How Mercedes-Benz fuels innovation with AIOps

While the typical enterprise IT operator tends to think of themselves as someone at the cutting edge of business innovation, growing in lockstep with the ever-evolving digital technosphere, the reality of the situation is often something else entirely.

Ironically, some of the biggest organizational sticks-in-the-muds may be sitting at an IT desk near you.

Set in their ways, secure in their knowledge of a specific set of languages and skills, IT operators can suffer from major digital transformation fears, especially if they think new tools like AIOps might one day replace them (rather than merely make their lives far easier). We'll speak with two clients about why, in their experience, the biggest institutional change-management problems these days tend to revolve around, and within, IT—and what can be done about it.

At automotive giant Daimler AG (Mercedes-Benz) Rüdiger Schmid is manager of the diagnostics and connected car division.

Automotion is just one example of an industry where new technology such as self-driving cars, AI assistants, and digital connectivity creates a huge amount of data to be captured, and provides many more technology touch points that need diagnostics and customer support.

Managing this level of exponentially growing data needs the assistance of AI. It is simply too much data for humans to effectively process alone. At Daimler, Moogsoft is being used to adapt to the new demands.

As Schmid explains current processes and "Stone Age technologies" are too slow, and getting the buy-in to AIOps is crucial for the future development of the company.

"We need to be faster in incident resolution....Our internal infrastructure is not very flexible, and we are lacking easy-to-use processes.

We have to enter the next level so we can really keep up with the development in our company where processes get more complex and on the other side more critical." says Schmid.

He adds, *"Today no customer is hurt if, for example, some third-party information in their car regarding weather or other topics is not working properly.*

In the future, when we talk about autonomous cars, we talk about car to car communication...people won't accept that it takes hours and days until we fix something because they simply cannot access their car anymore, and this is more critical, and we have to invest now into intelligent solutions to be able to support the future."

To achieve digital transformation to intelligent solutions, companies like Daimler need to get buy-in from all departments. ITOps, DevOps, and senior executives. In many cases C-Level buy in for automation is universal and an easy business decision to make. Issues instead come from those in the trenches who have to use new technology, and don't like to adopt new tools. Schmid accepts this can be an issue.

"When you select support units which are working for the last 10 years on a certain topic and like to work in that mode, then it will be hard. People in some support organizations are acting as a hero...They feel good if they can save the world every day. But if certain heroes are not available, then our support organization simply doesn't work, and we simply have to get away from this hero thinking." says Schmid.

In order to meet growing customer demands, support at Daimler needs to be scalable. This means the days of relying on individuals to identify the root causes of problems are in the past.

Schmid understands some of the fears ITOps can have regarding automation, and leaving a familiar way of working that suits the languages they understand and their skillset. When asked about his own experiences at Daimler he says:

"I experienced this, and this is one of the major risks we see, that people are unwilling to use it. I see it as a complete mindset change in operations."

"Let me give you an example. Currently in operations our people work according to documented work instructions, with Moogsoft we expect from the same people to not follow any work instructions but to follow a tool, which is, depending on the incident we have, giving different results.

Of course this is what we want, what we need, but this is a complete mindset change from following documented work instructions."

To help achieve this change in mindset Daimler took around 40 to 50 people to a two-day workshop at the end of October, to give them opportunity to collaborate more intensively.

The workshop demonstrated what Moogsoft can do for teams within Daimler but also how it aids collaboration and resolving active incidents across tools and teams in one shared workspace.

Damiler's commitment to engaging and educating IT staff in this workshop is in part evidence of Schmid's beliefs that people have nothing to fear from AIOps like Moogsoft, and that there is plenty of work for skilled workers in working alongside AI.

"The fear of the people is that they are not needed anymore, we need to address actively those concerns because in my mind there will be enough work in the next years. Nobody has to be frightened to lose his job, even if it's automated.

If an incident happens, then we should be able to fix it very fast. And therefore we need people, and therefore we need to invest in people and their mindset and also their willingness to collaborate and to adapt new technologies." says Schmid.

Daimler are not alone in facing the challenges brought by the rapid pace of digital transformation.

At WorldPay, Solutions Architect Natalia Jojic-Ferguson believes in the power of AI to make repetitive tasks easier and people more productive.

She says: "AI is there to help us, crunching that huge amount of data, which is there more and more, and trying to find their relationships, which for a human would take not days but years to do. So I think we need to use that technology to make us work efficiently."

Jojic-Ferguson admits that buy-in with senior management for AIOps has never been an issue, but despite communicating the message that tools like Moogsoft are designed to make people's lives easier, not harder, there is still often some resistance from on the ground IT staff.

“From my experience, I actually did not have an issue with executives. To them it’s clear-cut, even if you just look at the money. You know, this is what it’s doing for them and for less money and less technical debt. So it was actually quite easy for us to sell it to the executives. It was more difficult to sell it to the actual people who would be supporting the tools.” she says.

Like Rüdiger Schmid at Daimler, Jojic-Ferguson has seen the fear and resistance from operational IT staff that are concerned about learning new cutting edge technology and adjusting from their current workflow.

She believes that automation works best in conjunction with people, in order to reduce repetitive tasks and improve efficiency.

She says: *“To me you should automate anything that you repeatedly do more than three times. Anything that you can write down for a human to do on a repetitive basis, then it’s worth automating, and that’s not to say that you need to replace that human.*

That is to say those repetitive tasks I can automate so I can function more efficiently, but I need the humans to concentrate on things where we need human input, including writing or driving that automation. So I don’t see it as replacing people.

I think, people that are trying to be protective over the old technology are also afraid that they will be replaced by the new technology, which I think we need to explain. We’re just replacing repetitive tasks.”

Interestingly Jojic-Ferguson believes that the type of background and technologies IT workers are experienced in can affect their openness to adopting cutting-edge AI technology tools like Moogsoft.

“It may not be true in some environments...in those that I’ve been working on I’ve found that those that had a UNIX and Linux background were more open to those kind of tools like the open source, expressions and bits that you can actually just hack basically.

While those that they were very much point, were tied to very strictly document controlled kind of workflow.

Those would be the two environments on the monitoring side that I’ve seen, the two kind of differences in mindset. So naturally those who have had more experience in that

kind of development, sys admin and open source technology will be more open to those cutting-edge new technologies." she says.

As can be seen in both cases, getting buy-in from operational IT workers can be one of the major stumbling blocks towards digital transformation in enterprise companies.

To deliver the drive to automation that business executives want to achieve, businesses need to involve operational IT workers, and as in the cases of Daimler and WorldPay, fully explain how AIOps is here to make life easier, increase collaboration, improve workflows and boost productivity across teams.