion of our meeting was the company's selection of the SummitAI Suite as its platform for global service/asset management and IT operations. The substance of our conversation was an inside look at a bold one-year journey to one single, global process for service management.

In the beginning

This multi-billion dollar, global manufacturer of consumer lifestyle innovations had grown over the years with close to twenty acquisitions. Each company brought different systems and processes, ranging anywhere from "somewhat" to "vastly" different. The VP we spoke with set the stage, saying:

"Process and business complexity were bloating and slowing the company's ability to meet business growth goals. There were more than 200 incident categories. SLAs were all over the map. The company was faced with using an outdated service desk tool to try to corral 10 different change management processes, three release processes, and 10 different Excel data collection processes to get to an asset position, as well as an array of approaches to handling the management of incidents, problem, change, and release processes.

End-user service to roughly 35,000 clients was subpar. Reacting to users and corporate objectives, we set out not only to have one ITSM tool and process for service management, but to focus on user productivity and end-user delight. We chose SummitAI early on. One of the companies we had acquired had been using it successfully for years. Because of our experience with the tool and the fact that it came very highly recommended, we skipped an extensive, formal evaluation. "

The unmovable goal: one global process

"Yes, we decided early on to bring in SummitAI, but fixing this situation was going to take a lot more than any tool. First, you have to clean up shop. Any tool you bring in is going to be useless until you do that.

In our case, we set out, not only to streamline processes and dashboards but to establish and execute one global process for all service management categories across 34,500 global end users and 400 analysts in 200 locations. This process simplification was very, very challenging. It required a *huge* amount of change management.

For instance, the Infrastructure SLA for C1 tickets was a four hour MTTR. Meanwhile, the application group's SLA for that same ticket could be 12 hours MTTR. How can you run a company like that? When there is a problem with a critical system like SAP and half the organization is driven to resolve it in four hours and the other half is fine with twelve hours? A lot of work had to be done to streamline SLAs for applications and infrastructure. Everyone had to be working toward common goals and standards.

I was empowered to do this. I had successfully done it before in other major corporations. I knew the most important areas I could drive to simplify change and CMDB, reporting, and service catalogues. I was extremely relentless—the goal was one global process."

Requirements and vision

"Every business unit or organization had their own requirements. Did I listen? Yes. Did it matter? In the end, no, it didn't because we were all driving to that single vision of one global process. I used to half joke, 'The only requirement that matters is mine.' It wasn't exactly a dictatorship, but there was no room for compromising the vision and goal. Differentiation and individual requirements could certainly be in place, as long as they fed and supported that single global process.

To do this, I had the full backing of the CEO and CIO. I was brought in to do exactly this and I knew how to do it. My team had full access to the leadership, and we knew for sure that the implementation would be supported. We had very strong executive backing.

Making changes in IT was pretty straightforward—we owned the territory—so we mandated actions that had to take place. And they happened. In other organizations outside of IT, I had to simultaneously draw on that strong executive support and expand my personal influence. There was growing trust and confidence both inside and outside of IT.

We were all moving in the same direction: one vision, one global process. At this point, intent was far more important than requirements. *One global process* mattered much more than specific requirements. We pulled together one document with the benefits and requirements all in one place. And we set up a team. I had the head of Operations running implementation. We had a designated project manager who had a lead person for each major area: CMDB/asset, incident/problem/change, and reporting/dashboards.

From their side, the CEO and CTO of Symphony Summit AI assigned very strong resources to our implementation. They were committed to our success and prepared to quickly address any gaps in the user experience. We were driving to a high level of adoption in a very aggressive timeframe."

Implementation

"From the start of the program in Q3 2017 to the live first version of full implementation on February 7, 2018, was seven months—seven months from vision to one service management process. And no, it wasn't easy. But it was pretty straightforward: goal-driven hard work. We had four independent work streams running in parallel: 1.) toolchain, 2.) processes, 3.) adoption and communication, and 4.) training. The pace of change? Well, their hair was on fire, but we stayed on track.

We had very few naysayers in IT. That's because we clearly recognized our need to change. There was a very negative impression of IT. I know there was because we did more than 300 interviews and the feedback was clear: 'This needs to change.'

A common complaint was the disconnect between IT and business. A user would say, 'I'll raise an issue. You think you solved it, so you close the ticket. But it's not solved. Good for you. You met your SLA, but I still have the problem.'

When I first came in, IT had a reported a first-time-right rate of 98%. Based on what I was hearing, I knew that couldn't be right. That has completely changed. We brought the number of SLAs down from 100 to four, including app services, infrastructure, and service requests. We made our reporting more realistic and improved service in all ways. We're continuously improving. A sign of those improvements is that our first-time-right rate is currently 58% and the satisfaction level is at the highest level to date."

Adoption

"A second big challenge was the overall communication around adoption. As we were replacing processes and tools, we had to clearly and consistently communicate those changes to the end users—and the reasons why.

We did a site-by-site show and tell to drive adoption. It was that important. One of the things that really helped drive adoption was the fact that SummitAI is a very intuitive platform."

To demonstrate that fact, this executive gave EMA an ad hoc demonstration of the SummitAI suite. Offering a selection of options, such as "I have a problem," "I need to order something," "I have a question," and "What's happening with my issue?" the screen was clean and visually appealing as well as intuitive to navigate.

Early results

Roughly one year into the service management process simplification drive, the company has achieved its goal of one global process. Built on the SummitAI platform, the solutions are internally to reflect the company's brand and culture. Seven releases into its agile process to implementation, it boasts the following achievements to date:

- 34,500 global end users, at 200 locations in 30+ countries, supported by 400+ analysts working in a follow-the-sun array of three service desks
- Incident handling has been streamlined from 200+ incident categories to zero with the new approach, 90 workgroups to 60, and 100 SLA categories to four
- 10 ITSM tools consolidated to one
- SSO and mobile are enabled
- Nine service catalogues offer improved self-service, service automation, a smart user guide, and email-to-ticket capabilities
- Change/CMDB went from three change processes to one and 10+ Excel data collections to one CMDB
- 30+ just-in-time interactive reports and dashboards
- There is one global process for service management that encompasses incident management, knowledge management, service request, asset lifecycle management, automation, service catalogue and policies, SLA management, reporting and dashboards, process management, change and release, problem management, self-service, and CI/CMDB
- The company estimates cost avoidance and savings in excess of $1.5 million annually

As impressive as these results are (and they are impressive), they are dwarfed in comparison to the enterprise agility and innovation that are possible now that the entire company has unified processes and standards of execution.

Next step: automation

Not surprisingly, this innovator and his team aren't taking much time to pause in admiring their achievements. Their accomplishments are simply important milestones on a larger journey to the efficiencies and capabilities of largescale automation.

An early but important step on that journey is the soft launch of SummitAI's intelligent digital agent, dubbed CINDE (the femininely monikered acronym for Conversational Interface and Decisioning Engine). CINDE's objective is to interact with end users in natural language while applying AI to understand the problem, auto-resolve the ticket, and intelligently route any remaining issues to the right analyst or agent.

The company took a soft-launch approach making CINDE available to all 34,500 end users without actively promoting its use. This approach let end users start getting used to it, while IT and Symphony SummitAI worked to extend the number of use cases and the degree of automation enabled. The focus on use cases that work well from initiation through auto-resolution includes services such as password reset, employee onboarding, and wireless access.

For example, before CINDE, users requesting Wi-Fi access for guests had to wait 2-3 hours for a ticket to get assigned to an agent before being resolved. It was not uncommon for guests in short-duration meetings to have already left the premises before their request was handled. After CINDE, any host requesting Wi-Fi access for a guest can now predictably expect to receive it in less than two minutes.

Our host said, "We have very aggressive goals going forward. We want CINDE to cover many, many more use cases like a completely automated service catalogue. And we want a voice-enabled CINDE to hold natural language conversations with users just like they would with a human agent, only more efficiently.

In my own shop, I am counting on the future of automation to be at least 90%. I have a huge volume of things that can break: 32,000 PCs, 1,661 database instances, 121,000 hardware endpoints…I want automation to be extremely effective at self-healing and limit the blast radius if something does go wrong. In the meantime, we are constantly working on site reliability by engineering to improve the backend.

AI is new to everyone except for AI scientists and engineers, so there is a lot of learning involved. I envision a time when SummitAI and CINDE will be the single face to the customer. CINDE will be the point of contact with self-healing going on behind the scenes and self-service on the frontend."

Closing thoughts

Symphony Summit AI's vision of automation captures the art of the possible with a suite of enabling tools that work now and for the future, but that is only one critical part of the equation. It takes tools, processes, people, and technology to successfully undertake this transformation process. As our success illustrates, not only does it take radical and focused commitment to achieve radical results, but radical results are in fact achievable.

Concluding his interview with EMA, our host stressed, "All parts matter, starting with a clear vision. The reality was that I provided the vision and the push…but it was really the combination of our first-rate team and fantastic collaboration with Summit that did the miracles."

SummitAI

The SummitAI Management Suite is a modular, cloud-based ITIL 2011-certified solution that unifies ITSM, IT asset management, and IT operations management in one integrated platform. SummitAI uses predictive analytics, machine/deep learning, natural language processing (NLP), and speech recognition, as well as gamification and real-time dashboards that feature key business metrics.

Using natural language, business and IT users can interact with SummitAI's digital agent CINDE (Conversational Insights and Decisioning Engine). CINDE returns personalized responses that address the intent of the requestor in the context of the incident, service request, or query. CINDE uses machine learning techniques to intelligently determine the best course of action, and automatically resolve a wide range of issues.

Codeless configuration options greatly reduce the need for customization and professional services. The result is fast implementation and time to value.